



Baptism is a one-time public event where a believer is momentarily submerged under water and raised again in celebration. The sacrament symbolizes the promise of Christianity that, through faith, we die to our old sinful self and are raised again in the newness of life because of the finished work of Jesus. Baptism is considered a “sacrament” or a religious activity we embrace because Jesus Himself clearly instructs us to make disciples and baptize them.

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DISCUSSION #1: NOT BY WORKS, INCLUDING BAPTISM

In this discussion we will learn how the act of baptism does not “save” a person, but rather faith (believing) in the work of Jesus.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Biblically speaking, which came first: the chicken or the egg? Faith or works?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

For by grace you have been saved through faith. Ephesians 2:8a

What types of faith are there? What is unique about saving faith?

What is the role of grace in your salvation? What is the role of faith? Can you have one without the other and still be saved? Explain.

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And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8b-9

Name some popular ways people think they can earn their salvation.

What is seductive about believing you can have a hand in, or even orchestrate, your own salvation?

Why is it tempting to believe that getting baptized can save you? Why do you think there are so many people in the world who believe this?

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Make a list of 25 typically “good” things you do during an average week.

What motivates you to do these things? Do you believe they have any bearing on your salvation? On your spiritual growth (your sanctification)?

What’s the healthiest way to view good works and how they impact your spiritual condition?

DISCUSSION #2: BAPTIZING DISCIPLES

In this discussion we will learn how we are baptized to identify publicly with Jesus and His victory over sin and death.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Describe your path of becoming a disciple, from conversion to the present moment. Who were the top three influences (actual people in your life) who contributed the most to your spiritual formation?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ... Matthew 28:19

Why did Jesus tell us to baptize disciples and not “new converts?” What’s implied here?

What’s important about using the Trinitarian formula, (in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit), when baptizing someone? What would be missing if we only baptized in the name of one member of the Godhead?

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Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:20

To “observe” means to actually do. What’s the significance of the word “all” in Jesus’ statement here? What do you think Jesus meant by this? Which of Jesus’s commands is hardest for you to follow, or to teach others to observe?

How do we reconcile Jesus’ promise to never leave us with the occasional (or frequent) dark nights of the soul, when it seems like God is nowhere to be found?

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Find a disciple in your circle of influence who has not been baptized, and offer to do the honors.

DISCUSSION #3: IDENTIFYING WITH US

In this discussion we will learn how Jesus' baptism was a way for him to publicly identify with us (sinful people).

MY STORY | Starting Place

If God were to make a public pronouncement from heaven about how He feels about you, what would He say?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:4

Why does John couple repentance and forgiveness here?

What's it like to forgive someone who never owns up to the losses he or she created in your life?

Does God ever do that? If so, what does that look like?

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In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:9-11

Based on how the text reads, what's the likely mode of Jesus' baptism? Why is the mode of baptism important? (Different modes of baptism include immersion, sprinkling, and pouring). Does the mode of a baptism impact its? Explain.

How is the Trinity (The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) represented in the baptism of Jesus? Why is this important?

If Jesus never sinned, and thus did not need to repent, why did He participate in John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" ?

What does it mean for Jesus to "identify" with us? How did his public baptism play a big role in this?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Attend a baptism in a church that does not practice believer's baptism by immersion. Afterwards, talk to one of the church leaders about why they perform baptisms in this way.

DISCUSSION #4: IDENTIFYING WITH JESUS

In this discussion we will learn how we are baptized to identify publicly with Jesus and His victory over sin and death.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Who is a character in a movie with whom you closely identify? What resonates with you about this person's portrayal of someone's life?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Having been buried with him in baptism ... Colossians 2:12

Being submerged in the waters of baptism is a symbol of the death with which we publicly identify with Jesus in his death.

Read the following quote: "Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life." C.S. Lewis

In what sense is "dying to self" the only way to discover your real self?

What were you like when you were holding on to your old self? What's new and vibrant about your new self (after experiencing saving faith)?

In what ways is voluntarily dying to self similar to Jesus' voluntarily submitting himself to crucifixion?

