

**the
Table**

Baptism Resource

A guide to the basics of Christianity
& what it means to follow Jesus

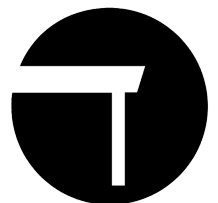


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Introduction

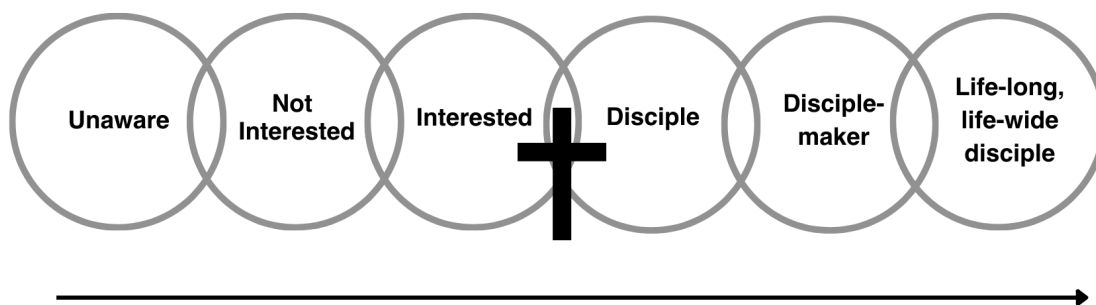
This resource is meant to be an accessible guide to the basics of Christianity. It's designed for those who want to learn more about following Jesus and/or baptism, and is meant to be done with a Christian friend who is able to walk through the material with you, answering any questions along the way.

Our recommendation is for this to be used in four meetings over the course of four weeks, to give time to reflect on the material being covered as you prepare for baptism. The decision to trust and follow Jesus is the most important one you will ever make, so settle in and dive into the topics with all of the prayer and the joy you can muster!

Where are you?

Before we begin, take a look at the drawing below:

Chain of Discipleship



We call this the Chain of Discipleship, and we use it to illustrate the journey every person takes when choosing to follow Jesus. All of us fall somewhere in one of these circles.

1. Unaware - This person has heard, little if anything about Jesus.
2. Not Interested - This person has some concept of Jesus, but doesn't really have any desire to know more.
3. Interested - This person has heard about Jesus, but has not yet chosen to follow him, either because they need to know more, or because they are not fully ready to commit.
4. Disciple - This person has heard the Gospel, and has responded in faith. They have trusted Jesus to save them from their sins, and they are committed to him as Lord (King) of their lives.
5. Disciple-Maker - This person is following Jesus, and is actively using their gifts, time, and resources to help others know and follow Jesus.
6. Life-Long, Life-Wide Disciple - This person is a mature (though not perfect) follower of Jesus. Their commitment affects every aspect of their life, and they are marked by consistent growth.

It should be said from the beginning, that when we place our trust in Jesus, we are committing to walk this path all the way to the end, to be life-long, life-wide disciples. This doesn't mean we have to have it all figured out before committing (trust us, you won't have it all figured out). It just means that we want to trust and follow him.

Reflect

- Where would you place yourself on this chart? What has brought you to that point?

- What would you say is your greatest hindrance to moving into the next circle?

God

Overview

A favorite quote of ours at The Table comes from A. W. Tozer, who said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." This means that what we think about God shapes the way that we live every day! If God is real and is the Creator and Sustainer of all of us, then God is truly the most important Person we can ever know. The goal of today is to begin to understand who God is, and our relationship to him.

Intro Question: What do you think of when you think of God?

Who is God?

Every single person has opinions on this subject, whether they know it or not. The Bible is said to be the Word of God, meaning he has revealed himself through it. These are some of the ways that the Bible (i.e. God) speaks of God.

God is the Creator

- Read Genesis 1:1 and Romans 1:20.
- God is the creator of everything that is seen and unseen. There is nothing that has ever existed that is outside of God's power and rule. If you look back, all that has been made eons ago came only from God. If you look up, all the stars and galaxies that exist today came through a word from God. God is the maker of all things, and therefore all things belong to him.

