

CORNERSTONE

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

PREPARING FOR  
**BAPTISM**

A 10-Day Study & Reflection Guide

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# DAY 1

## INTRODUCTION

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The fact that you are considering baptism<sup>1</sup> is a sure sign that God is working in your life! Probably, the encouragement of other Christians—perhaps a relative, a pastor, a friend, or fellow small group members—has been a part of how the Holy Spirit has been pointing you to take this vital step of faith and obedience in following Jesus Christ.

Now it's time to dig deeper—to really understand what baptism is about—and how being baptized shapes and defines you forever. Your baptism will be one of the most significant moments of your life, so you're encouraged to engage in baptismal preparation accordingly.

This guide has been designed for your personal study and reflection as you prepare for baptism. As part of the process, you will also meet once or twice with a Cornerstone pastor, staff member, or leader to discuss what you've been learning from this guide as well as what you've been experiencing in your spiritual journey as you get ready for your big day.

In working through this guide, pick times each day when you can be unhurried and focused. Begin each session with a short prayer, asking God to open your heart and mind fully to his Word,<sup>2</sup> so you will be teachable and responsive.

As you study, jot down your notes and thoughts. There are reflection questions each day designed to help you process what you're learning.

Make sure you look up and carefully read all the scripture passages referenced in this guide, including those in the footnotes.<sup>3</sup> If it helps, underline these passages in your Bible, look them up in different translations,<sup>4</sup> read them aloud, or commit certain verses to memory. Do whatever it takes for God's Word about your baptized identity to take deep root within you.

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As the Bible says in the book of Hebrews:

*God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what.<sup>5</sup>*

Baptism, as you will discover, is like a diamond. It's a “many-splendored” thing. It's multidimensional. Baptism points to a variety of aspects of the Christian life all at the same time, each rich with meaning.

This guide has been designed to help you prepare for baptism by exploring what baptism is about and learning to live in line with your identity as a baptized follower of Jesus Christ.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has God been working in your life to bring you to the point of wanting to be baptized (or to at least learn more about it before you decide)?
2. How would you describe the feelings that you have about baptism?
3. What are the main questions do you have about baptism at this point?

1 The word “baptism” in Greek (the original language of the New Testament) literally means *to plunge* or *to dip*.

2 God's “Word” is the Bible, also known as *scripture*.

3 If you need to, use the Table of Contents in the front of your Bible to help you locate the particular book of the Bible you're looking for (i.e. Genesis, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, etc.). In Bible most Bible references, there are two numbers separated by a colon. The number of the left side of the colon is the *chapter*, and the number on the right side is the *verse* or *verses*. For example, the passage Genesis 1:1-2 can be found in the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verses one through two.

4 For online access to the Bible in various translations, see [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com). As well, *YouVersion* is a great free Bible app for your phone. Recommended Bible versions to use include the NIV (*New International Version*), NLT (*New Living Translation*) and *The Message* (MSG).

5 Hebrews 4:12 (MSG).

# DAY 2

## THE BACKGROUND OF BAPTISM

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Various ritual washings were part of Jewish religious practice throughout the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> These washings were connected with the idea of cleansing from sin for the purpose of religious and ceremonial purity in the presence of a holy God.

Shortly before Jesus began his public ministry, his cousin John the Baptist preached a message of repentance from sin.<sup>7</sup> His purpose in doing so was to help people prepare for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, who would usher in God's kingdom in a decisive way.<sup>8</sup> As people responded to this message, John baptized them in the Jordan River as a sign of their willingness to align their lives with God's coming kingdom.

The key thing to grasp here is that baptism pictures a **cleansing from sin** (just like water washes us clean when we're dirty), and a **turning away from sin and toward God**.

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6 For example, see Exodus 30:17-21; Leviticus 11:24-25.

7 See Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:1-5. Repentance literally means "turning" or "doing a 180." It has to do with realigning our lives with God (and his purposes and priorities for us) wherever we've been out of alignment with God. We repent when we stop moving away from God, and turn to move in God's direction. We will talk more about repentance later in this study.

8 The kingdom of God was Jesus' central message, and it's a challenging and vital idea for us to grasp today as we seek to understand what it means to be followers of Jesus. The kingdom of God is best understood as the kingship, or sovereign and saving rule of Israel's God (known as Yahweh). Because Yahweh was the creator of everything, when he finally and fully becomes king in the way he intends, it will involve putting the whole creation right again. Most people of Jesus' day expected the Messiah to usher in God's kingdom by rescuing Israel from foreign oppression through military victory and restoring their status as a nation. However, as Messiah, Jesus dramatically redefined those expectations. His invitation for people to enter God's kingdom was a way of summoning them to allegiance to himself and his program to restore God's world through God's people in God's time. For Jesus, the coming of God's kingdom would not take place in a single move, but in stages, of which his own public ministry was one, his death and resurrection another, and his future return to forever rule the earth another.



# DAY 3

## WHY BE BAPTIZED?

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There are lots of important reasons why a Christian should be baptized, many of which will be unpacked throughout this study. Remember, baptism is like a diamond—it’s multifaceted—rich with spiritual significance and life-implications.

