

# BAPTISM SERVICE PLANNING GUIDE

Developed by 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 adjustments to fit the needs of a particular church.

Find more Baptism Sunday resources at [namb.net/baptismsunday](http://namb.net/baptismsunday).

## 4 KEY ELEMENTS OF A BAPTISM SERVICE

### ***Prepare***

It is a significant moment in the life of a new Christian when they decide to respond with a public profession of faith through baptism. We must plan 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:***

*(Adjust timeframes to fit service planning schedule)*

- **1-2 months prior:**
  - Decide on the date to call for a response of baptism in service.
  - Order baptism supplies,
- **3-4 weeks prior:**
  - Decide when and where the baptism(s) will happen in the service. End of service? Between songs? After service? Inside or outside?
  - Begin recruiting your volunteer team:
    - **Walkers** receive those coming forward and get them from the auditorium to the counseling area and back so that they do not have to walk alone.
    - **Baptism Counselors** talk with the candidate to discern if they understand the gospel and are ready for baptism. These should be both male and female leaders in the church.
    - If baptizing during the service, the **Coordinator** communicates between the worship leader/pastor and the counseling room to update them on whether the people are ready for baptism.
    - **Check-In** matches counselees with counselors, maintains accurate sign-in records, distributes paperwork, logging information for follow-up.
    - **Clothing Assistants** distribute clothing and towels, helping people find open changing rooms and watching their belongings.
- **[OPTIONAL] Weekend prior:**
  - Announce that the following week's service will include a baptism service.
- **Week prior:**
  - Review plan with worship/music team to answer any final questions.
  - Prepare how to communicate the baptism invitation .
  - 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 and baptism.
  - Ensure that every baptism candidate receives counsel with care and patience.
  - Record information (on-site if possible) for follow-up of anyone who comes forward (whether baptized or not).

### **Call for Response**

During the invitation, it's essential 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 reinforces biblical teaching on baptism and calms the guest's fears 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. 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. Including a call for the congregation allows them to decide at that moment leading each person to examine their own lives 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 but also equips your congregation to have a conversation about baptism with their friends.

The 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 proclaim that He is my Savior publicly." 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 begin your walk with Jesus is not by postponing what He's told you to do.
- **Objection:** "I was baptized as a baby." |
  - **Possible response:** Baptism as a baby was not 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 the Bible always presents baptism as a decision you make. Your parents baptized you as a baby and it's time to ratify their decision and declare your faith in Jesus!

- **Objection:** “Well, it’s inconvenient.”
  - **Possible response:** Please hear me in love, but that’s not a factor once you grow to understand the Christian faith. Jesus said that to follow him meant we are 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 prayed that you would take this step of professing your 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 call for baptism 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/t-shirt—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 in the service decides to come forward as a candidate for baptism, they may not understand 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 receiving baptism 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 baptism candidate comes forward, have your check-in volunteer sign them in and match them with a trained counselor.
- Ask them to sit down one-on-one 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 have salvation?
  - 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 the gospel 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 difficult questions
  - 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 a newly baptized person 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 following weekend. The primary purpose of the call is to clarify the decision made and help them with their next steps.
  - Connect those who received baptism 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 to baptism.

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