

DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

19

Entering the Christian Life





ONE OF OUR Bible school representatives in Africa sent us this report:

“Five years ago I received a request from the Voice of Prophecy to visit a prisoner who was a Bible correspondence school student. Because the student had a deep desire to study the Bible, I visited him regularly. About six months after my initial visit, the student-prisoner asked to be baptized and join the church. The wardens and other prisoners gathered to witness one of the most moving baptisms I have ever conducted. Shortly after this, the man was released from jail even though he still had considerable time to serve. When I asked why, I was told that his life had changed so drastically and he was such a witness for his Savior and his religion, that he could no longer be thought of as a prisoner, nor be treated as such.”

Like this inmate, do you wish there were some way to be washed clean of your sins and start all over again? Well, that is exactly what God promises to do for you if you come to Him and ask Him to forgive you and make you clean. He has promised:

“Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool’” (Isaiah 1:18).

“If we confess our sins, He [Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Baptism doesn’t wash away our sins; only the blood of Jesus can do that. Baptism doesn’t save us; only Jesus can save. Baptism doesn’t change our hearts, but it is a symbol, a sign, that all these things have already taken place in our lives. It’s a way of publicly indicating that we have accepted Jesus as our Savior and intend to follow Him completely. It’s also something that Jesus considers very, very important.

1 | What Is the Meaning of Baptism?

The Bible clearly explains the importance and meaning of baptism. In a conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus declared:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Nicodemus didn’t grasp what Christ meant. After all, how can a person be “born again”? So Jesus explained:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“Born of the Spirit” signifies entering a new life, undergoing a change of mind and heart. Since entering the kingdom of God involves a completely new kind of existence, not just an old

life patched up, it is called the new birth. Water baptism is the outward symbolic portrayal of the inward change.

The prisoner in the story above was baptized as a recognition of his commitment to Christ, and as a symbol of the transformation the Holy Spirit had begun in his character.

2 | Why Should I Be Baptized?

Our salvation revolves around three of Christ's great acts:

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . He was buried . . . [and] He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

Christ made salvation possible through His death, burial, and resurrection. He died for our sins, was buried, and then rose from the grave to give us a new life of righteousness.

"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

The act of being baptized shows that, in a way, we can actually participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism means that we have died with Christ, buried the old life of sin with Christ, and are rising to live "a new life" in Christ. We can benefit from those saving acts just as if we'd been there on Mount Calvary and at the Garden Tomb.

Christ's death and resurrection become our death and resurrection. That's true, first of all, in terms of our relationship with God. When God looks at us, Christ's blood covers our sins, His perfect life covers our inadequacy.

Second, it's true in terms of our experience. God can make us dead to sin—as if we'd been crucified. And He can make us alive to the things of the Spirit—as if we'd been resurrected from spiritual death. This is called being “in Christ.”

The physical act of baptism graphically represents the steps of conversion. First, we're lowered into the water—we're immersed completely—just as people who have died are lowered into the grave and covered. This indicates that we have died with Christ and have buried our old lifestyle. Baptism is a funeral of sorts—a formal farewell to an existence in which sin dominated.

Then, we're lifted up out of the water by the one baptizing—just like a person being resurrected from the grave. This shows that we're a new creation, completely given over to the new life God has waiting for us.



Only immersion can accurately illustrate the true meaning of baptism—death, burial, and rebirth. “Baptism” by sprinkling doesn't adequately symbolize the new birth.

What does it really mean to die with Christ?

“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6).

Baptism represents outwardly what a person must do inside: surrender everything to Christ, and lay it all out on the table. If we keep anything a secret, if we hold anything back from God, then we'll likely remain “slaves of sin” in some way.

When we surrender fully to Christ, our sinful desires are rendered powerless.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

When I identify with Christ’s crucifixion through baptism, I invite divine power into my life, thus “Christ lives in me.”

As you consider putting your life—your will—fully into Christ’s hands, first look at Christ dying on the cross. Don’t look at the sin that’s threatening you; don’t look at your past record; look to Jesus. If you look carefully and prayerfully, you’ll be inspired.

When you accept Jesus into your life, because of His death and resurrection and through His power, you’ll see more and more of His good qualities replacing your old habits:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 18).

Baptism is the first formal step in this process. Through it, we express our desire to lock arms with Jesus and live a new and better life “in Christ.” Jesus does in us and through us what we could never do for ourselves. We arise from the water “a new creation,” and He gives us the power to live a new kind of life.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1, 2).

3 | Why Was Jesus Baptized?