However, two of the most fundamental answers to the question, “Why be baptized?” are as follows:

1. **Jesus MODELLED it:** Even though Jesus didn’t need to repent of sin himself (he was sinless), he was baptized at the start of his public ministry for the purpose of identifying himself as one fully submitted to the will God the Father. By being baptized, Jesus also identified himself with the repentant people who were coming to the Jordan to be baptized by John. The Messiah-King who came to ultimately put the whole world right humbly identifies with fallen humanity (and by ultimately dying their death).<sup>9</sup>
2. **Jesus COMMANDED it:** These are Jesus’ final words to his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew. He left them with his presence and with the mission to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, baptism is an essential part of being a disciple (follower) of Jesus, and is a first step toward obeying everything Jesus has commanded. It is not an optional “add-on” feature for those who are extra-serious about their Christian faith. Rather, baptism is basic to our identity as Christians.<sup>10</sup>

In some ways, baptism is like a wedding ceremony. When I proposed to my wife Jan, I gave her an engagement ring, expressing my desire and intention to marry her—to commit myself fully and exclusively to her for a lifetime. As important as that step was, the wedding ceremony itself was even more important.

If I had kept finding ways to postpone our wedding ceremony, it would have been fair to question how committed to Jan I really was. But by publicly declaring my commitment to Jan on our wedding day, I was saying that we belonged to each other and there was no turning back.

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Baptism is like that. By being baptized, we declare to God, to ourselves, and publicly to others that Jesus is the Lord of our lives. Even more importantly, Jesus commands baptism because through it, God declares to you in a very tangible and memorable way some extremely important things:

You are mine. I love you. You are cleansed and forgiven. You are my child, and you belong to my family. My Spirit dwells in you. You have been rescued from the power of evil and darkness, and set free to live a new life of holiness and purpose in my church. You have been buried and raised with Christ, having died to your old life, and risen to new life in Jesus. I now call you—not in your strength but in my Spirit’s power—to join my people in my mission to set this world right. You have my promise of eternal life, and I will never leave nor forsake you.

Furthermore, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright explains that in our baptism, God sees us as he saw his Son Jesus on the day of his baptism (see again Mark 1:9-13):

The whole Christian gospel could be summed up in this point: that when the living God looks at us, at every baptized and believing Christian, he says to us what he said to Jesus on [the day he was baptized]. He sees us, not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in Jesus Christ. It sometimes seems impossible, especially to people who have never had this kind of support from their earthly parents, but it’s true; God looks at us and says, “You are my dear, dear child; I’m delighted with you.” Try reading that sentence slowly, with your own name at the start, and reflect quietly on God saying that to you, both at your baptism, and every day since.<sup>11</sup>

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stands out most to you from today’s reading?
2. What’s it like to know that God wants to make you his own child and tell you how much joy you bring him?

9 See Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-22.

10 See Matthew 28:18-20.

11 N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, p. 4.

# DAY 4

## REPENT & BE BAPTIZED: OUR PROBLEM WITH SIN

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The first and most central steps in responding to God’s invitation to personally embrace Jesus as Lord and Messiah are to “repent and be baptized.” Repentance and baptism are like two sides of the same coin. As the Apostle Peter declared in his sermon on Pentecost:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, **“Repent and be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.<sup>12</sup>

We briefly spoke of repentance earlier. Now we’re ready to unpack the idea more. Repentance is much more than just saying “sorry” to God for the wrongs we’ve done. It certainly includes acknowledging our personal sins and receiving God’s forgiveness, but first and foremost repentance is an act of embracing Jesus as the only hope of the world. It’s a willingness to turn away from any competing agendas, and let our whole life be shaped by and aligned with God’s kingdom agenda to restore this fallen world through Jesus.

At its heart, God’s grand restorative plan for all creation encompasses the rescue of repentant human beings from their sin. When we repent, we do so with a deep and personal awareness that we are sinners in need of a Saviour.

What is sin, anyway? When you spell S-I-N, there is of course an “I” in the middle of the word. That’s a fairly accurate way of understanding what sin is— *“I” in the middle*— which is to say that as sinners, we put self at the center of our lives.

Sin is a deep orientation and attitude of self-preservation, a heart and mind that in effect says, “I will go my own way, and look after my own best interests.” Instead of humbly receiving the love and life God has for us, we try on our own terms to grasp the things that we think will give us life.

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Therefore, as sinners we become consummate takers and hoarders. We forfeit the freedom to live a life of self-giving love, as we were originally created to do as persons made in God’s own image.<sup>13</sup> In a sense, sin is about making a god out of self. In doing so (whether consciously or unconsciously), we are refusing to let the one true God be God in our lives. And the Bible makes it clear that all humanity—including you and me— is guilty of sin.<sup>14</sup>

Sin’s dark power permeates our relationship with God, self, others, as it does the whole of creation in a systemic way, environmentally, socially, politically, and economically. Sin is tragically profound, and its implications are immense in scope.

