

Developed by SBC President J.D. Greear and The Summit Church, this guide provides a template resource to help pastors and worship leaders incorporate baptisms into a service or immediately following a worship service. Aspects of the planning process and elements of the service may need to be adjusted to fit the needs of a particular church.

Find more Baptism Sunday resources including a series of coaching videos from Pastors J.D. Greear & Johnny Hunt at namb.net/baptism-sunday-resources

4 KEY ELEMENTS OF A BAPTISM SERVICE

Prepare

The decision to respond with a public profession of faith through baptism is a significant moment in the life of a new Christian, so we must plan ahead to care for them well as they take those steps. Preparing well to incorporate the baptism into a worship service eliminates potential distractions and provides a powerful testimony that encourages the congregation to praise God.

Suggested Preparation Sequence:

(Timeframes may be adjusted to fit service planning schedule)

- **1-2 months prior:**
 - Decide on date to call for a response of baptism in service
 - Order baptism supplies

- **3-4 weeks prior:**
 - Decide at what point in the service the baptism(s) will happen. End of service? Between songs? After service - inside?
 - Begin recruiting your volunteer team:
 - Walkers:** Responsible for receiving those coming forward, and getting them from auditorium to counseling area and back so that they do not have to walk alone.
 - Baptism Counselors:** Responsible for talking with the candidate to discern if they understand the gospel & are ready to be baptized. These should be both male & female leaders in the church.
 - Coordinator:** If baptizing during the service, this role will communicate between the worship leader/pastor & the counseling room to update on whether people are ready to be baptized.
 - Check In:** Responsible for matching counselees with counselors, maintaining accurate sign in records, distributing paperwork, logging information for follow up.
 - Clothing Assistant(s):** Responsible for distributing clothing & towels, helping people find open changing rooms, watching their belongings.

- **[OPTIONAL] Weekend prior:**
 - Make an announcement that a baptism service will be held the following week.

- **Week prior:**
 - Review plan with worship/music team to answer any final questions
 - Prepare how you will communicate the invitation to be baptized

- Set out supplies and prep changing rooms
- Print copies of baptism info/counseling sheets
- Send out necessary details to volunteers (arrival time, location, etc.)
- **Weekend of:**
 - Pray for God to soften the hearts of those he's calling to repentance & baptism
 - Ensure that every baptism candidate is counseled with care & patience
 - Record information for follow up of anyone who comes forward (whether baptized or not). This should be done on site if possible.

Call for Response

During the invitation, it's important to recognize that not everyone in the congregation may understand the biblical nature and purpose of baptism. Offering a concise explanation of what's about to happen both reinforces biblical teaching on baptism and calms fears of guests or new believers who may have never seen a baptism before.

[Template Explanation] "In just a moment we are going to celebrate the act of baptism. Baptism is a picture of the gospel, and we do it to remind one another of the gospel when we gather together. There is nothing special about this water. It is not what saves you, but it is an outward sign of the inward work that Christ has completed for us, and the way an individual publicly identifies themselves as a believer in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The act of baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as our own death to sin and resurrection to new life. So every baptism is a celebration of salvation."

Don't stop at teaching people about baptism. It's critical to give people the opportunity to respond in obedience. By including a call for the congregation to make a decision at that moment, we lead each person to examine their own life in light of God's command.

Anticipate the excuses people make for not getting baptized. Taking a few minutes to walk through the answers to these objections not only gives the person who needs to be baptized time to consider their decision, it also equips your congregation to have a conversation about baptism with their friends. Following are a few of the more common objections to baptism along with a possible response:

- **Objection: "I'm not ready" | Possible response:** *If you have trusted Christ, you are ready. Baptism is only the public profession of the inward reality, declaring to everyone watching, "I know that I'm a sinner and that I need Jesus. I'm ready to publicly proclaim that He is my Savior." If you say you've accepted Him as Lord, you need to be ready to go public with that profession.*
- **Objection: "It's not that important..." | Possible response:** *If God calls baptism important, it should be important to you. If you are not willing to obey God's first command to you by taking this one small step, why do you think you'll obey God in the other areas of your life? Disobedience is a terrible way to start your Christian life - the way to start your walk with Jesus is not by postponing what he's clearly told you to do.*
- **Objection: "I was baptized as a baby." | Possible response:** *Baptism as a baby was not really a profession of your faith, but a profession of your parents' faith. And praise God for*

that! But you need to profess your own faith, which is why baptism is always presented in the Bible as a decision you make. Your parents baptized you as a baby and it's time to ratify their decision and declare your own faith in Jesus!

- **Objection: “Well, it’s really inconvenient.” | Possible response:** *Please hear me in love, but that’s not really a factor once you grow to understand the Christian faith. Jesus himself said that to follow him was to take up a cross and die. Inconvenience isn’t a category you can bring to this decision.*
- **Objection: “But I don’t have a change of clothes!” | Possible response:** *Don’t worry, we have them for you! We’ve got all sizes, dark-colored T-shirts, towels and hairdryers - we thought of everything to allow you to take this step of faith.*
- **Objection: “But I came with people... they’re going to want to go eat after this.” | Possible response:** *You may not realize it, but the people you came with have been praying that you would take this step of professing faith in Jesus. I think they’ll wait! Or even better, ask them to come forward with you. Even if they won’t wait, I want to remind you of the importance of starting your walk with Jesus by obeying what he tells you to do right away. We’ll figure out how to get you home, it’s that important.*

Tell people specifically what to do and when. A person responding to the call to be baptized is probably already slightly nervous and emotional - don’t compound that by making them uncertain about what to do!

- “I’m going to pray, and then when we stand to sing you step out of the row”
- “When you step out, look for one of our volunteers with a lanyard/tshirt - they’ll show you where to go.”
- “When you step out, head to the doors at the back of the sanctuary - someone will meet you and show you where to go.”

Counsel

When someone decides in the service to come forward as a candidate for baptism, it’s possible that they may not understand the salvation and baptism as laid out in the Bible. Requiring that every respondent has an immediate conversation with a trained counselor ensures that each person being baptized can make a credible confession of faith. In other words, the candidate should be able to articulate the gospel and explain what baptism means and why they want to do it.

How do you effectively do on-the-spot baptism counseling?

- When a candidate comes forward to be baptized, have your check-in volunteer sign them in & match them with a trained counselor.
- Ask them to sit down 1-on-1 with the counselor in a semi-private area
- The counselor should ask questions to discern the candidate’s profession of faith. Examples include:
 - › What made you want to respond today and come forward?
 - › How is it that we are saved?
 - › What does getting baptized mean to you?
 - › What does it mean to follow Jesus?
- Optional recommendation:
- If it becomes evident that they don’t understand the gospel, share with them and ask them if they have ever surrendered control of their life and trusted in Christ for salvation.
 - › The counselor may need to ask the candidate to put the decision on hold so they can talk more with a pastor over the next week
- Ensure that a pastor/elder is available so that a counselor can involve them at any point for questions that are difficult
- Ensure the candidate has provided contact information for appropriate follow up, whether they proceed with baptism at the time or choose to delay.

Follow Up

The follow up communication with someone who's just been baptized may be simple but it is a crucial step in their discipleship. After we celebrate their profession of faith with them, we must help them learn to live out the declaration they just made.

Week after:

- Make a follow up call to each individual who came forward with an interest in baptism before the next weekend. The primary purpose of the call is to clarify the decision made and help with next steps.
 - Connect those who were baptized with a discipleship group or Sunday School class
 - Connect those who weren't baptized with a pastor or church leader to continue the conversation about salvation and baptism
- Follow up with an email to anyone you cannot reach by phone.
- OPTIONAL: Send a letter from the pastor that commemorates the date the person chose to respond in baptism

Material adapted from and courtesy of J.D. Greear and The Summit Church.