



Preparing Youth & Children for Baptism & Church Membership

Dear Sterling Park Parent,

You're reading this because your son or daughter has clearly expressed to you that they have placed their faith in Christ for salvation. Perhaps, along with that, they've even expressed a desire to identify with Jesus through baptism.

If this is true of your child, we rejoice with them and with you!

Yet we know that with this profession of faith and with this rejoicing come some really tough questions. Question like: *what exactly is the next step? How do I actually know if my child's faith is real? How do I know that they truly understand what it means to repent and believe in Jesus? How do I know if they've really done that?*

These are natural questions to be asking. They're also really hard questions to answer! No one can see our child's heart. Just like any other person expressing faith in Jesus, we can never say with 100% certainty who is and who is not a Christian. Only the Lord knows! However, we want to do our best to whole-heartedly affirm the faith of any person we bring into membership.

With youth & children, this struggle seems compounded. Our kids often want nothing more than to please mom and dad. And they know that nothing would please their parents more than for their child to love Jesus! So there can be a real temptation ("positive peer pressure," if you will) for children to profess faith—maybe even before true faith is actually there. All of the sudden our desire to affirm the genuineness of a child's profession is a tough task! (For more see elder paper: *Children, Baptism, Church Membership, and the Lord's Supper at SPBC*).

This is why we want to come alongside you and help you walk with your individual child who is professing saving faith in Christ.

And that's why we've developed this packet. It's designed to equip you as you take on the responsibility to help your child think through his/her own personal profession of faith in the Lord Jesus.

We love you and your child very much. That's why we take our responsibility of shepherding both your heart and theirs so seriously! We are here to walk with you. And our prayer is that the Lord would use us to shepherd our children toward a life of repentance, faith, and sanctification—all to the glory of God.

With love in Jesus,

Your SPBC Elders

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INITIAL STEPS

“Mom. Dad. I think I want to be baptized.”

There are no sweeter words a Christian parent could hear from their child. But such sweet words may also be some of the most intimidating! As their parents—the ones entrusting with their care—how do we faithfully shepherd our children who are professing faith for the first time?

Before we get to a more detailed response, here are three initial steps that may be helpful.

1. Rejoice!

First, praise God! Communicate how wonderful it is that your child believes in Jesus and desires to follow him.

2. Remember

Second, there's one truth that's helpful to *remember* when it comes to our child's personal relationship with the Lord. That is, salvation is *God's* work, not ours. He will save whomever he wills, whenever he wills.

What this means is that *our aim as parents and as a church is simply to recognize God's work in our kids, not create a decision in our kids.*

The Bible describes salvation as a rebirth (John 3:1-8). To be saved is to be regenerated - made new. This is not something *we* can bring about in our kids! This means that we're not here to talk our children into anything contrary to their will; we're here to recognize that God has given them a new will – a new heart. We're here to affirm the work of rebirth which God himself is doing in an individual's heart.

Hopefully remembering this truth takes the pressure off of you! The fact that your child's salvation is out of your hands is at the same time scary and liberating. But we encourage you to remember this truth and take the posture of observing God's work in your child's life.

3. Communicate

We love to know how the Lord is working in the youth and children at SPBC! If your child is professing faith in Christ, please come and talk to an elder.

Well, having taken these initial steps, where do you go from here? We'd suggest that it's wise for us to move into a **season of intentional observation and discipleship** in which—together—we observe, encourage, and nurture your child's faith.

A SEASON OF OBSERVATION & DISCIPLESHIP—THE MOTIVATION

Why is this season helpful? Well, because it's appropriate for every person's profession of faith to be judged—evaluated (1 Cor. 5:12). That is, upon hearing their profession of faith, the church should watch for evidence of new life in Christ. We ought never to baptize and take into membership a person who simply professes faith without also having evaluated their life in some way (again for more, see elder paper: *Children, Baptism, Church Membership, and the Lord's Supper at SPBC*).

It's the same with our youth and children. Our goal in evaluating their profession over time is not to aimlessly delay their baptism; rather, the goal is to love them well by ensuring they have the best possible understanding of what God is doing in their lives and how they're responding to Him.