It’s important to note the difference between sin and sins. Using the analogy of a tree, sin is the root, and sins are the fruit. On a personal level, I produce the “fruit” of sins (things like lying, cheating, gossip, slothfulness, sexual immorality, and so on) because my life as a fallen human being is rooted in sin.

Another way of looking at it is to think of a disease and its symptoms. Someone with a disease might experience symptoms like pain, fatigue, fever, shortness of breath or a rash. Of course, such symptoms, troublesome as they are, aren’t the main problem. The main problem is the underlying disease or infection that produces those symptoms. Similarly, the sins we commit (whether in thought, word, deed, or even in all the good things that we ought to do but don’t) are symptomatic of the fact that we have a much deeper problem in our being—a dreadful systemic infection called sin.

When I was pre-teen, I remember an argument I had with my mother. In my anger, I said some very mean things to her, to the point that she broke down and cried. After that argument, I retreated to my bedroom, deeply troubled in spirit. I loved my mom. She cared for me and loved me unconditionally. How then could I say such hurtful, venomous things to her? What was wrong with me? In that moment, from the depths of my soul I silently cried out to God, “Why am I so... bad?” I didn’t understand this at the time, but God in his grace was helping me to realize that my sins (in this case, angry hurtful speech and rebelliousness against a parent) pointed to a deeper reality in my being— the disease of sin.

The same distinction applies on a worldwide scale. The various sins of injustice that have victimized many people in this world are rooted in systems ravaged by the infection of human sin and rebellion against God.

12 Acts 2:36-39, emphasis added.

13 See Genesis 1:27.

14 See Romans 3:23.

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It's the "I"-in-the-middle gone viral. We're all responsible for why the world is in such a sorry state.

Reflecting on the depth of our personal sin problem as well as the scale of sin's impact worldwide isn't pleasant, but doing so enables us to appreciate why the gospel of Jesus Christ is such wonderful, crazy-good news ("gospel" literally means good news). According to the Bible, sin separates us from God, who alone is the source of life. Therefore, "the wages of sin is death."<sup>15</sup> Wages are something we earn and deserve. We have earned and deserved the penalty of death through our sins.

The Bible makes it clear that we are as good as dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1), meaning there is nothing we can do to save ourselves from sin. Our only hope is for rescue to come from outside of ourselves. And here's where the crazy-good news comes in, as the Bible describes it in Romans 5:6-10:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

In his great love for us, God has chosen to make forgiveness and eternal life available to all who will embrace it, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (see Romans 6:23b and John 3:16). It's worth letting this crazy-good news sink in, so check out another passage that describes it (Ephesians 2:1-10):

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that

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you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.<sup>16</sup>

Remember, our initial response to this good news—to the gift of salvation that God offers us in and through Jesus Christ—is to “repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). When we repent, we acknowledge our personal sinfulness and need for God's forgiveness. In repentance, there is the rejection of a former way of life, coupled with the conscious identification with a new way of life (which the Bible speaks of as “the kingdom” or life under the reign of Jesus Christ).

The Bible also says that God's kindness leads us to repentance,<sup>17</sup> and part of the point of this section is to help you appreciate the depth of your sin problem and God's indescribable kindness in making your restoration possible through the suffering and death of Jesus for your sin, and his resurrection from the dead so that you can share in his life (as well as his mission to restore the whole created order) both now and forever.

It's also important to recognize that repentance not only marks the beginning of our Christian lives, but the rest of our lives, as we daily align and re-align our thoughts, words, feelings and actions with the lordship of Jesus Christ.

