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# Introduction

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This guide has roots in three realms of my experience. The first realm was as a boy growing up in a Christian home with godly parents who showed me the way that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). At age seven, I raised my hand to accept Christ in a Sunday school class that my mother taught. I have a vague memory of that moment, but no idea what I was thinking or feeling. When we got home that afternoon, she recorded the date in the back of my Bible, marking me as the last of her four children to be saved. It also marked the first of several times while growing up that I made a decision or rededicated my life to the Lord—never quite sure if I was truly born again. I knew that I was a sinner. I believed that Jesus died for my sins. And I knew that by accepting Jesus into my heart I would have eternal life. Looking back, I had a shallow understanding of the gospel and limited confidence in my decision to follow Christ. Consequently, I struggled with assurance of salvation for the first two decades of my life.

The second realm was my experience as a father of two daughters. In 1993, my oldest was in sixth grade, and she expressed a desire to be baptized. I was delighted by her interest, but not sure if she was ready. I invited her to a special daddy-daughter time to discuss it. We met once a week for seven weeks and reviewed the basics of the Christian faith, baptism, and church membership. She took these sessions seriously, and we were both surprised by how much we enjoyed them. By the time we finished, I was more confident that my daughter was ready for baptism. We also discovered that the time spent in these heartfelt discussions about eternal realities drew us closer as father and daughter, reinforcing a special spiritual bond between us that we both will cherish and benefit from for a lifetime.

Three years later, I was the Pastor for Parenting and Children's Discipleship in my church. In that role, I had the opportunity to influence the way we prepared young people for baptism. I prepared the first edition of this booklet for use by the church and parents as a baptism preparation tool. More importantly, I designed it as a tool that might be used to better discern a young person's understanding of the gospel and where he might be in his spiritual development. Part of my aim in providing this tool is to assist the church in its efforts to faithfully

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oversee the ordinance of baptism, while preserving and reinforcing the responsibility, privilege, and blessing that belongs to parents to prepare their children to take this important step of obedience and faith.

I have further revised the original material in the hope that it will continue to be useful for baptism preparation, but I also hope it can benefit young people who have already been baptized. I grew up in a church that saw no need for a guide to prepare young people for baptism because, in their view, I had already been baptized when I was three months old. Still, if given the opportunity, I am sure my dad would have welcomed a guide like this and the encouragement to meet with his children to explore their understanding of the truth of the gospel and the state of their souls. I, in turn, would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss these things with my dad. I would have been blessed by those discussions, and I probably would have been spared a lot of confusion and spiritual insecurity.

### **Nomenclature**

One challenge I faced working on this revision was deciding how we should refer to the young person who I hope will benefit from this guide. In the previous editions I used “candidate” (for baptism); but that no longer works since, as already explained, in addition to being a tool for baptism preparation, it has other useful applications. “Child” does not work for those who are older. “Youth” could work, but using it in most sentences is awkward. I came close to using “disciple” because that is how we should think of them, given our desire and responsibility for their faith, as well as our Lord’s commission in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples of all nations.” Short of inventing a new word, I settled on “student,” which works even though it can imply that this effort is a mere academic exercise. In a further effort to avoid cumbersome wording, I am also following the biblical pattern of using the masculine pronoun inclusively to refer to male and female.

## **Before You Begin**

Like most things in life, you and your student will gain more from this experience if you take time to prepare. Here are five suggestions:

### **1. Connect with a pastor/elder in your church.**

If you are using this guide to prepare someone for baptism, it is important to seek the support and involvement of your church leadership. If you have been given this guide as part of your church's baptism preparation process, the connection with your church's leadership is already in place. You may be using this guide as a supplement to your church's discipleship process. In either of these scenarios, connecting with church leadership is fitting, since baptism is most appropriately performed in the context of the local church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

### **2. Examine yourself and pray.**

You may not consider yourself a shining example of faith, and thus you may feel reluctant to instruct and encourage someone else in his faith. This job does not require you to be a theological or spiritual giant, but it does require you to lean on the Lord's grace, which "is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul was one of the greatest spiritual mentors of all time, yet he affirmed that his message and preaching "were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4), so that his faith was not resting "in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

Weakness, however, should not be confused with hypocrisy. It would be difficult to authentically lead a young person through these steps if you are not a believer. So first follow Paul's admonition and "examine [yourself], to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Furthermore, we should not presume to give spiritual direction to another person if we are walking in disobedience and deliberately sinning against the Lord. Paul rebukes Roman teachers who taught others but did not teach themselves.