We take the route of careful attention here because we take the meaning and significance of the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) seriously. And when a church approaches the ordinance of baptism earnestly, it can come down on either of two sides—two differing approaches/practices.

The first approach is *immediate baptism*. The argument being: since baptism is such a serious ordinance, it should be done with great immediacy. The second approach is *intentional baptism*. The argument being: since baptism is such a serious ordinance, it should be undertaken with great care.

The first approach heightens the focus on the person being a *baptized* professor. The second approach heightens the focus on the person is a *true* professor.

Since we at SPBC believe that a person is baptized into the membership, care, and discipline of a local church, we adopt the second approach. We desire to be as sure as possible that the people we're baptizing are truly born again.

It's in this light that we ask the student to enter into an intentional season of observation and discipleship with their parents and the church.

There is no set length for this season. It could be months or even years—and that's okay. Just as with anyone coming forward for baptism, we only desire that there be sufficient time for the child, parents, and church to be able to confidently affirm the faith of the one making the profession.

So, how do we go about that?

Here we'll take some time to spell out some specifics.

A SEASON OF OBSERVATION & DISCIPLESHIP—THE PROCESS

It's helpful to note that there are three different entities involved in this discipleship process: the student, the parent, and the church (represented by a pastor and/or qualified mentor). Each of these has a vital role in this season of discipleship towards baptism and membership. So let's take them in turn:

I. DISCIPLING TOWARDS BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP: THE STUDENT'S ROLE

What steps do we encourage the student to take as they walk towards obedience in baptism? Here are some steps to consider.

Learn from Your Parents*

The church would love for the student to take some time to learn even more about the gospel, baptism and church membership at home.

So, it'd be great for the student to begin having intentional conversations with their parents about the meaning of baptism, membership, and the Lord's Supper. When they have questions, it's a good idea for them to write them down and bring them up with a parent.

Students, we'll also talk to parents about how they can help you with this!

Learn from Your Pastors

Also, when the student is ready, they should ask to talk to one of our pastors about their faith in Jesus and any steps they need to take.

His aim will be to listen, ask questions, encourage, and determine any practical next steps. As one of these steps, the pastor may decide to pair the student up with a mentor for more intentional discipleship (their D-group leader may serve in this mentoring role).

He may determine that the appropriate next step is simply to keep learning and praying at home with their parents and at church with leaders and peers. On the other hand, the pastor may determine that the student is ready for the SPBC Baptism Course. More on that in a bit.

Join a Discipleship Group

We've designed our youth discipleship groups with the hope of creating safe environments for our students to grow in their understanding of the gospel and its implications on their lives. The beauty of discipleship groups is that students can do this together with their peers under the guidance of an older, qualified discipler.

Complete the SPBC Baptism Course

If it is determined through the first three steps that the student is ready to take more intentional steps towards baptism and membership, they will be connected with a pastor or qualified mentor who will walk them through the SPBC Baptism Course (see Appendix). This course will be a great complement to their time with parents.

Complete the Membership Process

* If, for any reason, the student does not have a parent capable of carrying out this discipleship, the church should try and be more involved through the assigned pastor/mentor.

Every new member of SPBC goes through our new members' class, followed by a membership interview with an elder. Even if a student has been a part of our church since they were younger, this class will help answer any questions they may have never thought through in great detail. The elder interview is the final step before being presented to the church for membership.

II. DISCIPLING TOWARDS BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP: THE PARENTS' ROLE

The second person with significant responsibility in this process is the parent. The Lord has entrusted this soul to your care in the family. So what would he have you to do?

Remember

First, as we stated above, it's important to remember your goal in all of this. Remind yourself that your role is not to bring them to a decision or to talk them into (or out of!) something. Rather, *your goal is simply to observe, encourage, and nurture your child in their pursuit of God.* Be their faithful partner. Be their present guide. Be their biggest cheerleader and encourager. Watch for God's work in them and tell them when you see it.

Understand

Also, parents of students must understand that, as a church, we don't have a category for church members who are not subject to church discipline. This includes members who are still under the direct authority of their parents. While seek to be sensitive, loving, and wise in every case of discipline, parents should understand our conviction that all who are covenant members of the church – including our youngest members – are subject to corrective church discipline. This means that, in cases of unremitting unrepentant sin, the elders and church will eventually need to become appropriately informed and involved.

