

BAPTISM

Our Lord has graciously given us baptism as the initiating sign and seal of the gospel. In baptism, with gravity and joy, we confess that our only hope for this life and the next lies in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ongoing life on our behalf. Baptism is the first step of discipleship, the door of obedience through which we step as we begin our ascent toward heaven. Baptism is also the door through which we step into covenant with our Lord's community of faith, the church. Because of the life and work of our Lord Jesus, we travel together, fixing our eyes on Him, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

What does baptism represent?

What is it a symbol or sign of?

Baptism re-presents the gospel, which teaches us that though we are more sinful than we will ever know, we are, at one and the same time, more forgiven than we could ever hope, all because of our Lord's life and work on our behalf. In baptism we make a radical--down to the roots of our being--identification with His death and resurrection. Baptism dramatically pictures what happens as a result of our union with Christ, as we go down with him in His death and rise with Him to new life (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). In baptism, then, we "immerse" ourselves in Jesus' life and work on our behalf.

Closely related to this, baptism also pictures our passing through the waters of judgment safely. In Christ, God has given us the one way by which we may be saved. Just as God provided the ark to bless and preserve Noah and his family, who were saved through the waters of judgment, so he has given us his Son, who is uniquely able to save all those who "enter" into him and His church by faith. Baptism, the Apostle Peter tells us, "corresponds to this" (I Peter 3:21). After boldly proclaiming the gospel on the Day of Pentecost, when many were "cut to the heart" and eager to turn toward Jesus as Lord and Savior, Peter urged them to be baptized as a sign of being "...saved from their corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40).

Baptism is also a symbol of being washed or cleansed from sin. Scripture teaches us that even our "righteous" acts are no more than "filthy rags" in the eyes of our holy God (Isaiah 64:6). We have no way to cleanse ourselves. Thus the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood shed on the cross cleanses us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:7; Hebrews 9:11-28; Revelation 7:14). In baptism we "put on" Christ and his righteousness--"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

The Apostle Paul writes of "the washing of rebirth" (Titus 3:5); we have been "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). Baptism graphically pictures this cleansing of the heart; thus it makes sense for Ananias, shortly after Saul has come to understand the gospel, to urge him as follows: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

What does baptism have to do with discipleship?

While baptism is a sign and a seal that Jesus is our Savior, it is also a sign and a seal that he is our Lord and King. His last instructions to his disciples before He ascended to heaven clarified His absolute sovereignty: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto me. 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: 18-20). Baptism is the initiating response of obedience in the life of discipleship; it is the doorway through which we step onto a life-long path of obedience to our King.

It is clear that baptism, while having no saving properties in-and-of-itself, is an essential step in the life of faith. An unbaptized believer is in a state that should not be regarded as normal, but as an aberration to be addressed and "mended." According to the witness of scripture, an unbaptized believer has not yet professed the faith. How can we

speak of following our Lord in a generic sense if we disregard this first step of obedience which he has ordained for his people (Matthew 28:19)? To truly love Jesus is to obey him (John 14:15).

In baptism we publicly profess that our life is no longer our own. We have been bought with a great and terrible price, and we now live to serve our gracious King. “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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 6:3-4). In baptism we intend, by his grace, to love Him for all He is worth. He gives us grace and strength as we follow Him in repentance and faith.

What does baptism teach us about church membership?

Baptism, and the life of faith it represents, is a communal, covenantal sacrament. As the second great commandment organically emerges from the first, so one’s radical identification with Christ in baptism must be accompanied by a similar identification with his people. It has been called the “doorway to the visible church.” On the Day of Pentecost, those who responded to the Lord in baptism immediately entered the community of faith; they emerged from the waters of baptism to immerse themselves in a new social reality, the church, which brought with it rich practical consequence. They began to cultivate the God-given means of grace which He has given us to see His will done on earth as it is in heaven—they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

We must understand baptism in the same way, for the Lord of baptism remains the same (Hebrews 13:8). We are all, despite our myriad differences, united in Him by faith, and have thus become fellow travelers on the ascent to heaven. We are a single organism, one body. True discipleship is a community project which we realize as we work together to please and honor our King, lifting one another up in prayer, entering one another’s joys and sorrows, carrying each other’s burdens, encouraging one another, and speaking the truth. We love one another toward heaven for the sake of our great King.

