

Preparing for baptism: Leader's guide

This course is designed for:

- people who have recently professed faith
- people who want to be baptised
- people who want to understand the significance of their baptism

It looks at baptism, but uses baptism as a window onto how someone becomes a Christian and what it means to live as a Christian. It's designed to make sure people understand the gospel and know how to begin the Christian life.

Session 1: Baptism is a sign that we have a new hope

Summary

- *Session 1 begins with the baptism of Jesus. Jesus identified with us in his baptism. He was baptised as a sign that he would be judged in our place (water can be a sign of judgment in the Old Testament).*
- *Our baptism is like a wedding. A wedding makes a couple's commitment to one another a public agreement. In the same way, baptism is a public sign or pledge of our union with Christ.*

Target answers for questions

1. Baptism by John was a sign of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This makes the baptism of Jesus puzzling because Jesus was without sin. But Jesus was identifying with sinners.
2. God the Father was pleased with Jesus at his baptism. We will return to this at the end of the session, when we will see that God the Father is pleased with us because we are united to Christ.
3. The baptism of Jesus was a sign that he would be judged by God.
4. On the cross Jesus took the judgment we deserve in our place. (See also 2 Corinthians 5 v 21.)
- 5-6. These questions are an opportunity to ensure people understand God's grace. We are not saved because of anything we have done. We are saved by what Christ has done for us. Faith is accepting this gift.
7. God the Father is pleased with us because we are united to Christ.
- 8-9. These questions are an opportunity to ensure people understand the gospel.

Session 2: Baptism is a sign that we have a new family

Summary

- *Baptism is like a naming ceremony. It is a sign that God is our Father.*
- *It is also how we join the church family. If we are united with Christ, then we are also united with his people, the church. We are also involved in the mission of the church.*

Target answers for questions

1. We become part of God's family through faith in Christ. Baptism is the sign of this.
2. Anyone can be part of God's family if they have faith in Christ.
3. God sent his Son so that we could become part of his family. And God sent *the Spirit of his Son* so we could *know* that we are part of his family. The Spirit assures us of God's fatherly love.
4. As children of God we can pray to God the Father. We are free from the power of sin. And we are heirs, with the promise of eternal life.
- 5-6. Our local church needs us and we need our local church. Think about whether participants are inclined to feel they have little to offer or little to gain from the church, so you can apply the passage to them.
- 7-8. This is an opportunity to identify specific ways in which people can be committed to the community life of your church.
- 9-10. Jesus sends us out on mission to tell people the gospel. He does this because all authority has been given to him. He is God's King and he will return to claim God's world. This will mean judgment for rebels against God. But in the meantime God offers peace through the proclamation of the gospel.
11. This is an opportunity to identify specific ways in which people can be committed to the mission of your church.

Session 3: Baptism is a sign that we have a new life

Summary

- *Baptism is like a funeral. We don't kill people at funerals! Instead funerals mark their passing. In the same way, we died with Christ at the cross and then rose with him to new life. Our baptism marks this event. This means a radically new way of life in which we die to ourselves and follow Christ. Christ gives us his Spirit to help us live this new life. He also gives us the Bible, prayer and the church.*

1. The rest of this session will provide a fuller answer to this question. At this point, make sure people understand that becoming a Christian involves a radical change of direction (repentance).
2. Baptism is a sign that we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.
3. Sin and death no longer rule our lives. We are free to live for God. This does not mean we never sin. But we do have the freedom to say no to temptation. And, although we may physically die (unless Christ returns first), we will be raised from the dead like Christ (v 8) to die no more (v 9). In other words, we will enjoy eternal life with God.
4. We are to live as those who have died with Christ and risen to new life. So we no longer follow our evil and selfish desires. Instead, our new life is lived for God.
5. We are to deny ourselves and follow the example of sacrificial love that we see in the cross.
6. This is an opportunity to identify specific areas in which people need to change direction (repent). It is an opportunity to ensure they understand the cost of following Christ.
7. This is an opportunity to explore specific ways in which people might be susceptible to peer pressure.
8. In this life we deny ourselves and feel the shame of identifying with Jesus. But we gain eternal life with Jesus in glory.
9. Baptism is a sign of the inner transformation that the Spirit brings to our lives.
10. Use this question to introduce people to good habits of regular Bible-reading, prayer and involvement in the local church.

Being baptised (see p28 of the Study Guide)

If someone is getting baptised, ensure you discuss what will happen. What will they be expected to say? What will they be expected to do? You may want to run through the “choreography”. If you are immersing people, show them how you will hold them and how you will immerse them. It can be helpful to ask people to bend their knees as they go under the water. Ensure they bring a change of clothes and avoid light clothing as this can become see-through when wet. You can also discuss who they might invite.