*(REFLECTION & PRAYER EXERCISE continued on next page.)*

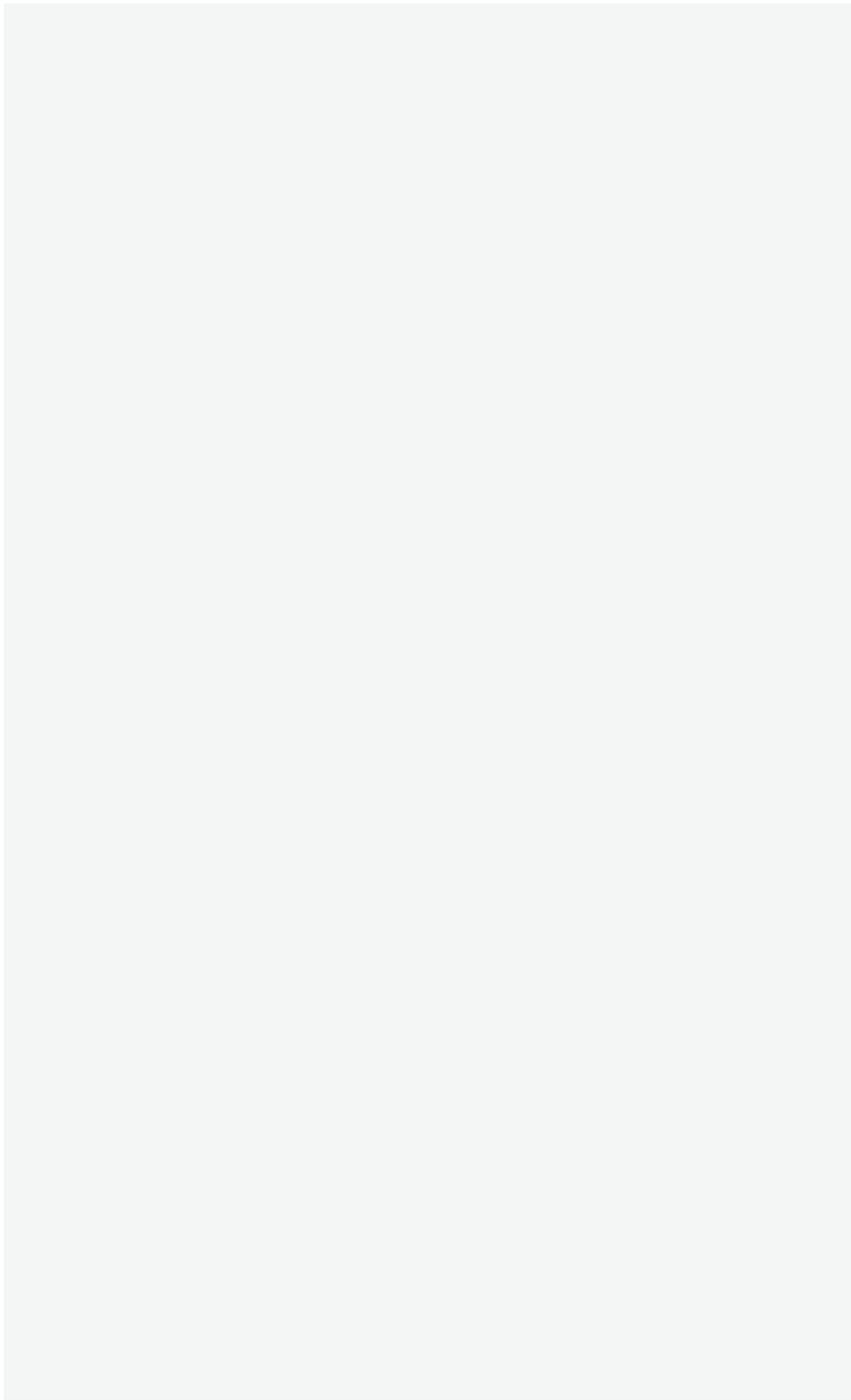
<sup>15</sup> See Romans 6:23a.

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 2:1-10 (NLT).

<sup>17</sup> See Romans 2:4.

## **REFLECTION & PRAYER EXERCISE**

What thoughts, feelings, impressions, or questions come to mind as you consider the depth of your sin problem, and God's kindness in giving his one and only Son for you (John 3:16)? Take some time for this. Review the notes and Bible passages on previous pages, letting them sink in. Then, say or write a prayer of repentance to God in your own words.



# DAY 5

## **REPENT & BE BAPTIZED: THE SIGN OF YOUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST**

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During New Testament times, when people embraced the gospel message about Jesus and acknowledged their need of God's forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection, they were baptized into the growing group of believers called the church.<sup>18</sup>

Baptism was usually performed at the start of their new life in Christ, with little if any delay. Converts were baptized in the name of Jesus, marking their acceptance of him as Messiah and their acknowledgement that salvation was found in no one else.<sup>19</sup>

By the third century A.D., however, the baptism of new converts tended to be delayed until the completion of a period of intensive instruction in the faith called *catechesis* [kat-uh-KEE-sis]. This change in the timing of baptism had to do with the types of people who were becoming Christian converts. Many of the first century Christians came from a Jewish background, and had strong foundations in Hebrew (Old Testament) worship and scripture. They didn't require as much instruction to understand the implications of Christian baptism. By the second and third centuries, however, most converts to Christianity came from pagan backgrounds and required more time to be oriented in scripture, doctrine, and the radical shift of life and allegiance that Christian baptism represented. The period of catechesis helped ensure they were well aware of and fully committed to the meaning and purpose of life in Christ.

At Cornerstone, we encourage new believers to be baptized following a short period of self-study coupled with instruction and guidance from a pastor or other church leader. This is to help make your baptism as informed, rich, and life-shaping as possible.

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Regardless of the timing of baptism, any baptismal candidate will do well to emulate the eager spirit of the royal Ethiopian official, as described in Acts:

So Philip began at this place in the scriptures and explained the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to a place where there was some water. The official said, “Look! Here is some water. Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the chariot to stop. Then they both went down in the water, and Philip baptized him.<sup>20</sup>

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What stands out to you most from today’s reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you have any questions about baptism in light of this reading? If so, please note them here.

18 See Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-13; 36-38; 10:44-48.

19 See Acts 4:12.

20 See Acts 8:35-38 (CEV).

# DAY 6

## INFANT BAPTISM VS. BELIEVERS BAPTISM

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There are many godly churches that practice the baptism of infants or young children. Part of the basis for this practice is that sometimes in the New Testament, entire households would convert to Christ and be baptized, and these households may have included children.<sup>21</sup>

Also, a church's perspective on the issue of infant baptism depends on whether that church sees baptism as an expression of the faith of the person being baptized, or an expression of God's grace to a child who is born into a Christian family. In churches that practice infant baptism, the expression of personal faith is reserved for a rite called *confirmation*, which takes place when a person is old enough to make an informed choice to follow Jesus. During confirmation, the individual reaffirms the baptism he or she received as an infant and expresses his or her desire to become a full and willing participant in the life of the church.