While all true believers are part of the universal body of Christ, united with all other believers throughout time and space, baptism brings each believer into the culture of a specific local church. The baptized life is not esoteric or nebulous, but must be firmly rooted in practical devotion to real persons of shared scriptural commitments in a particular time and place. At CTK we urge all those who have called out to Christ as Lord and Savior to obey Him in the waters of baptism, and we urge each one to see their baptism as pledge of allegiance to Him and to his people.

What is the connection between Baptism and the Lord’s Supper?

The witness of scripture, the logic of the gospel, and the purpose of the sacraments bring us to the conviction that only those who have been baptized should partake of the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is the initial doorway of obedience to Christ, the first step in a life of discipleship. The Lord’s Supper is then the ongoing, oft-repeated meal that we share as we ascend together toward heaven. It does not make gospel sense for one who has neglected the initial confession of faith, the “formal” entrance into the life of the church, to partake of the meal designed and given to those who have stepped into the church through this door of confession.

Help from Psalm 84 and the Heidelberg Confession

Some of the poetry found in Psalm 84 is helpful in understanding what baptism signifies for the believer and the believing community, the church: “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their heart on pilgrimage” (v.5) beautifully captures the double confession that is made in baptism. One confesses absolute dependence on God for all blessings, and at the same time sets ones heart (ones understanding and affection) on pilgrimage. Our Lord is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. “O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you” (v. 12).

Psalm 84 is a psalm of ascent, sung or chanted by the people of God as they wended their way upwards toward Jerusalem for the annual feasts to worship God. Baptism is the initial confession of ascent made in the presence of God and his people, fellow travelers on the road toward heaven: “They go from strength to strength, till each appear before God in Zion” (v. 7).

The first two questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) are rich with gospel truth, and helpful in realizing the double confession of baptism--both the resting and the resolve which it represents. The resolve, though imperative, is clearly subordinate and derivative to the rest; while we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” it is with the confidence that “it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12b-13). The first question and answer of this catechism has been called “the whole gospel in a nutshell; blessed is he who can repeat it from the heart and hold it fast to the end.”

1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who with His precious blood has freed me from the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair shall fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, wherefore by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.

2. Q. How many things are necessary for you to know, that you in this comfort may live and die happily?

A. Three; the first, how great my sins and misery are; the second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; the third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.

Baptism as a “wide angle lens” onto all of life

Baptism is a “narrow” doorway which opens onto an unimaginable breadth of possibility and joy, both in this life and the next. In baptism we immerse ourselves into the life of our King, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). It is precisely in so “losing” our lives for his sake that we truly come to find them (John 12:25). Following his baptism, the Philippian jailer was “filled with joy” and was compelled to tangibly share this joy with others (Acts 16:25-34).

Baptism, then, though it re-presents some particular and vital truths about the conversion God works in our lives, ends up by being a wide angle rather than a zoom lens view of conversion. Baptism is a picture of conversion, which is a giving of our entire selves to our Creator and Redeemer and to his body, the church. Baptism, when understood aright, is relevant to every corner of our lives—it is as wide as the Gospel, and thus as wide as life itself. Baptism is culture-shaping; it is about living every moment of our lives, together, to honor and glorify our King.

Who should be baptized?

All persons who are truly looking to Christ alone as their Lord and Savior should be baptized. Baptism is the external, public confession of an internal direction of faith and repentance brought about by the Spirit of God in conversion. It is a picture of the gospel. It is the initial sign pointing back to conversion and forward to a life of discipleship (Matthew 28:19). In the account in Acts 2, when the people heard the gospel, “...they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call’....Those who accepted his message were baptized” (Acts 2:38-39 and 41a).

When should a believer be baptized?

