



TOPIC:

*baptism*

*Christian*

FOUNDATIONS



A QUEENSLAND BAPTIST COURSE // PREPARED BY JOHN SWEETMAN

## INTRODUCTION

# Christian FOUNDATIONS

Christian Foundations is a series of studies that helps people discover (and rediscover) the FOUNDATIONS of believing in, living life with and serving Jesus.

Each module is centred around the rhythm of daily self-study and reflection on Scripture and weekly discussion with a Christian mentor (or mentoring group).

### The daily rhythm involves:

- A brief introduction to the Scripture reading
- The study of a Scripture passage
- Reflection and journaling on the passage
- A short devotion flowing from the passage
- A prayer to pray aloud
- An action to take in response to what you have learned

The modules can be completed in any number or order depending on your needs, but for someone completing all the modules a **suggested order**

### is:

1. Identity
2. Spirit
3. Growth
4. Service
5. Mission
6. Perseverance
7. Baptism
8. Community

## INSTRUCTIONS

**ORGANISE** with a mentor or mentoring group when you will meet and which module you will do together each week.

**STUDY** daily one of the five Bible studies (Study 1-5), and write any reflections, questions and revelations. It will probably take you about 20 minutes to complete the reading and reflection. (If a daily study proves too difficult, you could decide to spread each module over two weeks.)

**MEET** weekly (or fortnightly) with your mentor (and other members if in a group). There is a guide for this discussion at the end of each module.

## ADVICE

Decide in advance exactly where and when you will spend the time each day reading and reflecting on the Scripture passage and input. With a regular time and place, it is much more likely that you will get the studies done.

Make sure you don't "move on" from each module until you have spoken and debriefed with your mentor or mentoring group about this important foundation of Christian living. Be completely honest with your mentor. If you don't understand something, are having doubts, or forget to do the studies, just tell them. This isn't a test you can get wrong. It is an investment into the rest of your life with God.

Write down your questions and reflections and bring this to your weekly meeting. It would also help to have a look at the discussion questions before you meet with your mentor. Pray that God will use these studies to grow you and release you into a more grace-centred, God-focused and joy-filled life in Christ.

## READING 1: BAPTISM FOR JEWS

### *orientate*

I must admit that baptism seems like a “rite” that comes from a different culture and a different time in history. Maybe sprinkling babies is kind of cute. But dunking adults seems rather strange. Some Australians would see it as one of the weirder aspects of Christianity. Maybe you feel the same way. Well you need to know that’s exactly how the Jews of Jesus’ day felt about baptism. It may have been used occasionally for Gentiles wanting to become Jews, but certainly no good ethnic Jew would ever consider baptism. It was unnecessary and unusual. Then along came John (“the Baptiser”) calling on all Jews to repent and be baptised. Now that was disconcerting for them. John was a rather wild prophet who preceded Jesus. Read about John’s message and actions.

### *explore*

#### **Matthew 3:1-12**

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming

wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. How did baptism fit into John’s call for repentance?

## reflect

John was really stirring things up. Most Jewish people presumed that they were right with God because they were Jews. They were God's specially chosen ethnic group. Some Aussies similarly think that way. They presume they are Christians because they live in Australia or because they believe in God. But John's message was that God was about to do a new thing ("the kingdom of heaven is near") and that "having Abraham as your father" (making you an ethnic Jew) was not enough.

To be included in this new move of God two things were necessary. One was repentance. People had to admit that they were not living God's way, say sorry to God, and then change their lifestyle to reflect this new commitment to obeying God. John was rather direct with the religious leaders (he called them a "brood of

vipers"). Their problem was that not only were they too proud to admit their failure to God, they were trying to prevent others from doing this. They were a dangerous bunch.

The second action required was to be baptised. Remember this was a very humbling and costly action for Jewish people, but it was a powerful symbol of what was happening in their lives. They were going into the water burdened by their guilt and failure. They were coming out of the water clean and pure and right with God, and ready for the powerful work God was about to initiate.