At Cornerstone, we respect those who practice infant baptism followed by confirmation, but our church community practices **believer's baptism**. This is because there isn't a single unambiguous reference to the baptism of infants or children in the entire New Testament. Instead, the biblical pattern of baptism can be seen in a passage like Acts 2:41, where the Apostle Peter has just finished preaching to a huge crowd about the good news of God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection. It says:

Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.<sup>22</sup>

The New Testament pattern for baptism, then, is that **first you believe, and then you are baptized**. In other words, baptism is an expression of the faith of the person being baptized. Clearly, infants aren't old enough to express personal faith.

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I was baptized when I was a baby in the church my parents attended, and was later confirmed in the same church as a young teenager. I went through those motions with little idea (when I was confirmed) or no idea (when I was a baby) of what it really means to be a Christian. However, when I made a personal choice to follow Jesus when I was 17 years old, I was baptized at another church as a believer – a powerful experience. I remember the sights, sounds, and feel of that event very clearly, and it continues to mark and shape my life to this day.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What stands out to you most from today's reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you have any questions about baptism in light of this reading? If so, please note them here.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Acts 10:47-48, which refers to the baptism of Cornelius' household.

<sup>22</sup> See Acts 2:41 (NIV).

# DAY 7

## BAPTISM AS A DRAMATIZATION OF SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

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In 2 Corinthians the Bible says:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
The old has gone, the new is here!<sup>23</sup>

Those who become Christians become part of the work of new creation God is doing in this world. There's a transformation that takes place within us. It might not be seen or felt immediately, but it's the work of the Holy Spirit, and it's very real.

The phrase Jesus uses to describe it is being “born again” or “being born of water and of Spirit” (see John 3:3-5; in the Bible, water is often a symbol of birth or creation – the beginning of new life).

Baptism is a profound and tangible dramatization of the inward change that the Holy Spirit birthed in your heart when you put your trust in Christ for salvation.<sup>24</sup> It's a picture of your old life being done away with, and the arrival of your new life in Christ.

Some have asked, “If baptism is a dramatization of an inward reality, is it really all that important for me to be baptized? I mean, if God has done the real work inside me, is all this outward drama really necessary? Isn't it just optics?” To put the question in a different way, “Do I have to be baptized in order to be saved?” Some Christians would unequivocally answer, “No!” Others (myself included) would offer a more qualified answer: *No and yes*.

Let's explore the “no” side of the answer first. The Bible makes it clear that we are not saved through our own efforts, but through faith in what God has graciously accomplished for us in Christ.<sup>25</sup> Take a moment to look up Mark 16:16. According to this passage, what is the reason for condemnation – the absence of faith (belief), the absence of baptism, or both? The reason for condemnation is the absence of faith, *not* the absence of baptism.

But then there's the “yes” side of the answer to the question, “Do I have to be baptized to be saved?” Remember, Jesus clearly and specifically

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commanded baptism as basic to our identity as his followers (see again Matthew 28:18-20 and the “Why Be Baptized?” section above).

While it is true that we are saved by God’s grace through faith alone, **baptism is about the most fundamental expression of faith in Christ that we can make.** If I claim to follow Christ, but persist in unwillingness to be baptized (whether because of fear, embarrassment, busyness, etc.) what does that really say about the nature of my faith? In this regard, the words of James are sobering:

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds. “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?”<sup>26</sup>

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stands out to you most from today’s reading?
2. Have you had any hesitations about following through with baptism? If so, has today’s reading helped you make a firm decision to go for it?

<sup>23</sup> See 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV).

<sup>24</sup> “Salvation” or “being saved” refers to how God rescues us from sin and death, and restores us to a right relationship with himself and his purposes. The term can apply on both the corporate and personal levels (we have salvation together as God’s people, and I have salvation as an individual person who is a member of God’s people).

Furthermore, the term salvation can be applied to the grand work God is doing to restore the entire created realm..

<sup>25</sup> See Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>26</sup> See James 2:17-21 (NIV).

# DAY 8

## BAPTISM AS BURIAL & RESURRECTION WITH CHRIST

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This is some pretty profound stuff. Look up Romans 6:3-5 read it very carefully. The idea here is that **baptism is a demonstration of the fact that you are identified with Jesus**. Through baptism, your life becomes bound up in his. What has happened to him happens to you because you have been placed “in him.” In baptism, you are “buried” with Christ.

That’s what going down into the waters of baptism dramatizes. Then, we are raised up out of the water as a demonstration of the fact that we’ve been raised from sin to new life in Christ. It’s also a picture of what will happen to us when one day at Christ’s return our mortal bodies will be transformed into immortal bodies.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, through baptism, we mysteriously but genuinely participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him, our old self-driven life is crucified and buried. In him, we are set free from slavery to sin and raised to a new life of righteousness, which means right living.