The theological significance of baptism--it is a picture of regeneration (new life) in Christ, and a profession of one’s faith and repentance--point to an early rather than a later timing for baptism. Our Lord makes it clear that baptism is the initial step in the life of faith; the newly baptized believer then embarks on a life of learning and devotion to Christ (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41ff).

The examples given of baptism in the book of Acts, though occurring in a unique season of redemptive history, remain remarkably weighted toward a sooner rather than a later time-frame whenever genuine faith and repentance are manifest. The three thousand baptisms on the Day of Pentecost happened on the same day that these men and women were cut to the heart by the message of the gospel. They had no time to attend classes on doctrine or discipleship, and no time to prove or disprove the validity of their conversions. They responded eagerly to the gospel, and were prepared to step into the life and devotion of the church immediately (Acts 2:36-47). The same holds true in all the smaller conversion accounts throughout Acts. For instance, “*when* [the Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Not long thereafter Philip joins the Ethiopian in his chariot, and explains the gospel to him. “As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:36-38). When the Philippian jailer responded to the gospel, “...*immediately* he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33b). Three days after Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, he was visited by Ananias, who that day told him, “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

It is common for God-fearing churches to be very careful about the timing of baptizing professing believers. This is understandable in light of much casual decisionism, cultural nominalism (when people “believe” in name only due to cultural expectations), and general carelessness in the church with regard to the gospel and its implications. We believe, however, that these real or potential abuses may cause churches to be excessively fastidious in this matter, so that the obedience of genuine, albeit novice believers die the deaths of a thousand qualifications. In such cases this Christ-given confession and seal of faith before God and the gathered church, and all that it implies for the life of faith, is blocked indefinitely, perhaps because of criteria which is more ours than our Lord’s. Baptism ought to come at the *beginning* of the life of faith, of a long obedience in the same direction. In many cases we have reversed this, and insisted on a long and involved obedience in *order* for one to be baptized. When this occurs, the portal to a life of following Christ is blocked, and a vital means of growth in grace is denied. Sadly, those confessing Christ in baptism may fall away from the faith, or prove to be insincere, no doubt, yet this should not make us reluctant to proceed where genuine faith seems to be operative. It did not deter the apostles. Who are we to impede a person’s obedience to Christ?

Scripture is clear on the importance of baptism. While it saves no one (Ephesians 2:8-9), it is an imperative of our Lord, and vital to a life of true discipleship. In fact, welcoming the gospel through faith and repentance and baptism seem to form one complex experience of gospel initiation in the New Testament. Difficult questions about its nature and application should not keep us from an ever-growing commitment to its practice in fidelity to our Lord.

Here are some diagnostic questions we must keep in mind with those seeking baptism, taken primarily from the instructive account in Acts 2:36-47. Does the loved one understand the gospel? Does he (or she) acknowledge themselves to be a sinner by nature and practice, without hope on their own before the holy God? Do they understand who Jesus is, that he is God in the flesh? Do they know of His sinless life, of His substitutionary death on the cross and resurrection? Do they believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ? Are there signs of them being “cut to the heart?” Are they eager to do whatever is necessary to turn from their sin and self-righteousness, and to turn in faith to Christ and his righteousness? Is the prayer our Lord commended, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13) approximated in the words and disposition of the candidate? Are they willing to be baptized, to make this public confession of faith and commitment to follow Christ? Do they demonstrate an eagerness to enter into the devotions of the church?

To unpack all the implications of these questions would require much time and reflection, no doubt. A basic heart-response to these questions must be evident, however, taking into account matters of context in the life and circumstances of the loved one, if we are to avoid malpractice in this matter of baptism.

How should one be baptized?

We believe that the best way to realize the biblical mode of baptism is to practice immersion. We believe this for three reasons. First, the word baptize in Greek means to dip or immerse, even to drown. Second, the physical context of baptisms noted in the New Testament leans decidedly in favor of immersion. John baptized people in the Jordan River

(Mark 1:5); Jesus came up out of the water after being baptized (Mark 1:10); and Philip “went down into the water” to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38). And then, immersion is the mode which is most congruent with the theological reality which baptism signifies—“immersing” ourselves in the work of Christ on our behalf and then rising to follow Him in newness of life.