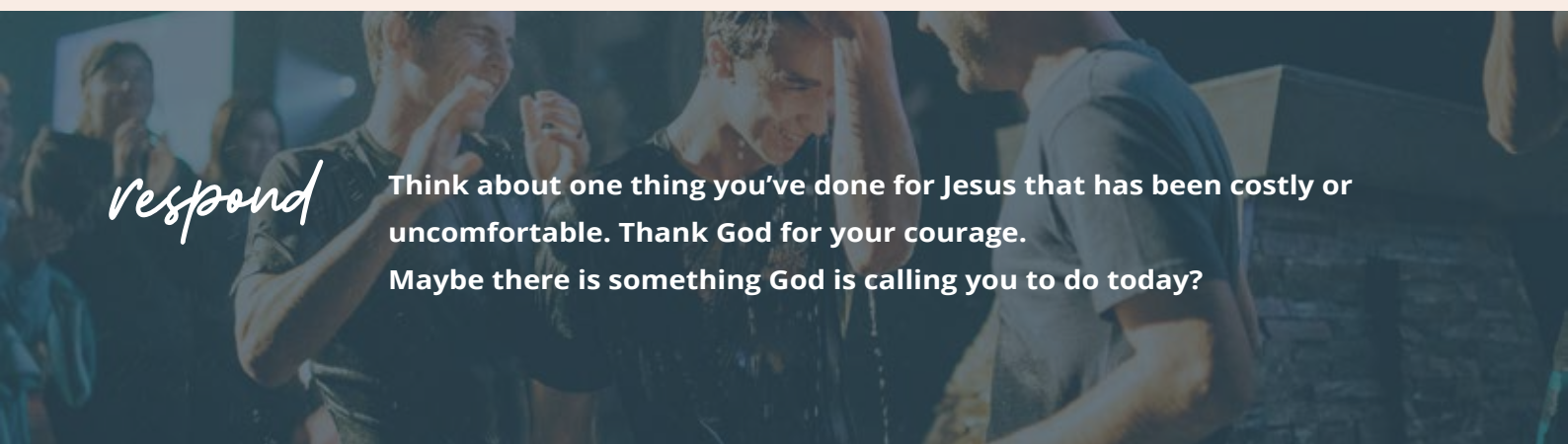
This is only a first taste of what baptism is about. As John himself indicated there was more to come (3:11). But I hope that already you're feeling a sense of anticipation as to what baptism could mean for you.

## pray

Lord thanks that I don't have to live burdened by my failures and weakness, but can bring these to you, repent, and be released. Please keep me humble and soft to your Spirit. May I not pretend that I am okay or hide my brokenness, but readily seek your forgiveness and a fresh start daily. And if that means being baptised, then I will do what you want, no matter how humbling or strange it is.

## respond

**Think about one thing you've done for Jesus that has been costly or uncomfortable. Thank God for your courage.  
Maybe there is something God is calling you to do today?**



## READING 2: BAPTISM FOR JESUS

### *orientate*

John and Jesus were related so they knew about each other. But when Jesus turned up to be baptised along with John's converts, John was absolutely flabbergasted. Like why did Jesus want to be baptised? John was calling people to repent and turn away from sin. But Jesus was sinless. John was preparing people to be part of a new move of God. But Jesus **was** this new move of God. He didn't need to prepare for anything. Can you see John's dilemma? Why on earth was Jesus wanting to be baptised. It just didn't make sense. As John puts it to Jesus, "You should be baptising me."

### *explore*

#### **Matthew 3:13-17**

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven

was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. Why do you think Jesus chose to be baptised?

## reflect

To appreciate what is happening here, you need to understand the timing of this event. Up until now, Jesus has been working as a tradie (probably a chippie) in his small hometown of Nazareth. He has led a very ordinary and mostly uneventful life for about 30 years. Very few people know who he is. But God is stirring in him and he recognises that his preaching and healing ministry is about to begin. So he leaves home and heads towards the Jordan River to be baptised by John. Something new is going to happen.

Obviously, Jesus' baptism was not about repentance. He had nothing to repent of. But it was about commencement and inauguration. It was like the appointing of a new prime minister after an election. They have a new role; a new calling. By being baptised, Jesus was indicating his availability to God to do whatever was needed. Through his baptism, Jesus indicated that he was committed to bring in God's new

kingdom and God responded by sending his Spirit to empower him for this mission. And of course, God the Father was incredibly pleased with and proud of his Son.