God is the King

- Read Psalm 47:6-7.
- In ancient times, kings were the complete and absolute ruler of the land. When the Bible speaks of God being king, it means he is the rightful ruler of all things. Every single person to have lived falls under God's reign. This calls for absolute obedience and reverence towards him, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

God is Triune

- Read Matthew 28:19.
- Warning: this is an incredibly complex and mind-boggling idea we are about to speak of. But if God is truly the eternal, infinite God, it means the human mind shouldn't be able to fully comprehend him.
- The Bible is clear that there is only one God, and yet it refers to three different persons as God: The Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. We refer to this as the Trinity—One God in Three persons.
- While it isn't significant that you understand the Trinity fully (hint: you can't), it is highly important that you know and believe it. When you are baptized, you are baptized into all three. That is what Jesus taught in Matt 28:19 "baptize them into the Name (singular) of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Reflect

- Which one of these descriptions of God sticks out to you the most?
- Does any of this differ from what you've been taught about God or the way you've viewed him in the past?

Made for Relationship

Though God is the main character of the Bible, it doesn't just tell us who he is. It also tells us who we are. And one of the first things we learn about human beings is that we are made in the Image of God. This has some major implications for human worth and dignity. But it also has some big implications for our purpose. One could sum those implications up using three "R's."

- Read Genesis 1:26-28

Being made in God's Image means we were made to...

- Reflect God - We were designed to reflect the character of God (his love, compassion, truth, joy, holiness, etc), by the way we live our lives and relate to others
- Represent God - We are meant to be representatives of the King who work with him to cultivate and care for his creation (which includes other people)
- Relate to God - We were made for relationship with God. Made to know him and obey him, to love him and be loved by him. To live a life connected to him.

Because these things are hardwired into God's design for us, we will always find our greatest joy, and God will be most glorified through us, when we seek to live out our purpose in these three areas.

Reflect

- Is there anything we read above that doesn't quite make sense to you? Anything you need a bit more explanation on?

Be sure to pray together as you wrap up your time today.

Sin

Overview

The Bible describes sin as the primary cause for evil and suffering in the world. Sin is also the sole cause for God's judgment against humanity, due to the evil that is present in us. This is the main reason that Jesus came to die for us, to save us from our sins and bring us back to God. In our culture, sin is kind of a foreign idea. The goal of today is to gain a right understanding of our guilt before God, so we can better understand our need for Jesus.

What is sin?

There are three main ways of describing sin in the Bible:

- **Transgression:** to break a covenant, contract, or agreement. In our culture, there are strong legal penalties for someone who breaks an official agreement with another. The Bible has the same logic, only the contract (or to use the biblical term: covenant) is between us and GOD. When we act/think/speak in ways that are contrary to God's laws for humanity, we have transgressed—broken our side of the deal.
- **To miss the mark:** Another way the Bible speaks about sin is the same way that we speak of shooting an arrow at a target. There is a clear target to aim for, and if we miss the target, even by a little bit, we have missed the goal entirely. When we act in ways that are against God's standard, we fall short of the mark he has set and have sinned.
- **Warped behavior:** The last way that the Bible speaks of sin is warped behavior. Similar to the previous definition, there is a clear standard of what humanity was supposed to be. Like a wooden board that has become bent out of shape, human beings are “warped” when they turn away from God's design for them.

Who has sinned?

- Read Romans 3:10-18 and 3:23
- The picture that the Bible paints of humankind is a bleak one! Every single person has sinned against God. No one can stand before God's judgment and earn his favor. If God were to pass judgment on anyone right now, the verdict would always be guilty.
- Some would object to this, saying, "but I'm a good person." That may be the case, but that doesn't mean they are truly the person they should be. The truth is that none of us even lives up to our own moral standards! We all think gossip is wrong, but we've all done it. We all agree you should be kind to others, but we all have moments when we're rude instead. If we've not lived up to our own standards, then we've certainly fallen short of God's.

Reflect

- In your own words, how would you describe sin?