Concerning the Baptism of our Children

At CTK, we believe and practice believer’s baptism. We believe that baptism is a sign and confession of the reality of faith in the life of a believer, and thus not appropriate to be practiced on an infant who is not yet able to understand and respond to the gospel.

Some churches, in an effort to safeguard the honor of our Lord and the integrity of His church, prohibit the baptism of children old enough to understand and embrace the gospel, often establishing a certain age which must be reached before the elders will consider baptizing a young person. While we respect, and to some degree sympathize with such concerns, our reflection on scripture has taken us to a different position with regard to our children at CTK.

We believe that the most vital matter to be learned of a baptismal candidate is not their age, but whether there is evidence of the presence of faith and repentance in their life. “Can a child be converted? Can they truly turn to Christ in faith and repentance?” becomes the question of real import. If the answer is yes, which we believe it is, then why should they be denied the opportunity to confess their faith in obedience to our Lord, and enjoy this means of grace like any other believer? To establish a set age for baptism may well be “cleaner” and more efficient, and no doubt proceeds from careful thought. The life of the Spirit, however, though it must be ordered, is organic rather than formulaic. While some principles indeed apply “across the garden” of the church, each “plant” is different, and as such requires individual care. (To press the metaphor in this matter of baptism, it seems that we often cannot see the trees for the woods). At CTK we intend to reflect deeply on scriptural principles, and then apply these principles to each person under our care. Though there is careful logic employed in the reasons to disallow children to receive baptism, it may, if fact, subvert the deeper logic of the gospel.

And it doesn’t seem to square with scripture. There is no prohibition anywhere in scripture concerning the baptism of children; no age criteria are given. Though the accounts are not explicit in the New Testament, the implications seem strong that children were part of the groups receiving baptism. Three thousand were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, people from all over the map in every sense of the word. It seems unlikely that none of that large group were children. When they asked what they should do in response to the gospel, Peter cried, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your *children* and for all those who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

Another biblical account which is relevant to consider is found in Acts 16. When the Philippian jailer asked what he must do to be saved, Paul and Silas said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household. Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16: 32-33). Again, any arguments here proceed from silence, yet the implications are worth noting: “*Immediately* the jailer and all his [believing] family were baptized.” The nature and purpose of baptism call for its practice sooner rather than later for *all* those who receive Christ; unbaptized believers of any age are an anomaly in the New Testament.

There is a wonderful window in the life of our Lord which, though not specifically about baptism, remains relevant to the way we understand and minister to our children. In Mark’s gospel, chapter ten, we find people bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them. The disciples, knowing the ministry pressures upon Jesus, rebuke them. Here we have a group of careful adults guarding the integrity of Jesus’ ministry, assuming a criterion for a person’s gaining access to Him which keeps children marginalized. Ostensibly, they are concerned for Jesus’ sake, yet he rebukes them with indignation: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:14-15).

Elsewhere our Lord, answering the disciples' question concerning the kingdom of heaven, "...called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me'" (Matthew 18:1-5).

And then, there is the remarkable instance where Jesus addresses the seventy-two disciples who have returned to Him from a season of ministry. They report on their successes—"...even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17b). Jesus replied, '...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.' At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure'" (Luke 10:20-21). It seems that little children are, by God's grace, enabled to understand and embrace the treasure of salvation.

Shortly before His death, Jesus entered the temple area in Jerusalem. Children began shouting "'Hosanna ["save us"] to the Son of David.'" The chief priests and teachers of the law—the religious experts, the theological watchdogs--were indignant: "'Do you hear what these children are saying?' they asked Him. 'Yes,' Jesus replied, 'have you never read, "'from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?'" (Matthew 21:15-16; Psalm 8:2).

There is, no doubt, a danger in being overly sentimental with our children and unwisely inflating their response to God, but these accounts makes it clear that the danger of *underestimating* them is even greater. Children are able, by God's grace, to "get" the gospel and embrace it. In fact, our Lord tells us that in some ways they are *especially* able to do so. The way they get it bears much reflection for us as adults.