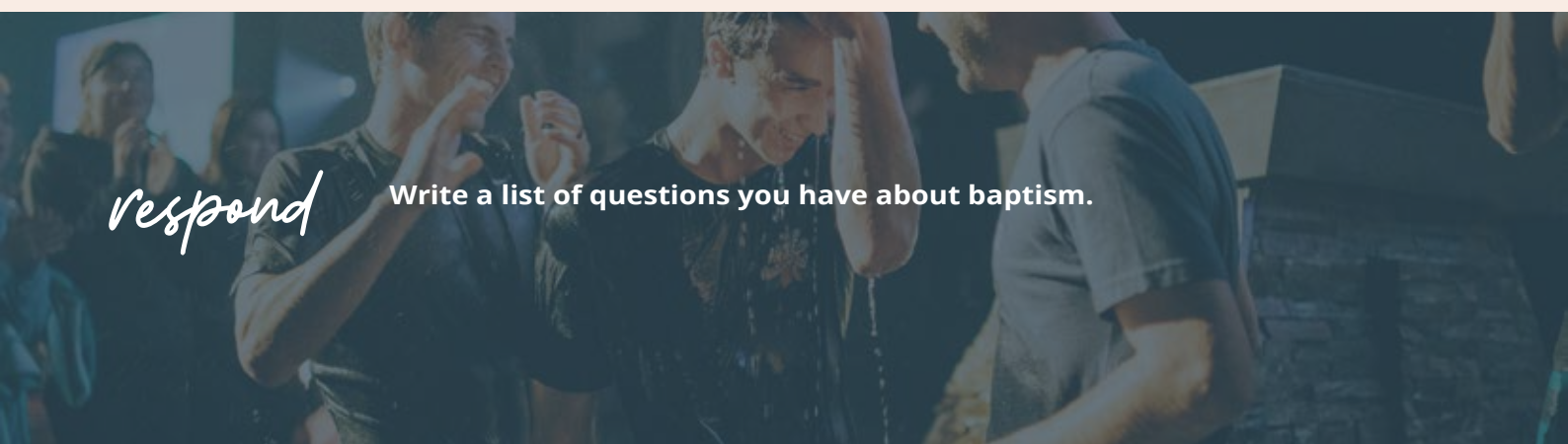
So Jesus shows us that baptism is not just about repentance, but can also be about commitment and a new empowerment. Sometimes I'm asked, "Is there any point in being baptised if I've been a Christian for a long time?" I always point to Jesus. He was baptised after serving God for 30 years. I grew up following Jesus, but at 15 I knew that I had to be baptised like Jesus. I knew that it was time to declare publicly that Jesus had saved me and that I would follow him for the rest of my life. John was shocked by Jesus' request for baptism, but he finally agreed. As soon as Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened, and the power of the Spirit fell on Jesus. John wouldn't have missed it for the world. God was at work in a new way.

## pray

Lord I'm at the start of something new. This is both exciting and daunting. May I follow in your footsteps. May I obey like you. You have set the example. May my baptism bring honour to God and a fresh empowerment for all you have called me to do with you.

## respond

Write a list of questions you have about baptism.



## READING 3: BAPTISM FOR NEW BELIEVERS

### *orientate*

When I teach new preachers, I emphasise the need to speak truth, to call people to respond, and to tell them how to respond. In this passage, we will read about the ending of Peter's first sermon. The Spirit had come on Jesus' disciples accompanied by all sorts of powerful signs and so Peter preached impromptu to the astounded onlookers. But he clearly hadn't been in my preaching class, because he didn't tell them how to respond to the gospel. They actually had to ask the disciples what to do. They wanted to know how they were to respond to this incredible message about Jesus. Peter's reply was clear. Check it out.

### *explore*

#### **Acts 2:36-41**

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, 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. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for

all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. What did the new believers have to do and what happened?

## reflect

What an incredible reaction to the gospel of Jesus. Imagine getting 3000 responses to your first proper sermon. Obviously, God's Spirit was working powerfully through Peter. The first Christian baptismal service must have gone on forever, but I bet no-one complained. The kingdom of God was on the move as Jesus had promised.

So what does this tell us about baptism? As with John's baptism, it was associated with repentance and forgiveness of sins. This is an issue that makes the practice of infant baptism difficult. There is no personal repentance. Our church only baptises believers – those who have repented of their sin and received forgiveness from Jesus. If you were baptised as a baby, you can still be baptised as a believer. This is not rejecting your previous baptism but is actually affirming the promise and expectation of your parents that in time you would personally

choose to follow Jesus. It is your confirmation of that promise and prayer of your parents.