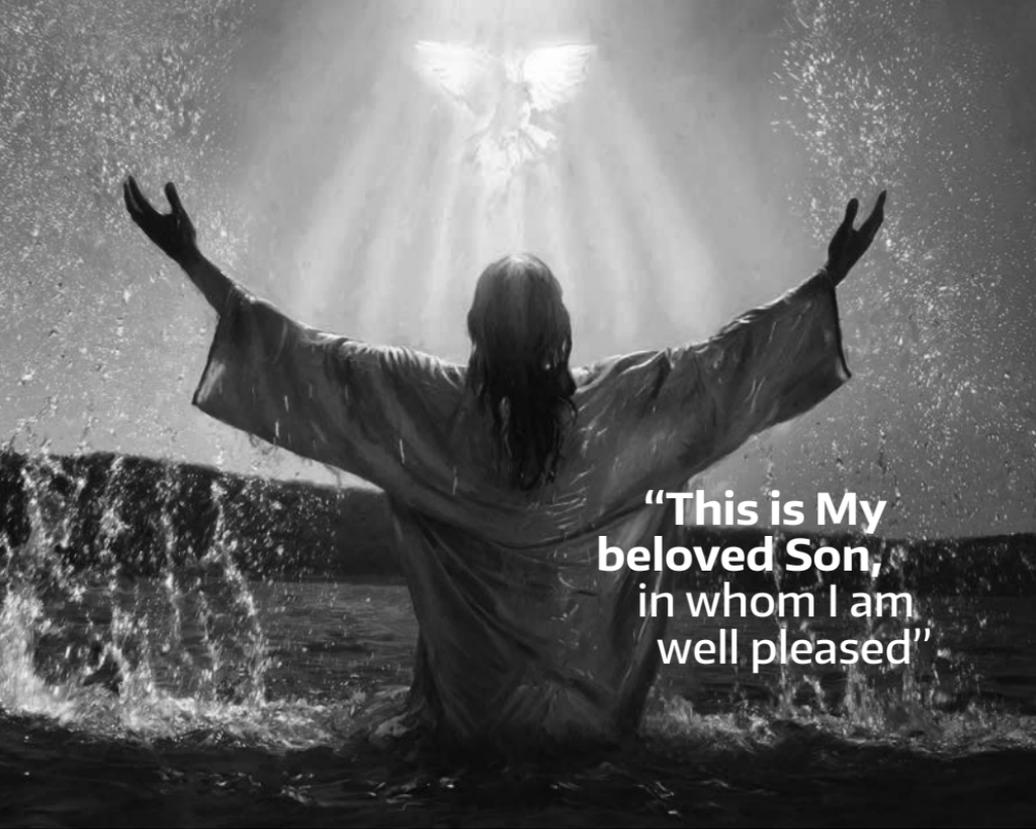
Remember that baptism not only symbolizes dying to an old life of sin, but it also portrays the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus. At Pentecost, Peter told those who were seeking release from guilt:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

This brings up a question. Jesus never committed a single sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Why, then, did He permit Himself to be baptized?

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:13-17).

Jesus was sinless. He didn’t need to repent of any wrongdoing or have any guilt washed away. Christ was baptized for another reason: “To fulfill all righteousness.” By allowing John to immerse Him in the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus set a positive example for us. He identified Himself fully with weak, sinful human beings; He was willing to take all the steps *they* needed to take. Christ the Savior never asks His followers to go anywhere He hasn’t



**“This is My
beloved Son,
in whom I am
well pleased”**

been. He’s always leading—never pushing—so when believers are immersed in the waters of baptism, they are following in the steps of the Master.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, He gives us His righteousness.

“He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Transformed in God’s eyes from sinners into saints, we grow into that righteousness which is already our gift, and thus we live a new life in Christ. Through Christ’s birth and baptism, He took His first step of inviting humanity into His life. The Savior’s death and resurrection were His final, climactic steps.

4 | Why Should I Be Immersed?

All the evidence suggests that Christ was immersed at His baptism; He was not sprinkled with water, nor was water simply poured over His head. One reason John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River was “because there was much water there” (John 3:23).

When Jesus came to John for baptism, He went down into the water, and “when He had been baptized [immersed], Jesus *came up immediately from the water*” (Matthew 3:16).