There is the danger of prematurely baptizing a child, the danger that over time they will give evidence that they were never truly converted. But this danger exists in baptizing *any* person. The scriptural witness, as noted above in the sections on "Who should be baptized?" and "When should one be baptized?" remain relevant for children as well as adults. The pattern suggests that *all* who turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior in faith, who are "cut to the heart" by the gospel, should be baptized with joy. We ought not to disparage a sapling because it is not yet a tree, but celebrate its life and cultivate it to the glory of God. We echo the words of Charles Spurgeon who wrote:

"If any reproach us with receiving young children into the church, we will wear the reproach as a badge of honor. Holy children cannot possibly do us any harm. God will send us sufficient of age and experience to steer the church prudently. We will receive none who fail to yield evidence of the new birth, however old they may be; but we will shut out no believers, however young they may be. God forbid that we should condemn our cautious brethren, but at the same time we wish their caution would show itself where it is more required. Jesus will not be dishonored by the children; we have far more cause to fear the adults."

Is a baptized child now a member at CTK?

At CTK we see all of our children as being vital to our community, regardless of whether or not they have been baptized. Upon their baptism, we view them as members, entering into most of the privileges and responsibilities of our church. They are then invited to join in the communion table, and we begin to hold them accountable to the scriptures and to our vows in a new and more thorough way. They are, in a sense, "junior" members, as they are not, for instance, expected to attend church life meetings or seek office in the church. We urge all our baptized children, when they reach the age of eighteen, to renew their commitment to Christ and to our church at one of our CTK life celebrations. At this time they become full members, now taking on all of the privileges and responsibilities of membership.

CTK guidelines for baptizing our children

There are reasons to withhold baptism from those seeking it, and this certainly includes children. We want to have confidence that each one understands the gospel and their absolute need of Jesus as their Lord and Savior. There must be a sober determination to step into the life and devotions of His church. An inability to articulate the gospel must give us pause, along with any silliness regarding this joyful though serious step. We want to be vigilant to avoid carelessness in proceeding. The following are some good reasons to delay baptism:

We want to be careful that our children's interest in baptism is not proceeding from peer pressure, from wanting to do what their friends are doing. There is a positive "peer pressure" in the life of faith, no doubt, and our children may be positively challenged by this confession from one of their friends. We must remain clear, however, that baptism is, at the core, a response to the initiative of God in one's life.

We must also take care that a child is not pursuing baptism simply to please their parents, or other adults in our body. Certainly we want to bring the gracious weight of the gospel to bear on their minds and hearts, to press on their understanding and affections the beauty of saying "Yes" to our Lord in all things, but we do not want to pressure them into hypocrisy. We want them to fear the Lord, and not men, in this matter (Proverbs 29:25).

We want to be careful, as parents and concerned "aunts" and "uncles," not to succumb to peer pressure of our own. Concern for what others may think of our children—if they are baptized, or if they are not—may motivate us more than fear of the Lord. We must love our children for His sake—the second great command must always be chastened and ordered by the first. All of our children, like all of us, are at different spiritual places, and we dishonor our Lord, and do them a disservice, if we pressure them into a confession which may not yet truly be their own.

Another poor reason to encourage your child toward baptism is because you do not want him or her to feel left out. Similarly, take care not to be pressured into affirming a child whom you wish to please, yet whose preparedness you know to be dubious. The sacrament of baptism is far too serious to be treated with indifference, and it certainly should not be seen as another piece of an overall "resume" we are constructing on their behalf.

Beware of the danger of the subtle working of a kind of "baptismal regeneration" (the view that baptism is necessary for one's salvation). This, not unlike pushing or manipulating a child to "make a decision" or to pray a particular prayer, may grant a concerned parent a measure of peace, yet this may be a peace gained at the cost of truth and thus prove to be damaging to the child. Yes, we earnestly guide our younger loved ones toward Christ, and press upon them the claims of the gospel, yet, at the end of the day—and all throughout it—we commit their lives to His sovereign care, and keep loving them for His sake.