Now, with this established goal and understanding in mind, what are some good steps to take in helping your child walk faithfully toward baptism and membership?

We'd suggest committing to four things in this season: *walk, talk, look & listen.*

Walk

View this journey as a walk, not a sprint.

While it may be tough, we ask that you not feel the need to rush your child into baptism and church membership at the moment they profess faith. Again, our goal in this is not to merely delay your child's church membership. Our goal is to love them well by ensuring they have the best possible understanding of what God is doing in their lives and how they're responding to Him.

In this light, we believe that it can be wise and loving not to rush them, but to slow down and intentionally *walk* with professing students through this season.

Talk

As we walk, we should talk. We've already encouraged your child that their parents are the first place to go in thinking through next steps in following Jesus. So now, we'd encourage you to be ready to talk with them.

When the Bible addresses a parent's role in rearing their child in the gospel, the basic exhortation is to talk about the Lord and the gospel as much as they'll listen!

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Notice that this portrait of family discipleship is of a parent who is always ready and willing to talk about the truth with their child. Whether it's when they're sitting at home or traveling for errands or lying down before bed or waking up to a new day around the breakfast table, God's design is that parents would be ever ready and willing to converse with their children about God and the gospel.

Now, this doesn't mean that you need to be the answer-man for them. No doubt, our kids will ask us questions that we're ill equipped to answer! The point is that we're on the road with them. And we're talking with them along the way.

There are many resources available to help in discipling your children in the home. We'd suggest choosing one at a time to work through with your child.

If your child has experienced genuine conversion, we'd expect them to have a genuine interest in God and the gospel. We'd expect them to pursue answers to the questions going through their minds. Your role is to create a safe and welcoming environment to have those gospel conversations.

And remember, you're not alone in this! Go to other members and come to us for help in this process. Discipleship is a community project: don't go it alone!

Look

Although regeneration itself is an *invisible* work of God, it is manifested in *visible* fruit. Thus, our next role is to look for the fruit of regeneration in a child's life. Jesus tells us that we'll know a tree by its fruit. If your child is professing to love and trust in Christ for salvation, this is a great time to begin observing their life for that they've gone from spiritual death to spiritual life. Obviously, we expect a child's life to be child-like. But if they have true faith, we would also expect to begin seeing some observable evidence of regeneration in those child-like lives.

What should we be looking for? Here are some categories and questions to help guide you in this season of observation:

Look for Repentance from Sin

- Does your son/daughter demonstrate sorrow and remorse for his or her sin?
- Does your son/daughter confess her sins to God and ask for his mercy without your prompting?
- Specifically, what sins have your son/daughter repented of?

Look for Faith in Christ

- In what practical ways does your son/daughter demonstrate that he/she trusts Jesus?
- How does your son/daughter respond to hardship?
- Does your son/daughter understand that she is saved only by God's grace and not because of any good within herself?

- Does your son/daughter demonstrate a genuine interest in spiritual things apart from your prompting?
- Does your son/daughter pray or read the Scriptures on their own initiative?
- Does your son/daughter desire to talk with you or others about God and the Bible?

Look for Good Works

- Does your son/daughter show practical love for others?
- Does your son/daughter demonstrate a genuine desire to tell others about Jesus?
- Is your son/daughter growing in the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentles, faithfulness, and self-control?

Listen

While we certainly don't expect any young Christian to produce a theological treatise, we do believe it's wise to expect them to be able to understand and articulate certain foundational truths about the faith before being welcomed into membership.

In that light, as parents and elders, it's important for us to listen, seeking to discern what they do/don't understand. Below are some categories to pay attention to. We've also included some questions you could ask your child under each category.

The point is not to sit down and run through these all at once. Make these categories and questions a part of your everyday conversation. Note things about which they may be unclear. Reflect on how you can help them think through them more clearly.

Seek to Discern Their Understanding of God

- Does your son/daughter see God as holy?
- Does your son/daughter understand God to be the One, True, Triune God?
- Does your son/daughter relate to God as their Father?