What are the effects of sin?

Sin is not just something we do. Sin also does something to us. Remember the Image of God we talked about last week? That is what mankind was supposed to be. But when sin entered the world, it distorted all that was good in us, and because of that...

- We do not Reflect God like we were meant to - We may still do some good things, but ultimately we are like broken mirrors that show a distorted reflection of his character (Rom 3:23)
- We do not Represent God like we were meant to - Rather than working under God's loving rule, we've tried to rule our own lives and have become his enemies (Rom 5:10)
- We can not Relate to God like we were meant to - Our sin against God severs our relationship and separates us from him (Isaiah 59:2)

The end result of all of this is death. Because we are guilty of rebellion against God, We are alienated from him in this life, and after this life, we will be separated from him—the source of life—for all eternity. And the Bible is clear that we brought this upon ourselves. As Romans 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.”

So what do we do? How do we fix this? That’s what we’ll talk about next time. But we can’t leave you hanging like this! So here’s a quick spoiler with some bad news and good news:

Bad news: We can’t do anything to fix this or make ourselves right with God.

Good news: God can! And he’s made a way through his Son Jesus to redeem us back to himself!

Homework

Before we move on, it’s important to make this personal by recognizing and owning your own sins against God.

- Read Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:29-32, and Ephesians 5:3-5 this week
- Then take some time to write down the ways you have sinned against God in your heart and in your actions, then confess that sin to him in prayer.

Salvation

Overview

We have seen so far that God made us to know, love and obey him, but because of our sin, we have separated ourselves from him, and are deserving of death. We've also seen that we can't fix this ourselves. We can't clean ourselves up. We can't do enough good things to outweigh the bad. But even though we can't fix this, God can, and he has made a way through his Son Jesus to redeem us back to himself. The goal of today is to understand how God saves us through Jesus, so we can respond to this Good News in faith.

Who is Jesus?

The Son of God

- Read John 1:1-2 ,14-16
- John tells us that Jesus came to earth as a human being, but he's not merely human. He is also divine—the perfect sinless, Son of God who is himself God
- Because he is fully God and fully man, he can be the ultimate Image Bearer, who Reflects, Represents and Relates to God, as humans were meant to

The Savior

- Read Matthew 1:21
- Before Jesus was born it was predicted that he would save his people from their greatest enemies: sin and death

The King (Lord)

- Read Luke 1:31-33
- Jesus was born in the line of King David, which made him the rightful king of Israel, but because he's also the "Son of the Most High," he is the rightful King over all creation. This is part of what we mean when refer to him as "Lord"

All three of these matter and they cannot be divorced from each other. We cannot call him our Savior if we're not willing to worship him as God and submit to him as King.

Reflect

- Which one of these three things have you heard emphasized the most?
- What do you think the result would be if a person looked to Jesus as Savior while neglecting him as God and King?

Why did Jesus die?

One of the most amazing things about Jesus is that he did not come as a conquering king, but as a suffering king, who died a humiliating death on a cross. So the big question is why? One could answer that in a number of ways, but here are three big ones.

Because God loves us

- Read Romans 5:6-8
- This is the most wonderful news in the world! In spite of your rebellion against God, he still loves you, so much so that he would send his own Son to die for you, And Jesus was not an unwilling sacrifice. He was motivated by love for his Father and for you.

To pay for our sins and make us right with God

- Read Isaiah 53:4-6 and 2 Corinthians 5:21
- God is loving and merciful, but he is also perfectly just and righteous. And because he is perfectly just, he cannot simply shrug off our sin. All wrongdoing must be punished if justice is to be served.
- So how can God be both just (punishing our sins), and merciful (forgiving our sins) at the same time? Answer: Through the atoning death of Jesus. When Jesus died, he took our sins upon himself and then God punished all our sins in him. He bore God's wrath, so that we wouldn't have to. As Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that brought us peace was on him."

To conquer death for us

- Read Romans 6:8-11
- Jesus came as a suffering king, but that doesn't mean he did not conquer. After dying the death we deserved, he physically rose from the grave three days later, and destroyed death's power.
- This means death is not the end for those who are in Christ. Eternal life is the end.