Two important things to keep in mind are these: (1) because a child (or an adult) is not yet baptized does not mean they are therefore unconverted; not at all. As important as baptism is, it is not to be forced prematurely. The best way to love God and your little neighbor may be to wait to see if gospel realities are truly settled in his or her heart; and (2) we are not to judge one another in this matter, whether parents present a child to be baptized or deem it wise not to. Different households will make these decisions in different ways, and we all need to respond with charity (Romans 14: 4, 10, and 19).

Any child who is baptized must have a strong desire to do so, must be instructed in their home and then be commended by their parent(s). Know that each child who is baptized has been interviewed and commended by the elders.

Preparing our children for baptism

We hope, pray, and intend to increasingly become a culture of Godward delight. We purpose to know, follow and celebrate Christ our King with such joy that baptism, and all that it signifies, will be compelling to each of our loved ones. We pray that every corner of our shared existence will move our children toward Christ and His kingdom. May absolute

dependence, gratitude, and allegiance to Him be the air our children breathe in our midst; may loyalty to King Jesus be caught as well as taught. Here are some exhortations as we seek to guide our children to the Lord Jesus:

- Pray often and earnestly for each one of your children, and pray as able for all of the children within our fellowship. His grace precedes all our efforts, and He is able to work even through our failings. “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builder’s labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1a). We plant and water, but only God makes things grow (I Corinthians 6:7). The gospels are filled with accounts of our Lord answering the requests of parents on behalf of their children.
- Live a life of repentance. Continually seek God’s grace to follow Him with all your heart and mind and soul and strength—then you will be able to truly and meaningfully love your nearest neighbors in your home.
- Devote yourself to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). We want our children to turn from sin—are we turning from sin in our lives? We want our children to love the scriptures—do we love them? We hope they will grow in their love and devotion for the church—are we so devoted, or are we distracted and worried by competing priorities that pale in comparative importance? Remember: affections are sooner *caught* than taught.
- Overflow with thankfulness to God, certainly for the “unspeakable gift,” Jesus, but also for *all* the blessings He so liberally showers upon us. Live doxologically before your children—cherish and celebrate all that He has given you. Be festive as often as possible. Celebrate each child—rejoice in their existence and encourage them in their interests and gifts. Be affectionate.
- Studiously avoid the greatest idolatry in our culture—money, acquisition, materialism.
- Hear our Lord clearly. This is hard for us to truly hear, as materialism is as pervasive as the air we breathe: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15); “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21; see also I Timothy 6:10 and 17-19). Set your mind and heart on things above (Colossians 3:1-2), and from this setting make choices here on earth. Live in ways that show Jesus’ seemingly paradoxical promise to be absolutely true: We most truly find our lives when we lose them (John 12:25), and it is through generosity that we “...take hold of the life that is truly life” (I Timothy 6:17).
- Read, teach, and explain the scriptures in your home rhythmically. If possible, pursue a catechism (a systematic series of questions and answers designed to give a person a framework of biblical truth), or read other books that are relevant to your child’s spiritual formation. If you need guidance in this, come to one of the elders.
- As fathers, especially, we are instructed to bring up our children “...in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4b). We are to be pastors in our homes. We are all at different places on our spiritual journeys, and in our understanding of the Word, yet all of us remain responsible to embrace and share to the best of our ability what we do know. Don’t wait until some future, imagined time of expertise—love and dispense the truth now, *while* you are growing and learning. Remember: “Anything worth doing is worth doing badly.”
- Dispense the truth “randomly” throughout all the facets of your existence. “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Seek to make talk of the Lord and His word so natural that it invariably works its way into all manner of conversations.
- Seek to make the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus part of the very *atmosphere* of your home. Paul was able to write this to Timothy, who did not have the benefit of a believing father: “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first *lived* in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (II Timothy 1:5).
- All truth is God’s truth—we must learn and teach an integrated worldview, beginning with the scriptures and working out to every corner of our existence. Reflect upon and discuss the three major categories of reality—creation, fall (or sin), and redemption. Consider the myriad implications of each broad and nuanced category, and how these realities are relevant to each one of our lives.
- Promote an environment where questions are welcomed, ignorance is readily admitted, and where truth is pursued with joy and vigor.
- Focus together on the Lord Jesus—the life He lived among us, full of grace and truth, the death He died and His ongoing, resurrected life. Be eager to speak of His unique place as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to God (John 14:6).