Baptism here is also associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those baptised came out of the water to a new life in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was through their baptism that they received the Holy Spirit.

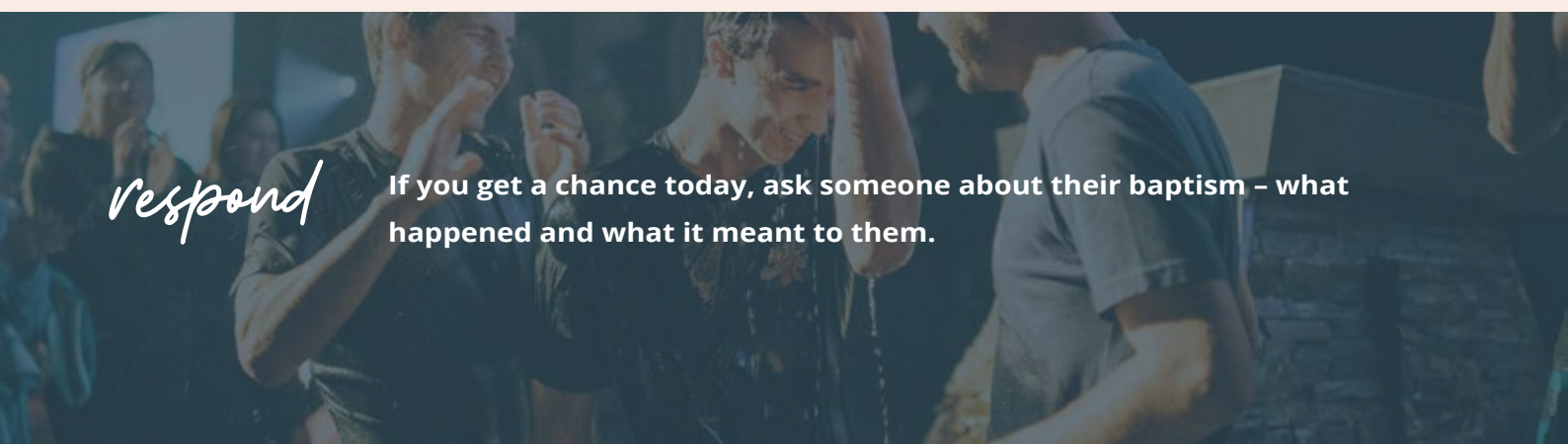
This raises a key question. How important is baptism? In this situation, it appears that new believers were saved through their baptism. Without baptism there would have been no salvation. But that's because baptism was the way the early Christians responded to the gospel. In some places in the New Testament (like here), baptism seems to be the same as salvation. But it isn't. Baptism is the outward symbol of the internal change that God brings in us through the work of Jesus. Baptism is really important, but it doesn't save us. Jesus does that.

## pray

Lord, the words of Peter are echoing in my mind, "Repent and be baptised every one of you." My heart is to follow you and obey you. Give me strength to do what you are asking of me.

## respond

**If you get a chance today, ask someone about their baptism – what happened and what it meant to them.**





## READING 4: BAPTISM FOR US

### *orientate*

There is a question about baptism that we have not tackled directly: “How much water is necessary?” Some people in a church I pastored had become Christians as adults and had gone to their (Uniting church) minister at the time who baptised them by sprinkling. Were they baptised believers? My opinion was that the mode (the method used) was not as important as the meaning and so I concluded that they had indeed been baptised as believers. But the word “baptise” means “dip” or “immerse” and the symbolism revolves around going under the water, so it makes sense that by far the best way to baptise is to plunge people completely under the water and that’s what we do. In the following passage, there is yet another picture of baptism that reinforces the “dipping” mode.

### *explore*

#### **Romans 6:1-7**

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 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. 5 For if we have been united with him in a

death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. What is the new meaning of baptism (at least for these studies) introduced in this passage?

## reflect

Let me try to piece together all that we have learned about baptism through the Scriptures we have read. What does this symbolic action mean?

First, baptism is a symbol of repentance and death. In baptism, we are saying that we have not lived the way God wanted us to and that we are farewelling and turning away from our old life. As Romans 6:4 says, our baptism represents a burial of the old life. Just as Jesus died and was buried because of our sin, so we with Jesus, have also died and the old life has been buried under the water. It's gone. It's been killed off. We're not the way we used to be. We will never be that way again.