In our last session we referenced Romans 6:23, which says "the wages of sin is death." Here's how the rest of that verse goes:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

How can we be saved from our sins and receive eternal life?

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

- Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and John 14:6
- Grace means “an undeserved gift.” So there is nothing we do to earn our way back to God. God brings us back through Jesus’ death and resurrection when we put our faith in him.
- But biblical faith is more than just agreement or mental ascent. If I truly believe Jesus is Savior, King, and God, then I won’t just agree with those truths, I’ll respond rightly to those truths.

How do we respond to these truths about Jesus?

In the Bible, the normative pattern for responding to Jesus usually involves five things:

1. Hear - A person hears the Good News about Jesus when someone shares it with them (Roman 10:14)
2. Believe - A person believes the Good News that they have heard (John 3:16)
3. Repent - A person repents (changes their mind) about the way they have lived, and decides they should obey God instead (Acts 26:20)
4. Confess - A person confesses their allegiance to Jesus as Lord/King (Romans 10:9-10)
5. Be Baptized - A person publicly identifies themselves with Jesus through baptism (Acts 2:38)

Reflect

- Do you believe the things written above about Jesus? If not, what things are you still unsure about?
- If you do believe all this, what (if anything) is keeping you from giving your life to him?

Baptism

Overview

Congratulations on making it here! Now that we have outlined the Christian faith, we will turn our attention to the response of baptism. Our goal here is to outline how the Bible speaks about the significance and purpose of baptism, so that we can better understand this practice that Jesus has given to his people.

What is baptism?

- **Death and Rebirth**—in the act of baptism, you are symbolically and spiritually dying to the old life that you lived (Rom 6:3-4). All the sins you committed, goals you were chasing, and the personal desires you had are now fundamentally submitted to Christ. It's as if the person rising from that water is a new person (2 Cor 5:17)!
- **Proclamation**—In the act of baptism, the believer proclaims to the world that they believe in Christ (Acts 18:8), and that they are repenting of their previous way of life (Acts 2:38) . It is meant to be a public declaration of one's commitment to Jesus. Consider inviting friends and family to this God-honoring event.
- **Unity with Christ**—the Bible speaks of the act of baptism as a way we are spiritually unified with Christ (Rom 6:4-5). Whenever a person surrenders themselves to Jesus in the act of baptism, they will always have that memory of submersion into the waters and subsequent raising above as a concrete reminder of the life they now live in Jesus.

What baptism is NOT

- A renewal of vows to God—If you have led a life that has wandered from Jesus, but never truly renounced him, then all you need to do is confess your sins to the Lord and the Lord’s people. If you believe you truly meant it the first time, you do not need to be baptized again. Remember that God’s mercy is infinitely higher than you can ever understand. Trust in him.
- Magic—The church does not have “holy water”; there is nothing holy or special about the water that removes sin from us. The act of baptism is not a ritual that makes God respond positively towards you. The FAITH that the believer has is what gives power to the act of baptism, because it is faith in the power of God (Col 2:12). Remember it is Christ, and Christ alone, that saves us.

Reflect

- In your own words, what would you say baptism is? What is its significance to you?

The Importance of Baptism

Baptism is a crucial part of a Christian’s response to Jesus as outlined in the Bible. Here are some of the biblical reasons for you to consider as you approach baptism: .

It is commanded by Jesus.

- Read Matthew 28:18-20
- In this text, Jesus gives his Church its mission: Make disciples. And there are two key things they are told they must do with these disciples. 1. Teach them to obey Jesus, and 2. “Baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In the act of baptism, you are obeying the Lord.

It is connected to spiritual rebirth.

- Romans 6:1-11.
- Paul outlines what it means to be alive in Christ. His logic is very straightforward—to be alive in Christ means that one must be dead to their old life. And what is the means of dying to self and being raised? Baptism! Read v.4. His words are rather clear on the issue. In this act, you are united with Christ.

It is an important part of our response to the gospel.