- Make the gospel plain as often and in as many ways as possible. The gospel teaches us that we are more sinful than we could ever know. Does your child understand his or her plight before a holy God, and their desperate need for a mediator?
- The gospel also teaches us that God has made absolute provision for us in the person and work of Christ, so that we can know absolute forgiveness if we receive the Lord Jesus and embrace His mercy for us on the cross. Learn about and share the many facets of the cross.
- Make didactic use of CTK baptisms—witness them carefully, and reflect upon them with your children.
- If your child is interested in baptism, this may grant an excellent opportunity to get at the heart of the gospel with them.
- If your child is eager to be baptized, pray with him or her, ask questions, encourage them. Carefully consider this essay on baptism with them. If the eagerness persists, and they seem to understand and embrace the gospel, call on the elders to arrange a meeting with you and your child.
- If, at the conclusion of the meeting, it seems wise for your child to wait to be baptized, take care not to see the elders as being in any way “against” your child; rather, understand this as a kindness born of love for their soul, and a desire to honor God above else. Love of our neighbor is only true love as it is consistent with our love for God.

Remember: we see all of our children as vital to our community, whether they have been baptized or not. At the same time, we pray that each one will come to know and love Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and that a day will come when we can all, as a church family, witness and celebrate their confession of this in the waters of baptism.

A word to our young people

Having written at some length of the dangers of carelessness with regard to baptism, of pursuing it prematurely, we would like to note a possible danger in an opposite direction. Some of you, perhaps out of respect for the commitment baptism represents, and a proper desire to live with integrity and to not make a false confession, may “set the bar” so high as to disallow yourself to seriously think and pray about making this step. It may well be that your reticence is wise, yet also remember that baptism is not about the level of your own righteousness; if so, every one of us would be in trouble! Baptism represents the “alien” righteousness given to us in Christ as a gift (Romans 1:17; Ephesians 2:8-9). When we are baptized we are not extolling our own worth but His; we fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Furthermore, in baptism we are in no way announcing our “arrival” as believers, but resolving to *begin* to follow Jesus for all He is worth. Baptism is a way, then, to not only confess this resolve, but to deepen it by God’s grace. It may be a way for you to say, before God and your church family, “Lord I believe, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:41). You are calling on Him, and on your brothers and sisters at CTK, to help you as seek to walk in the life of faith.

We all have sinful hearts, and we live in a world which is often toxic to the life of faith. Favorable conditions to step forward in allegiance to Christ the King do not often come. We need to step forth where we are at, with our struggles, with our temptations—while the conditions may not be all that favorable—trusting Him to grant us His grace and favor as we seek to follow Him. We take this step acknowledging that we are works in progress, that we have “miles to go before we sleep.”

God blesses such candid, raw obedience, and grants grace to those who sincerely confess His name. The definitive nature of this step—“I have decided to follow Jesus,” will, by God’s grace, prove helpful in keeping one’s balance amid all the vertigo of adolescence and young adulthood—the vertigo of life in *all* seasons, solidifying your direction in a way that begs ongoing accountability. It is a cry of thanksgiving and a cry for ongoing help all at the same time. With joy, and with legitimate trepidation, casting all our hopes for this life and the next on the Lord Jesus, we “dive,” immersing ourselves into His life and into the life of His church.

The elders at CTK, along with many other adults who love you dearly, encourage each of you to think and pray about baptism and about the gospel it represents. We invite you to speak with us about it, to be candid with your questions, regardless of whether you are prepared to make this step or not. We need to stay in ongoing dialogue about the things that matter most—we need to stay in earnest dialogue about the gospel.