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In which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Colossians 2:12b

How is coming out of the waters of baptism symbolic of your spiritual, and eventually, your physical resurrection?

How is the "wakening of your spirit" after saving faith a way of identifying with Jesus in his resurrection?

Why is spiritual growth impossible apart from the power of God? What frustrations are you likely to experience trying to grow under your own power?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

What are some of your current ambitions and wishes that reflect your old way of thinking? What are some of your current desires that are likely an indication of the direction God wants you to go?

How can you die to the old yearnings, and put all of your focus and energy into your new, Spirit-driven longings?

DISCUSSION #5: INWARD REALITY

MY STORY | Starting Place

What was the biggest financial debt you've ever been forgiven? Tell us what happened.

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. Colossians 2:12

According to Paul, what does going into, and coming out of, the waters of baptism symbolize?

Why does this support that idea that the immersion of believers (completely, under the water) is the mode of baptism intended by biblical guidelines?

How is some of the symbolism of death and resurrection in immersion lost in other modes of baptism?

How will the power that raised Jesus from the dead also be applied to the physical and spiritual resurrection of believers? How is that even possible?

How is the resurrection of anyone, including Jesus', impossible apart from the powerful working of God?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

If a person is spiritually dead, how can he or she respond to the grace of God?

In what sense do our sins create a debt toward God and others? What significant losses have our damaging words and behaviors created with God and in the lives of others?

What types of "payment plans" do some people create in order to pay off that debt? Is that a futile endeavor? How long does it usually take for them to figure this out? What realizations eventually dawn on them?

No debt owed to God is ever, ever left unpaid. God is a God of Justice, and His holiness will not allow it.

To the best of your understanding, describe how the monthly payments (or lump-sum payment) of the believer's humanly-unpayable debt has been taken care of by Christ's work on the cross.

How were God's immovable standards of justice and holiness satisfied by Jesus' crucifixion?

Why would the crucifixion have absolutely no spiritual significance if Christ had not been raised from the dead—never to die again?

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Forgive a debt this week by fully grieving a loss that was created by someone until you get to the point of acceptance, or healthy resignation.



(You may find that when you get to the final stage of the grieving process, forgiveness is almost effortless.)

DISCUSSION #6: A FRESH START

In this discussion we will learn how baptism celebrates the reality of a new life in Jesus.

MY STORY | Starting Place

What's something you will never buy used (like underwear)?

Why does that particular thing need to be brand new if you're going to acquire it?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

What parts of your life and worldview experienced a radical, 180-degree change after coming to Christ? What parts have experienced more gradual change?

What is brand "new" about the essence of a person who has experienced the one-time act of God (justification) at the moment of saving faith?

What parts of your "old self" are gradually diminishing in their power, over you, over time?

Why is all this change worth celebrating, especially in the public act of baptism?

GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4

Again, how does the act of baptism by immersion symbolize death and new life?

What is the difference between the physical resurrection of the believer (after death) and the spiritual resurrection of the believer (after the death to self)? How are they alike?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Make a list of all the ways you've changed since experiencing saving faith. What changes took longer than others? Why? What dark habits seem to be hanging around?

DISCUSSION #7: INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

In this discussion we will unpack how baptism publicly celebrates an individual's inclusion and participation in God's family.

MY STORY | Starting Place

Have you ever been excluded from a group? If so, how did that experience impact you? What did you miss out on because of that exclusion?

DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12

Expand on Paul's metaphor of the church being like a human body. How are all the systems (skeletal, muscular, lymphatic, respiratory, digestive, nervous, endocrine, cardiovascular, urinary, and reproductive), dependent upon one another? What happens if only one of them shuts down?

What will happen in the body of Christ if you decide not to participate?

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For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (vs. 13)

What contemporary labels might be included in this list? Which of those labels would have applied to you?

How does being indwelt by the same Holy Spirit give the Church a chance for a level of unity and effectiveness not possible in any other human organization?

MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action

Pick one of the bodily systems listed above, and determine which of them is the best metaphor for your unique set of gifts and abilities.

Find another believer who represents a different system, and offer to bring your gifts into that person's life so that he or she may function more effectively in the Kingdom.