- As mentioned in the previous session, when people accepted Christ as Savior in the New Testament, that acceptance was generally demonstrated through hearing, believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized. All of the steps the Bible mentioned are clear ways the Christian is showing their trust in Jesus. In this act, you are formally accepting the gospel as it is outlined in Scripture.

Reflect

- The normative pattern for responding to Jesus in Scripture is Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized (see the end of last session for definitions). So which of those have you done so far?
- What (if anything) keeps you from doing the rest?

For answers to some frequently asked questions about baptism, see the appendix at the end of this resource.

I Just Gave my Life to Jesus. Now what?

If this is you, congratulations! You just made the greatest decision you will ever make! You are now an adopted Son or Daughter of God, and the Holy Spirit—God himself—lives inside of you and is changing you from the inside out (Romans 8:14-17)! Because of his Spirit, it is now possible for you to live out the Image of God as you were meant to! To reflect his character, to represent his loving reign over creation, and to live in a close relationship with him!

And that's our goal for you. Remember, the chain of discipleship (pg. 1)? We want to walk with you as you journey all the way to the end as a life-long, life-wide disciple of Jesus. More importantly, God himself wants to walk with you in this, and he promises to give you everything you need as you work hard to grow up in Jesus (Check out 2 Peter 1:3-11!).

So where do you start? Here are four things you'll want to do as you take your first steps in discipleship.

1. Engage with God's Word. Jesus himself said that we do not live on bread alone, "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Just as a child needs proper nutrition to grow, you will need God's Word to grow. So work now to start a habit of regular Bible reading.

Here are some suggestions for engaging with God's Word:

- Choose a consistent time and place each day for you to read the Bible. We recommend doing this in the morning, because it's harder to work it in once your day gets up and running, but you may find that your lunch break or the evening time right before bed works best for you.
- Have a plan as to what you will read. Don't just randomly open the Bible and see what you come across. Choose a place to start and go from there. We recommend one of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) or the Psalms as good starting points.
- See if there's a friend (like the person who walked through this booklet with you!) who would want to follow the same plan as you, so you can discuss what you're reading together
- It's okay to start small! And it's okay if you're having a little trouble understanding everything at first. Just keep at it, and ask God to open your eyes to the wonderful truths in his Word (Ps 119:18)

2. Involve yourself in the Body of Christ. The Christian life is not an individual faith journey. It is meant to be lived in community. And if you try to go it alone, you're setting yourself up for failure. One of the great gifts God has given us is his Church: A family of believers that will love, encourage, care for, teach, and correct us. So make it a priority to get deeply involved with God's people in a local church.

Here are some suggestions for involving yourself in the Body of Christ:

- Be at church every Sunday!
- Find out how to become a member of your church. This is an important step in making an intentional commitment to a body of believers and allowing them to make a more intentional commitment to you.

- Get involved in a small group of some kind. The large gatherings on Sunday morning are important, but it's also wise to be engaged in smaller environments where you can be known and connect with other Christians on a deeper level.
- Keep meeting with the person who led you to Christ, and with other older believers. They are a valuable resource in helping you grow in Christ. Ask them about things like how to pray, how to read the Bible, how to have God-honoring dating relationships, etc.

3. Live on mission. Ephesians 2:10, says that Christians are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do." God didn't save you just to leave you on the sidelines. He's called you to join his mission of making more disciples of Jesus. He wants you to serve His Church, give to his mission and to those in need, and share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Here are some suggestions for living on mission:

- Start volunteering in your church or in your college ministry. Join a greeting team, or a set up team. Serve in kids church.
- Start giving. In Jesus, God has given us the most valuable gift in the world. And just as God has been generous to us, we want to be generous to him and to others. Jesus tells us that wherever our treasure is, "there your heart will be also." This means what we do with our money has a strong effect on our heart. So make a practice of regularly giving a portion of your income to the church and to those in need.
- Look for opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus with others. God wants your friends and family members to hear the Good News of Jesus, just like you did. So pray that he would give you opportunities to share this Good News with them. And be prepared to tell them how Jesus has changed your life!

