

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## The meaning of baptism



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



While some of this material may be suitable for baptism enquirers, it is envisaged that you will pick and choose what is helpful depending on need.

### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Have you been baptised or christened? What did it mean to you?



### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Where does being baptised come from? (This section is not on the handout but can be shared as background).



John the Baptist famously called people to be baptised. But this was nothing new - they already knew what it meant. To be baptised is to be immersed. It was a sign of being set apart for God, and being ready for what He wanted to do in the world.

Long before John, the people of Israel would ceremonially wash people and objects which were set apart for God and could then enter His Temple. As time went on, the Jewish people grew in the hope that God would return and “wash” His people. (Zechariah 13)

So as the time of Jesus’ arrival drew near, groups of Jewish people combined this sense of wanting to be cleansed and set apart for God with this commitment to the new thing He had promised. Some started to baptise themselves (sometimes daily). They were preparing a “highway for the Lord.” No Jew saw baptism as a ‘magic’ thing that washed sins away – it was a sign of what God was doing in the heart. But it outwardly expressed that they had inwardly turned to God and wanted to be set apart for His purposes.

This helps us understand why Jesus marked the beginning of His mission by being baptised, why He commanded His disciples to baptise other disciples (Matthew 28:19)

It is why Peter, on the day of Pentecost, told everyone who wanted Jesus to be Lord and Messiah, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.” (Acts 2: 38). They were being set apart for God, and getting ready for what God wanted.

Baptism was not an optional extra, but an outward sign which showed and inward change. Today, if someone comes to a point of surrendering inwardly to God through Jesus, the outward sign of baptism is a natural and necessary way of marking this change.

On the handout:

Baptism or christening is as sign (or sacrament) which marks outwardly something that is true inwardly. It celebrates and reminds of two things – how faithful God is to us, and how we are committed to Him.

It shows the everlasting covenant relationship God has with us: it is like putting on new clothes!

As God’s children we are given a new identity in Christ and made right with God: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3: 26 – 27). The water symbolises being completely covered in Christ.

It reminds us we are completely forgiven for anything and everything: it is like being washed!

God wants us to be reborn spiritually through the “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 3:5-6). Peter writes that “baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.” (1 Peter 3:21) The water symbolises being washed clean, immersed in God’s presence, and passing through the waters of birth.

It reminds us we will live forever: it is like being buried and rising again!

We can be confident that our eternal life has already begun: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6: 4). Going into and out of the water symbolises dying and rising to life.

It shows us that we are part of God’s church: it is like a family celebration!

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12: 13).

It also celebrates and reminds of our commitment to God.

Sometimes an adult individual decides to be baptised.

This puts the emphasis on the what the person does in committing to God.

Sometimes people don’t decide for themselves but are baptised because they belong to a family of disciples. This emphasises how God is committed to the person.

This is why some churches baptise children (by christening so as not to drown them!) and some churches offer adult baptism for those who have made the decision to be baptised as they grow in their discipleship – usually by fully immersing them.

Adults who were baptised as children but then want to demonstrate their chosen adult faith, can have a service of confirmation. In it their baptism words are repeated and "confirmed".

Discuss: Covered with Christ, washed and forgiven, living forever, being part of a new family - which of these meanings of baptism excite you most? Why?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Romans 6: 1-10 which describes how we share in Christ's death and resurrection in baptism.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to share your experience of baptism.



## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Heavenly Father,  
by the power of your Holy Spirit  
you give your faithful people new life in the water of baptism.  
Guide and strengthen us by the same Spirit,  
that we who are born again may serve you in faith and love,  
and grow into the full stature of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit  
now and for ever.  
Amen





# WHAT BAPTISM MEANS



BAPTISM OR CHRISTENING IS A SIGN (OR SACRAMENT) WHICH MARKS OUTWARDLY SOMETHING THAT IS TRUE INWARDLY.

IT CELEBRATES AND REMINDS THAT:

## GOD IS FAITHFUL TO US.



**IT SHOWS THE EVERLASTING COVENANT RELATIONSHIP GOD HAS WITH US: IT IS LIKE PUTTING ON NEW CLOTHES!**

AS GOD'S CHILDREN WE ARE GIVEN A NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST, MADE RIGHT WITH GOD: "IN CHRIST JESUS YOU ARE ALL CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH, FOR ALL OF YOU WHO WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST **HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST.**" (GALATIANS 3: 26 - 27). SO THE WATER SYMBOLISES BEING COMPLETELY COVERED IN CHRIST.

**IT REMINDS US WE ARE COMPLETELY FORGIVEN FOR ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING: IT IS LIKE BEING WASHED!**



GOD WANTS US TO BE REBORN SPIRITUALLY THROUGH THE "WASHING OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE Poured OUT ON US GENEROUSLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR. (TITUS 3:5-6). PETER WRITES THAT "BAPTISM THAT NOW SAVES YOU ALSO—NOT THE REMOVAL OF DIRT FROM THE BODY BUT **THE PLEDGE OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD.**" (1 PETER 3:21)

THE WATER SYMBOLISES BEING WASHED CLEAN, IMMERSSED IN GOD'S PRESENCE, AND PASSING THROUGH THE WATERS OF BIRTH.



**IT REMINDS US WE WILL LIVE FOREVER: IT IS LIKE BEING BURIED AND RISING AGAIN!**

WE CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT OUR ETERNAL LIFE HAS ALREADY BEGUN: "**WE WERE THEREFORE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM** INTO DEATH IN ORDER THAT, **JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD** THROUGH THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MAY LIVE A NEW LIFE." (ROMANS 6: 4). GOING INTO AND OUT OF THE WATER SYMBOLISES DYING AND RISING TO LIFE.

**IT SHOWS US THAT WE ARE PART OF GOD'S CHURCH: IT IS LIKE A FAMILY CELEBRATION!**



"FOR WE WERE **ALL BAPTIZED BY ONE SPIRIT SO AS TO FORM ONE BODY**—WHETHER JEWS OR GENTILES, SLAVE OR FREE—AND WE WERE ALL GIVEN THE ONE SPIRIT TO DRINK." (1 CORINTHIANS 12: 13).

IT ALSO CELEBRATES AND REMINDS OF:

## OUR COMMITMENT TO GOD.



### IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

SOMETIMES AN ADULT INDIVIDUAL DECIDES TO BE BAPTISED. THIS PUTS THE EMPHASIS ON THE WHAT THE PERSON DOES IN COMMITTING TO GOD,

SOMETIMES PEOPLE DON'T DECIDE BUT ARE BAPTISED BECAUSE THEY BELONG TO A FAMILY OF DISCIPLES.

THIS EMPHASISES HOW GOD IS COMMITTED TO THE PERSON.

### THIS IS WHY SOME CHURCHES



BAPTISE CHILDREN (BY CHRISTENING SO AS NOT TO DROWN THEM!)

AND SOME CHURCHES OFFER ADULT BAPTISM FOR THOSE WHO HAVE MADE THE DECISION TO BE BAPTISED AS THEY GROW IN THEIR DISCIPLESHIP - USUALLY BY FULLY IMMERSING THEM.



### ADULTS WHO WERE BAPTISED AS CHILDREN

BUT THEN WANT TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR CHOSEN ADULT FAITH, CAN HAVE A SERVICE OF CONFIRMATION. IN IT THEIR BAPTISM WORDS ARE REPEATED AND "CONFIRMED"..

THEREFORE GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND SURELY I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE."  
(MATTHEW 28: 19-20)