Second, baptism is a symbol of new life. The old life has been replaced by a brand new life filled with the presence of God's Spirit and the freedom to live God's way. As Jesus was raised from the dead, so we have been raised to life as children of God. Our old life and our new life are like chalk and cheese. We come out of the waters to real life forever with God. Life to the full.

Third, baptism is a symbol of our new commissioning by God. We saw this in the baptism of Jesus. God has work for us to do and in baptism we are saying yes to following Jesus and joining his new kingdom mission. Our new life not only involves new joy but also new sacrifice and power.

Fourth, baptism is a symbol of washing. We haven't covered this, but in Acts 22:16 Paul recollects Ananias' words to him straight after he had been converted, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name." The baptismal water represents the blood of Jesus that washes away our sins so that we come out of the waters clean and pure and right.

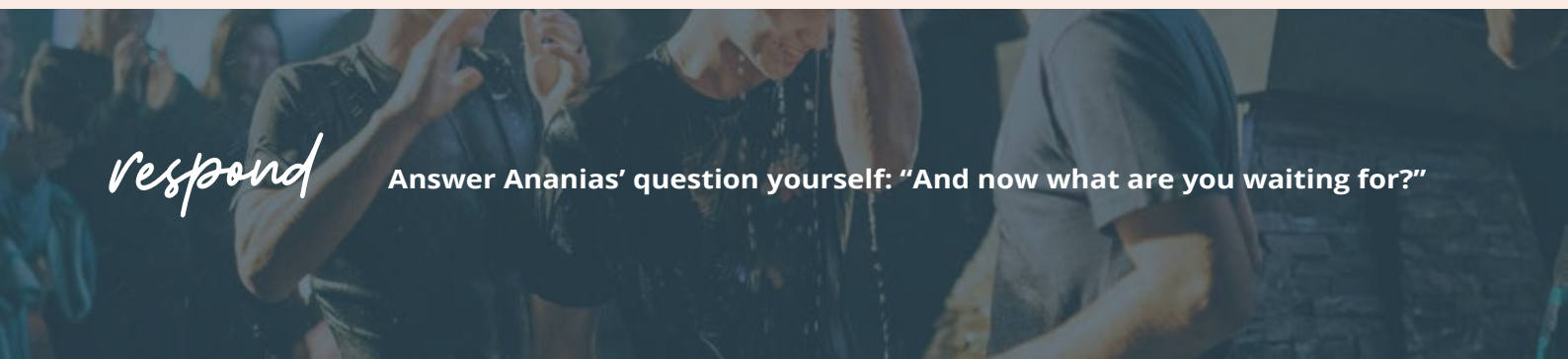
The symbol of baptism is full of meaning for us. It speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of our own death to our old life and resurrection to new life, and of our commitment to following Jesus. Ananias' question to Paul is relevant to you, "And now what are you waiting for?"

## pray

What am I waiting for Lord? I want to follow you. Please help me to obey.

## respond

Answer Ananias' question yourself: "And now what are you waiting for?"



## READING 5: BAPTISM FOR ME

### *orientate*

I love it when God just puts me in the right place at just the right time. The reading today is an example of this. Philip was a leader in the Jerusalem church who got very specific instructions from God to hitch a ride in a chariot on a desert highway. God does not always speak this specifically, but when he does, it's very exciting. Along the road came a very important Ethiopian official who really respected the Jewish religion and had been worshipping the Jewish God in Jerusalem. He was reading aloud from the Old Testament but had got stuck on a passage that he couldn't fathom. It didn't make sense to him. This was Philip's God-given opportunity. Read the whole baptismal testimony.

### *explore*

#### **Acts 8:26-39**

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. Why was the guy so keen to be baptised?

## reflect

This story is another example of the close link in the New Testament between conversion and baptism. The Ethiopian official hears the gospel and wants to say yes to Jesus by being baptised. Philip whips him straight into the water and baptises him. There is no series of studies to complete or check on how serious the guy is. Through his baptism, he is being transformed by Jesus and filled with God's Spirit. It all happens together. This is not usually our practice. Baptism often comes some time after conversion. There may be some good reasons for this. Baptism for the early Jewish Christians was usually a very costly event. It usually resulted in being ostracized by your family and community. It marked you as different. So you had to be serious about following Jesus to be baptised. These days the cost may not be as great and therefore the sincerity about Jesus not as strong. But still, the closer baptism can be tied to your conversion, the better. This is the biblical way. It makes the symbol more meaningful. I have sometimes heard Christians say, "I will be baptised when God speaks to me about it." Well God has already spoken, as we have seen in these readings. It's not a matter of being good enough or spiritual enough. Baptism is not a symbol reserved for the most

committed Christians. It's for everyone who has been saved by Jesus. Yes, you must have an intention to keep following Jesus, but baptism is about what Jesus has done for you, not what you will do for Jesus. If you have been saved by Jesus, then be baptised to tell everyone about it in the way God designed.