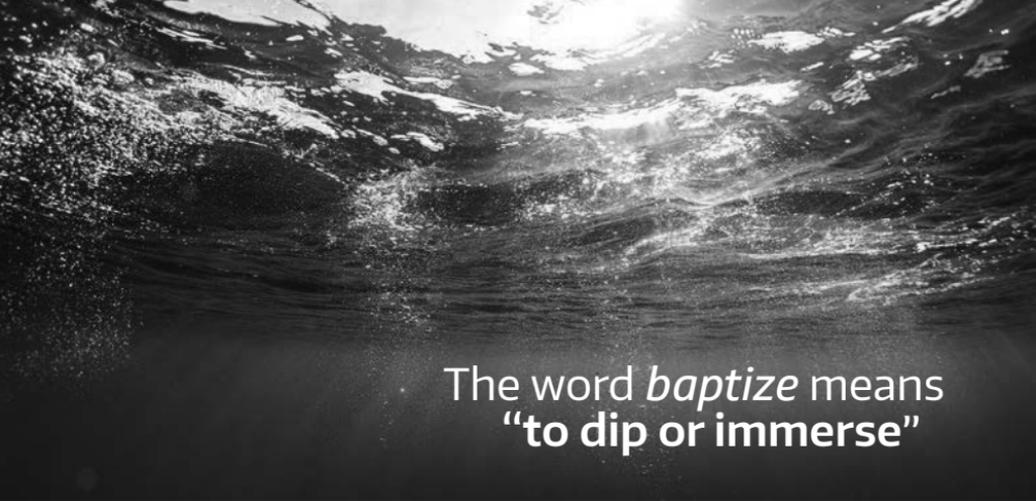
When we understand the true meaning of baptism, we have little difficulty recognizing the authentic *form* of baptism. The very word *baptize* comes from the Greek word *baptizo* and means “to dip or immerse (put under).”

During John Wesley’s visit to America in 1737, a church jury of 44 men tried him on the strange charge of “refusing to baptize Mr. Parker’s child, otherwise than by dipping.” (The record of the trial appears in the court proceedings of the state of Georgia.) It’s evident that the father of Methodism baptized his converts by immersion.

The history of the early church clearly indicates that baptism meant immersion. Statements in the books of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (vol. III, p. 94 and vol. VII, p. 379) show that the church immersed baptismal candidates in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Baptistries for immersing converts appear in many of the churches that were built between the 4th and 14th centuries in Europe and Asia. The reformer John Calvin stated: “It is evident that the word *baptize* means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive [ancient] Church” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 573).

Dean Stanley, one of the most scholarly writers of the Church of England, declared in the book *Christian Institutions* (p. 17): “For



The word *baptize* means “to dip or immerse”

the first 13 centuries, the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the very meaning of the word ‘baptize’—that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water.”

Baptistries throughout Europe testify to the truthfulness of these statements—including the cathedral in Pisa, Italy, and the Lateran Baptistry in Rome. The cathedral in Fréjus, France, has a well-preserved baptistry that was built and used in the 5th century. The ruins of a 2nd century church at Ephesus in Asia Minor also contains a baptistry for immersing candidates.

It was not until the Council of Ravenna early in the 14th century that the Catholic Church accepted sprinkling as equally valid with immersion.

In questions of church practice, we are not to follow what any man teaches, but we are to follow the example of Christ and the apostles as closely as possible (Colossians 2:8).

What about the baptism of infants? Many sincere Christians cherish the tradition of infant baptism; it has become a way in which they dedicate their children to Christ. Giving our children to God at the very beginning of their lives is certainly commendable, but there are biblically acceptable ways in which we can dedicate our children to Christ.

Baptism, however, serves a very specific function in the New Testament. The Bible makes it clear that a person must be taught the way of salvation before baptism (Matthew 24:14; 28:19), believe in Jesus before being baptized (Acts 8:36, 37), and repent of sin and be forgiven before being baptized (Acts 2:38). A baby is incapable of believing, repentance, and confession, all of which must precede baptism.

The Bible doesn't give specific information about children who die before they are mature enough to choose Christ as their personal Savior and be baptized, but we do know that children will be saved in the kingdom (Isaiah 11:6). We can certainly entrust their future to the loving Savior who said:

“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven”
(Matthew 19:14).

5 | The Importance of Baptism

How important is it for believers to be immersed? Jesus admonished Nicodemus, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

According to Jesus, being “born of water and the Spirit” is essential for those who wish to enter heaven.

Jesus gives only one exception. In some cases, it is physically impossible to be immersed. The thief on the cross was born of the Spirit, even though it was impossible for him to leave the cross and be immersed in water as a sign of his change of heart. Jesus promised that he would be with Him in the kingdom (Luke 23:42, 43). For the thief, being “born of water and the Spirit” represents the cleansing blood of Jesus, which at that very moment was being spilled to cleanse the thief from his sins.

Jesus Himself said:

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

By dying in our place at Calvary, Jesus made a public demonstration of His love for us. We need to respond with a public demonstration of our own—an unashamed confession of our commitment to Christ through baptism. In baptism, we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in His newness of life.

Have you entered into a new life in Christ? Have you been baptized? If not, why not prepare for baptism in the near future?