4. Don't forget the Gospel! The Gospel is not just something nonChristians need to hear. It's something Christians need to be reminded of every day! You need to remember God's grace for you when you fail (because you will fail sometimes). You need to be reminded of your new identity in Christ, so you can better live from that identity. And you need to remember his great love for you, so that it will be easier to love and obey him in return.

Here are some suggestions for remembering and internalizing the Gospel:

- Find good worship music that you can listen to regularly as you go about your day.
- Memorize some important verses that you can call to mind and meditate on in times of temptation, shame, anxiety or apathy. Here are a few good ones to start with: Galatians 2:20, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 3:1
- Set some limits on how much media you take in from the world every day. The things you watch, listen to, look at, and think about the most, are the things you will ultimately care about the most. If you watch and look at sinful things, your heart will be drawn to sinful things. Even if the things you're watching aren't sinful, they can still affect you by taking your mind (and heart) away from what matters most. So create some habits that will help you "set your mind on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-3)

Appendix: Baptism FAQs

Why do you baptize by immersion?

Here are two reasons why we believe baptism by immersion is faithful to the Scriptures.

1. The definition of the word “baptism” means immersion.
 - The word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word baptizo, which literally means “to immerse or drown.” Whenever the Scriptures use the word “baptism,” it has in mind the meaning-filled act of being buried with Christ by an act of faith, through water.
2. The Scriptures show baptism by Immersion.
 - John the Baptist led the nation in immersion (John 3:23). His name literally means “the Immerser”, and he baptized the nation in a baptism of repentance to prepare the way for Jesus. It is this same practice that Jesus passed on to the early church.
 - Jesus was immersed (Matthew 3:16). Jesus, while not requiring repentance, was immersed by John the Baptist. If his baptism was immersion, then it is very reasonable that ours should be too. We are immersed into his baptism.
 - When Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, they “went down into the water” to do so (Acts 8:38), an action not necessary if baptism were by sprinkling.

Conclusion: It would seem that the most biblical response would be the act of full body immersion, symbolizing a life that fully repents and chooses to walk in God’s ways.

What about those who were baptized as infants?

- We realize that many parents have had their newborn children baptized for a variety of different reasons. Some do it to make a public declaration of their intent to raise the child to know God. Some do it simply as a matter of family tradition. And some do it as a means of removing the inherent sin that they believe all people are born with.
- While we can appreciate those parents who are trying to do the right thing for their kids, we do not believe that a newborn baby believes he/she is a sinner — one who has willfully disobeyed God — thus, baptism is unnecessary. In Acts 2:38, baptism was coupled with repentance. Babies have nothing of which to repent nor can they repent.
- It is important to note that we believe those baptized as infants can still be Christians. It is faith and commitment to Jesus that saves a person, not the baptism itself. However, we would encourage those who were baptized as infants to consider being baptized by immersion to align themselves with the practice we see in Scripture.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

- The short answer to this question is “no.” At least not in the sense that it’s impossible to be saved without getting baptized. The thief on the cross was saved by Jesus and was clearly not baptized (Luke 23:42-43) This is because—as we’ve stated repeatedly—it is faith in Jesus that saves us.
- But we also have to acknowledge that the New Testament writers wouldn’t even know what to do with this question. It’s true that the thief on the cross didn’t get baptized... because he couldn’t! But everyone in the New Testament who could be baptized, was baptized. There was no such thing as a Christian who had not been baptized.
- When Paul describes how Christians are all unified because they’ve all partaken in the same things, he uses baptism as one of those things that every Christian has in common (Ephesians 4:4-5).
- And repeatedly baptism is talked about as the moment when a person is saved and made alive in Christ (Colossians 2:12-13; Romans 6:3-4, 1 Peter 3:21).
- It’s worth asking, “If I want Jesus to be my Savior and Lord, why would I refuse one of the very first commands he gives me as a disciple” (Matthew 28:18-20)?
- And it’s worth asking, “Why would I not want to share in this beautiful practice that Jesus gave me to identify myself with him?”