Questions to Ask:

- *Tell me about God. What's he like?*
- *Does God love you? How do you know?*

Seek to Discern Their Understanding of Themselves and Sin

- Does your son/daughter recognize that he has sinned against *God* and not just against others?

Questions to Ask:

- *What is sin?*
- *Have you sinned? In what ways?*
- *Is sin a big deal? Why?*

Seek to Discern Their Understanding of Jesus & Salvation

- Does your son/daughter understand that they are saved from the penalty of their sin by grace, through faith in Christ alone?

Questions to Ask:

- *Why did Jesus die? What did his death on the cross accomplish?*
- *Why did Jesus rise from the dead?*

- *What's the big difference between a Christian and someone who is not a Christian?*
- *Why is it important to say that we are saved by faith?*

III. DISCIPLING TOWARDS BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP: THE PASTOR'S ROLE

The final entity with a significant responsibility in this walk towards baptism and membership is the church itself. In this formal discipleship process, the church is represented by a pastor.

The pastor has a three-fold responsibility.

Discern

All throughout the process, the pastor will seek to discern that the student's profession of faith is genuine, being accompanied by legitimate signs of conversion.

Teach Baptism Class

If it is determined by the student, parents, and pastors that they should take the final step in preparation for baptism and membership, the pastor will walk with your student through a baptism course. The format and content of this course are detailed in Appendix below.

Conduct Membership Interview

The elder interview is the final step before being presented to the church for membership.

Appendix

SPBC BAPTISM COURSE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this course is to grow a professing believer in their understanding of redemption and their confidence in Christ as they walk towards following him in the obedience of baptism and church membership. This course will seek to instruct the person professing faith in the foundations of Christian doctrine and life.

FORMAT

The baptism course will consist of meetings with a pastor. The format of these meetings will be interactive discussion and instruction around various topics.

LENGTH

Two meetings

RESOURCES TO BE USED

SPBC Statement of Faith (Sof)
SPBC Church Covenant
New City Catechism (with accompanying Scripture) – newcitycatechism.com
SPBC Document: “Preparing for Baptism”
SPBC Document: A Bible Reading Guide
SPBC Document: Four Facets of Maturing & Multiplying

OUTLINE

Class 1 – Membership
Class 2 – Ordinances

LEADER’S OUTLINE

1) Class 1 – Church Membership

- a. Resources to Discuss with the Student
 - i. New City Catechism: Questions 48
 - ii. SoF Article: Of a Gospel Church
 - iii. SPBC Membership Covenant & Church Discipline
 - iv. SPBC Document: Four Facets of Maturing & Multiplying
 - v. SPBC Audio: Generous & Joyful, Classes 1 & 2 (Listen as homework, discuss)
- b. Questions to Answer with the Student
 - i. *What is the church?*
 - ii. *How is the church like a family?*
 - iii. *Who should be the members of a church?*

- iv. *Why is it important to be a member of a church?*
- v. *What promises should a person make to other members of the church?*
- vi. *Why might a church family need to remove someone from their membership?*
- vii. *What purposes might this serve in the church?*
- viii. *Why is it important to give money to the church?*

2) Class 2 – Church Ordinances

a. Baptism

- i. Resources to Discuss with the Student
 - 1. New City Catechism: Questions 43-45
 - 2. SoF Article: Of Baptism & the Lord’s Supper
 - 3. SPBC “Preparing for Baptism” Document
- ii. Questions to Answer with the Student
 - 1. *Do you have to get baptized in order to be saved?*
 - 2. *What’s happening when a person is being baptized?*
 - 3. *Is baptism important to God? Why?*
 - 4. *Is baptism important to you? Why? Why not?*

b. The Lord’s Supper

- i. Resources to Discuss with the Student
 - 1. New City Catechism: Questions 46-47
 - 2. SoF Article: Of Baptism & the Lord’s Supper
- ii. Questions to Answer with the Student
 - 1. *What is the Lord’s Supper?*
 - 2. *What’s the meaning of the Lord’s Supper?*
 - 3. *Is it important to God? Why?*
 - 4. *Do you have to take the Lord’s Supper in order to be saved?*
 - 5. *Who should take the Lord’s Supper?*