In Christ, we are assured that our bodies – though they die – will be physically raised to new and eternal life by the power of God at Christ’s second coming, just as Jesus’ body was raised on Easter Sunday (this, by the way, is the reason why many churches, including Cornerstone, do baptisms on Easter Sunday, although we also do them at other times of the year).

Once we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, God sees us *in Christ*, meaning that Christ’s righteousness becomes ours—it gets “credited to our account” so to speak. Therefore, when God looks at us, he does not see us as unrighteous precisely because our identity has become bound up in the righteousness of his Son.

But this doesn’t mean we get a “pass” on our responsibility to live holy and obedient lives. Quite the opposite! You’ve already read Romans 6:3-5. Now take some time to read the entire context of that passage (Romans 6:1-23). Precisely because the very identity of the baptized Christian is bound up in

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the righteous life of Jesus Christ, **we need to learn to live in accordance with our baptized identity.**

We were once slaves to sin. Sin was our master and there was nothing we could do about it. But Jesus rescued us. Through baptism, we die to that old life of slavery to sin and are raised to a new life of righteousness in Christ. Therefore, it is our responsibility to count ourselves dead to sin and learn to walk closely with Jesus each day, so that by the power and strength of His Spirit, we can learn to increasingly think, speak, and act in accordance with our identity in Christ.

Our spiritual life is really about **living your baptism daily.** Die always, everyday and in every way to sin. Rise always, everyday and in every way to your new life in Christ. In Colossians 3:1-6, the Apostle Paul writes:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ [in baptism], set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died [in baptism], and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly [i.e. sinful] nature...<sup>28</sup>

Paul then goes on to speak of how the baptized life involves a “wardrobe change,” in which we “take off” certain sinful behaviours and attitudes (much like we might strip off a sweaty old pair of gym socks), and then “put on” certain holy attitudes and behaviours (much like we might put on fresh clean clothes after having a shower).

*(EXERCISE continued on next page.)*

<sup>27</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

<sup>28</sup> See Colossians 3:1-6 (NIV).

## EXERCISE: WARDROBE CHANGE

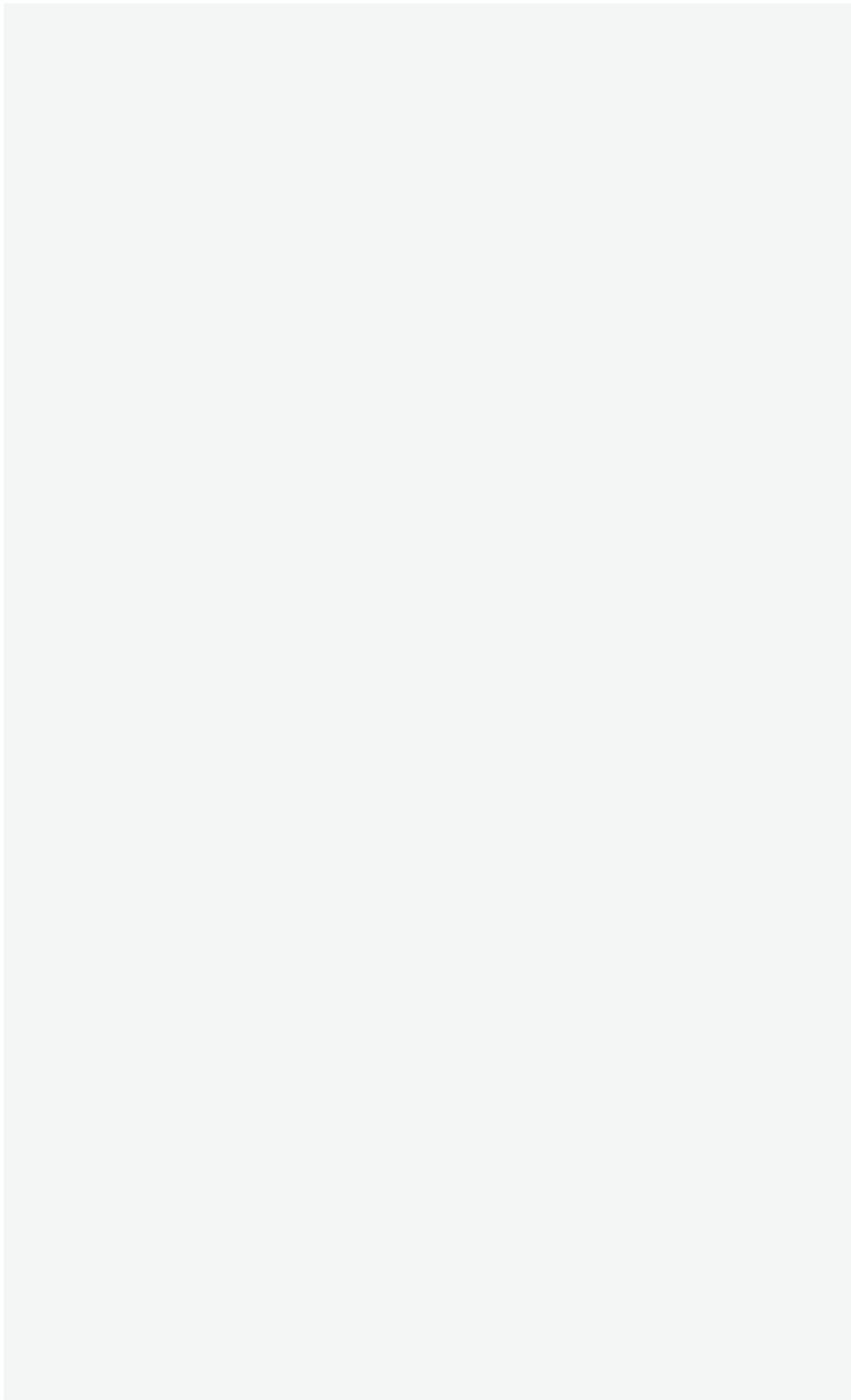
1. Carefully read Colossians 3:1-17. Then take some time to prayerfully work through the following exercise (allow yourself at least a good 15 minutes), recording your responses in the space provided:

List the behaviours and attitudes we are too “put to death” (see verse 5).

List the behaviours and attitudes we are to “take off” (see verses 8-9).

List the behaviours and attitudes we are to “put on” (see verses 12-17).

2. Spend some time meditating on the above lists. Is God showing you any particular behaviours or attitudes (whether from this list or elsewhere) that you especially need to “put to death” or “take off?” Is he showing you any particular behaviours or attitudes that you especially need to “put on?”



# DAY 9

## SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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In line with “taking off” sin and “putting on” righteousness, another part of your baptism will involve your rejection of Satan and his works.<sup>29</sup> Before your baptism, a pastor will ask you and the other candidates the question, “Do you renounce the devil and all his works?” and you will respond by saying, “I renounce them!”

The New Testament speaks often of Christ’s triumph over Satan and the forces of evil, which are sometimes referred to as powers, principalities, or rulers in the unseen heavenly realms.<sup>30</sup>

All of creation has been affected by the powers of evil since humanity’s fall into sin (see Genesis 3; Romans 8:18-22: note: the “sons of God” refers to redeemed human beings). Because of the influence of evil powers, even the very structures of the world that we often take for granted (i.e. various economic, political and cultural systems and values) are infected by corruption and sin.

While Christ has won an irreversible victory over the forces of evil, Satan and his forces will continue to wage “guerilla warfare” against God’s creation, people, and purposes until Christ returns again.

If you know anything about World War II, it’s kind of like the difference between D-Day and V-E Day. On D-Day, an irrepressible wave of allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, making the final defeat of Hitler’s forces inevitable.

However, before the allies could celebrate Victory in Europe (V-E), they had to deal with a stubborn enemy army which, while it could no longer win the war, continued to resist them with deadly force all the way to Berlin. The Christian life is like that. Christ has dealt a fatal blow to the powers of evil, but we will continue to have to fight them until Jesus comes again to earth to set everything right once and for all. **Baptism into Christ is baptism into Christ’s battles with the powers of evil.**

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We refer to the reality of our struggle against evil as **spiritual warfare**, and the good news is that God provides us with everything we need for the battle.<sup>31</sup> Baptism is a time when we align ourselves with the victorious Christ over and against the forces of evil. In baptism, we state our intention to live NOW as citizens of Jesus' kingdom even though we're in enemy-occupied territory. We do so with the sure hope that one day the declaration will ring out that:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.<sup>32</sup>

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stands out to you most from today's reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you have any questions, thoughts, or feelings about spiritual warfare? If so, note them and share them with the pastor or leader who is helping you prepare for baptism.

29 See 1 John 3:8-10.

30 See Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12; Colossians 2:5.

31 See Ephesians 6:10-18.

32 See Revelation 11:15.

# DAY 10

## BAPTIZED BY ONE SPIRIT INTO ONE BODY

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Another incredibly important aspect of your baptism will involve the officiating pastor making the sign of the cross on your forehead with oil, saying something like, “This oil is a sign that you have received the Holy Spirit.”

In the Bible, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and the anointing you will receive at your baptism signifies that when you placed your faith and trust in Christ as Saviour, the Holy Spirit – the third person of the Trinity<sup>33</sup> – took up permanent residence within your heart.<sup>34</sup>

The work of the Holy Spirit is crucial in your life as a Christian. Remember above when we discussed “taking off” sin and “putting on” holiness? Well, you can’t do that in your own strength! It is the Holy Spirit who enables you to grow in Christlikeness of character. That’s why Paul tells us that we are to “live by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). Then, and only then, we can “bear the fruit of the Spirit” (see Galatians 5: 22-23). The Holy Spirit also helps us pray and prays for us (Romans 8:26-27), empowers us to share our faith, enables us with gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), and teaches us as we study the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16).

As a believer in Christ, **the Holy Spirit baptizes you into God’s family, the church.** Your baptism is not just a personal thing between you and God. As the Bible says in 1 Corinthians:

For we were baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given one spirit to drink.<sup>35</sup>

Just as your baptism is a celebration of the fact that your very identity is now bound up with Christ, it is also a celebration of the fact that your identity is now bound up with God’s family or Christ’s “body,” the church.