What if you have actually been a Christian for a long time – do you still need to be baptised? Yes, it's still important. There is no allowance in the New Testament for an unbaptised Christian. Baptism of course won't save you, but it will complete the conversion process. You see being saved by Jesus is a process and baptism is the last step. It's a bit like the place of the wedding in a marriage. You're committed long before the wedding, but it's the final step of the process.

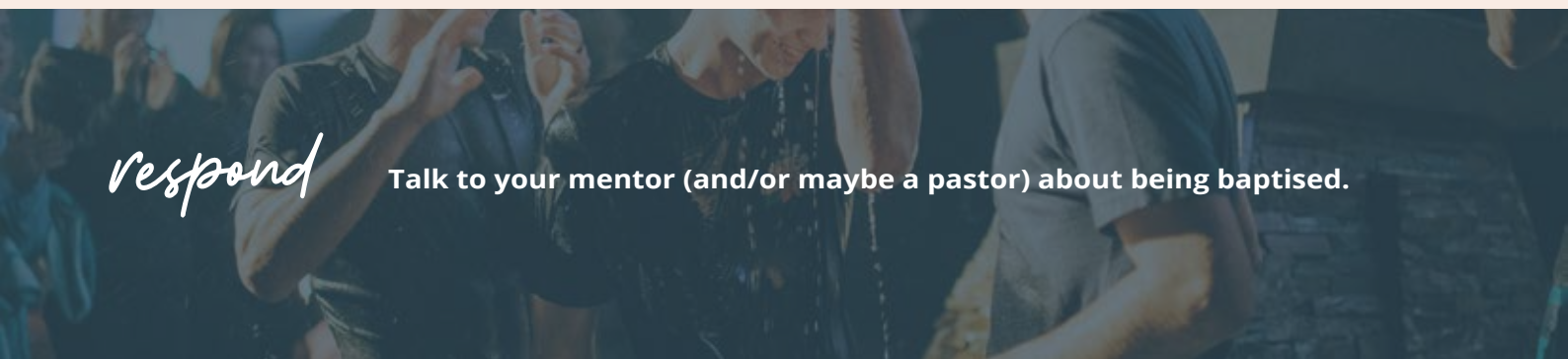
One more thing. You may find that your baptism is one of the "highs" in your spiritual life to date (like the Ethiopian guy), or it may turn out to be another step of faith and obedience without much emotion attached. Whatever the case, you can be sure that God is immensely pleased with and proud of your obedience and that spiritual blessing will flow from your baptism.

## pray

Lord may I follow you in faith and may others be impacted by my baptism.

## respond

Talk to your mentor (and/or maybe a pastor) about being baptised.



# Discussion QUESTIONS

*Use these questions to discuss with a mentor or group what God has shown you in this study*

*Study 1: Baptism for Jews (Matthew 3:1-12)*

1. Any reflections or questions on Study 1? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
2. Do you see baptism as something humbling or strange like first century Jews? Why or why not?

*Study 2: Baptism for Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17)*

3. Any reflections or questions on Study 2? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
4. Why was Jesus baptised if he didn't need to repent? What happened after his baptism?

*Study 3: Baptism for New Believers (Acts 2:36-41)*

5. Any reflections or questions on Study 3? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
6. Is baptism necessary to receive God's Spirit? Why is it so important?

*Study 4: Baptism for Us (Romans 6:1-7)*

7. Any reflections or questions on Study 4? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
8. What does the symbolism of baptism represent? Is there anything stopping you from being baptised?

*Study 5: Baptism for Me (Acts 8:26-39)*

9. Any reflections or questions on Study 5? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
10. How will your baptism be the same as and different from that of the Ethiopian guy?
11. Do you have any further questions about baptism? Talk with your mentor about the process of being baptised at your church.
12. How are you going spiritually and personally? What other things would you like to talk about?