**If you are trusting Christ, walking in His ways, waging war against sin, and striving to be an example...then pursue this opportunity to encourage another person in his faith...**

—David Michael

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*Romans 2:21-24—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?<sup>22</sup> You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?<sup>23</sup> You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.<sup>24</sup> For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*

If you are trusting Christ, walking in His ways, waging war against sin, and striving to be an example to others “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, [and] in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12), then pursue this opportunity to encourage another person in his faith and join with the Apostle Paul, who said:

*2 Corinthians 4:1-2—Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.*

### **3. Enlist prayer support.**

We can lead a person through the steps in this guide, but only God can touch someone’s heart and generate an authentic response to truth. Recognize that God may be pleased to use this time to advance His work in your student’s life and touch his heart (and yours) in a meaningful and life-changing way. Also, be careful not to underestimate what the enemy of our faith and our souls may do to oppose this work. Invite others to join you in praying that the Lord influence the heart and thwart the efforts of our “ancient foe.”<sup>1</sup>

### **4. Encourage spiritual discipline.**

If the student does not have a regular time of personal Bible study and prayer, this would be a good time to begin. Along with daily Bible reading and prayer, you may want to assign memory work or homework. You may also want to encourage keeping a journal of thoughts, insights, and highlights gleaned from personal time in the Word and from these sessions together. Consider keeping your own journal as well, to document your thoughts and impressions, including topics discussed, questions raised, observations made, and insights gained

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<sup>1</sup> This references a line in Martin Luther’s hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

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throughout this process. Consider spending part of your time together sharing the gleanings from your time in the Word and prayer.

### **5. Plan your meeting times.**

It is important for you to set aside sufficient time to meet privately with your student. This will communicate that these times are important and should be taken seriously. Plan at least six sessions. Even though it may be possible to race through the material, I suggest that you spread the sessions over several weeks.

Establish a regular time, and perhaps find a special place to meet. After meeting weekly in a local restaurant to work through this material with his daughter, one dad wrote: “Although I initially approached these sessions with some fear and trepidation, we have had such deep conversations that I am actually looking forward to continuing these, even after baptism! Thanks for helping get us off the dime.” If you are a parent who is stuck on “the dime,” consider that this process may help establish a regular time when your son or daughter can anticipate the opportunity to discuss important issues of life and faith with you.

## **Preparing for Each Session**

There are six steps in this process and, in most cases, each step requires at least one session to complete. Think of the steps as milestones and take as many sessions as you need to reach each one. This guide will provide enough detail to direct you for each session, but it is also flexible enough for you to lead the discussion in a way that works best for you and your student.

### **1. Preparation**

Carefully review the goals for each session ahead of time, and think about how you will guide your student through each session. Keep in mind that this guide is a tool to help you prepare. It is not designed to simply be read to or by the student. Plan for these meetings to be face-to-face and heart-to-heart discussions. Rather than reading aloud from this booklet, it would be better to make your own notes. This will communicate that what you are saying comes from your heart and that you consider these matters serious enough to take the time to prepare.

## 2. Prayer

Make prayer a significant part of each session. Encourage the student to pray with you. If you are a parent and prayer with your son or daughter has become awkward or mechanical, you may need to give some structure to your prayers. Praying through a particular Bible text is one way to provide form and substance to prayer. There are also simple acrostics that can be helpful such as ACTS<sup>2</sup> or APTAT.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Application

For each session, your aim should be to influence not only the “head” but also the “heart.” It is important for the student to understand the truth, but his heart response to the truth is even more important. Look and listen for an authentic heart response to the things you discuss together.

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. Sproul. “A Simple Acrostic for Prayer: A.C.T.S.” June 25, 2018, [ligonier.org/blog/simple-acrostic-prayer/](http://ligonier.org/blog/simple-acrostic-prayer/)

<sup>3</sup> John Piper. “Practical Help for Praying for Help,” January 3, 1988, [desiringgod.org/messages/practical-help-for-praying-for-help](http://desiringgod.org/messages/practical-help-for-praying-for-help)