The passages you read above are indicative of the fact that the Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation from other Christians. You need

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your brothers and sisters in Christ, and they need you. The operative word in the Christian life is “we” rather than “me.”

This is why we encourage people to be regularly involved in Sunday worship, a group, class or team, Thursday night dinners, etc. in order to live a life vitally connected with other Christians in your local church family.

Your baptism also signifies that you are **joining the church in its God-given mission** to share the love of Jesus Christ and to be God’s agents in bringing about his kingdom—his rule and reign—to restore creation in God’s time. God has particular callings for you to discover, so that you can use the gifts and talents he’s blessed you with to bless others in the church, in your family, in your workplace, in the local community, and in the world.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stands out to you most from today’s reading?
2. Why do you think it’s important as a follower of Jesus to be connected and actively engaged in the life of a local church?

33 On the basis of the church’s reflections on the Bible throughout the centuries, Christians of every tradition and denomination affirm that God exists as a Trinity. This doctrine asserts that there is one God (therefore, Christians are monotheists, or people who believe there is but one true God) who exists in a community of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s oneness is therefore not that of singularity or solitariness, but of mutually loving, interdependent community. The Bible teaches that God is love (1 John 4:18), and love, to be possible, requires an object, a recipient. God was love even before he ever created anyone to be an object of his love, because each of the persons of the community of the Trinity have perfectly loved one another since eternity past. At the core of his very being, God is a relational God. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity has profound implications for human beings, because we are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). As such, the Bible affirms that we are made to give and receive love in the context of relational community. The love of God and others is God’s supreme command and ultimate vision for all of us (e.g. Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:10).

34 See Ephesians 1:13-14.

35 See 1 Corinthians 12:13.

## BAPTISM NUTS & BOLTS

At Cornerstone, baptisms take place about 4 times per year during Sunday worship service. You are probably already aware of the date of your baptism. If not, confirm this with the pastor you're working with.

On the day of your baptism, you have the option of sharing either a short spoken or written testimony (see below for guidelines on how to prepare this). If you choose to share a spoken testimony, this will take place in the worship service shortly before you are baptized. If you choose to share a written testimony, we will post it online.

Just prior to your baptism, a pastor will invite you, along with the other candidates, onto the stage where you will respond to the follow series of questions as a group:

- Do you believe you are a sinner in need of a Saviour?  
If so, say, "I do."
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead so that you could have eternal life?  
If so, say, "I do."
- Do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord?  
If so, say, "I do."
- Do you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead?  
If so, say, "I do."
- Do you renounce Satan and all his works?  
If so, say, "I renounce them."
- Do you intend to follow Jesus the rest of your days?  
If so, say, "With all my heart."
- Do you accept God's summons to join him in his mission to restore this world in a way that fits the gifts, talents, and callings he gives you?  
If so say, "I do."

At this point, the candidates will be invited one at a time into the baptismal tank on stage. It's a portable tank about the size of a large hot tub.

The officiating pastor will be inside the tank, and will give you a hand as you climb in. The water in the tank will be pre-heated and warm, like bath water.



You'll stand toward the front of the tank, facing the congregation, and the pastor will say something like, "And now, on your confession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The pastor will then lean you backwards, fully immersing you in the water. It's okay to hold your nose if you want.

After you come up out of the water, the pastor will then make the sign of the cross on your forehead with anointing oil, saying something like, "This oil is a sign that the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart."

Here are a few more “nuts & bolts” details that will help you get ready for the big day:

- Please **arrive 30 minutes early** for service so someone can walk you through a brief orientation about the setup and the service, and have a word of prayer with you. We'll make sure you know exactly what's going on, what you need to do, and when you need to do it.
- You are encouraged to **invite family & friends!**
- **Bring** dark coloured clothes that you don't mind getting wet, a plastic bag to put your wet clothes in, a TOWEL, a change of clothes, camera etc.
- **We will provide you** with a Certificate of Baptism, and a new Bible or devotional book.
- **Prepare a short, written personal testimony** (no longer than 1 page). You will have the option of reading it aloud to the congregation during the service (recommended—this will take 2-3 minutes), but if speaking in public is more than you're prepared to handle, you can simply have your testimony printed as a bulletin insert. Your testimony should include things like:
  1. How you came to be a follower of Jesus.
  2. How you feel about what Jesus did for you on the cross.
  3. Your commitment to follow him for the rest of your life.
  4. Why you've decided to be baptized, and what it means to you.
  5. You may also wish to express appreciation to those who influenced you in your spiritual journey.
  6. You may wish to include a scripture passage or two from these baptism preparation notes that was especially meaningful to you.

The process of writing and sharing a testimony will add a great deal of meaning to your baptismal experience. It gives you the opportunity to reflect deeply about what God has done in your life, and to share it with others. Don't underestimate how God can work in the lives of others through what you have to share! **Please e-mail your written testimony to the pastor you're working with a few days prior to your baptism.**



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