6 | Baptism Is Only the Beginning

The rite of baptism, like the wedding ceremony, was meant to be the formal confirmation and pledge of a wonderful and growing relationship. With that said, while the ceremony of baptism can have a powerful effect on our Christian experience, we need to be careful not to imagine that it renders us permanently incapable of sinning. Our surrender doesn't automatically last a lifetime.

When a child is born, a celebration is in order. However, after the day of birth is over and the excitement subsides, the baby requires daily feeding, bathing, and concern for his or her welfare.

It's much the same with baptism. Paul said of his experience, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). By daily turning from selfishness, we become more and more responsive to Christ. In order to grow consistently, we need to give ourselves to Christ every day—a daily reception of new life through prayer and Bible study.

What instructions did Jesus give concerning those who are baptized?

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Jesus pointed out the importance of teaching those baptized “to obey all things” that He has commanded. Baptism represents our commitment to a Christian lifestyle. It is to be the beginning of a growing relationship with Christ. Peter admonishes us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

We are able to grow as Christians because “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). Read the entire first chapter of 2 Peter for more helpful counsel on how to grow as a Christian.

7 | A Cause for Rejoicing

Philip, a layman in the early Christian church, was once guided by the Holy Spirit to go and talk with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip discovered the eunuch riding in a chariot and reading a prophecy about Christ, the Messiah, in the book of Isaiah. When the eunuch asked Philip who the prophet was talking about, Philip “preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35). Philip and the eunuch “went down into the water, and he baptized him.” Then the eunuch “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:36-39).

What caused the eunuch’s rejoicing? It was the excitement of making a commitment to Christ. Philip “buried” him in the water as a symbol of the funeral of his old life of sin. Philip lifted the eunuch “up out of the water” as a sign that the Ethiopian had

been born into a new life with Christ. There is great joy in baptism because we are giving our lives to a great Savior.

Baptism is cause for rejoicing, because “he who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). When we are baptized, we’re on an upward path leading us to eternal joy with God.

Baptism also celebrates a present happiness with Christ. Jesus promises the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized (Acts 2:38), which includes the *fruit* of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). Having Jesus living inside us by His Holy Spirit provides a profound sense of security and certainty.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).

By faith, you can hear your Heavenly Father addressing you just as He did Jesus in Matthew 3:17: “This is my beloved son [or daughter], in whom I am well pleased.”

This secure relationship with God brings us many benefits, but it doesn’t guarantee a problem-free life. In fact, the enemy often tries to throw the most difficulties at those who have just made a commitment to Christ. However, life with Christ does give us a valuable perspective in the rough times. When we’re in God’s hands, we can know that He will use everything that happens to us, good and bad, to teach us and help us to grow (Romans 8:28).

With shining eyes, Jennifer looked around at her family and friends as they stood to witness her baptism. She felt so happy, so peaceful, so clean! She thought of all the steps that had led to this day. She remembered the discouragement that had so often filled her life before she learned of Jesus and His love. She remembered how thrilled she had been to know that Jesus would forgive her sins if she asked Him to do so. She remembered praying for Jesus to come into her life and asking Him to be her Savior. She thought about her daily walk with Him—sometimes failing and falling,

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WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What invitation did the Apostle Peter make to those who were convicted of their sins by his sermon at Pentecost? (Acts 2:38)

2. In whose names are we to be baptized? (Matthew 28:19, 20)

3. What does the Bible say about the method Philip used when he baptized the Ethiopian convert? (Acts 8:36-39)

4. Is it ever proper to be re-baptized? (Acts 19:1-5)

5. The Bible says that when a person is baptized, he or she is baptized into “one body” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13). What is that body? (Colossians 1:18, 24)



but always getting up again and asking Jesus to help her do better.

Today was the beginning of a brand-new life for Jennifer. She loved Jesus so much, and today her baptism would be a public acknowledgement of her love—a formal commitment to Him. Jennifer felt herself being placed under the water and then being lifted out again. It felt as if a great weight had slid off of her along with the water. Her

old life had been buried in the water, and her new life with Jesus had begun. What a wonderful feeling!

Jesus paid the greatest price to become your Savior. What a privilege it is to publicly give Him your love and allegiance. If you haven't yet done so, why not surrender your life to Him right now?

My Decision

- I want to follow Jesus completely and accept His invitation to publicly show my commitment by being baptized.

My Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, I thank You that Jesus died for my sins, was buried, and was resurrected—the eternal Life-Giver. As I surrender my life to You by dying to self, come into my life. Please pour out Your Holy Spirit into my life as You did in the life of Jesus. Fill my life with the peace and joy that come from following You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Voice of Prophecy | www.vop.com
PO Box 999, Loveland, CO 80539, USA

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