

Few things in life are more joyful than witnessing our kids come to faith in Christ. Some of our favorite pastoral moments are getting to talk to children about their desire to follow Jesus. Along these lines, one question we often get is: *How do I know my child is ready for baptism?*

It's an important question—baptism is one of the most significant events in the Christian life. So, we want to provide some guidance for parents about this issue.

How Do I Know if My Child Is Ready for Baptism?

The practice of Providence Church is to baptize those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Deeper than “asking Jesus into our hearts,” a profession of faith is fundamentally a response to something God has already done in a person's life. The Holy Spirit comes to us while we are spiritually dead and gives us a heart for God that did not exist before (Eph. 2:1-8, 2 Thess. 2:13-14, 1 Peter 1:1-2). Theologians call this process “effectual calling,” which the Westminster Shorter Catechism defines as “the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.” From start to finish, conversion is a supernatural work of God.

In discerning our kids' readiness for baptism, we are asking: *Has God worked decisively in their life to turn their heart to Jesus?* To use the language of John 3, *has God caused them to be “born again?”* These are weighty (and wonderful!) things to navigate with our children. Therefore, we commend a few guiding principles for parents—three things to look for in a child wanting to be baptized:

- **Regenerate Heart:** Through the testimony of the child and parents, there is evidence of a changed heart. *Is the child able to talk personally and specifically about their love for and desire to follow Jesus?*
- **Personal Ownership:** As baptism is an expression of one's identification with Christ, the child should be able to express a desire and conviction to be baptized. *Has the child talked about their desire to be baptized? Are they comfortable with being baptized in front of the church family?*
- **Mature Understanding:** The child should have an appropriate understanding of the gospel and the meaning of baptism. *Can the child articulate the gospel in their own words? Can they articulate what baptism is?*

If a child has expressed interest in baptism, here are some questions a parent can ask:

- Tell me about your relationship with God. Who is God? What does it mean to have a relationship with God?
- Why do you want to be baptized? Why do you think baptism is important?
- What is the gospel? What is sin? Why do you need God to save you? What did God do to save you?
- How have you seen believing in Jesus change you? What do you think it means to follow Jesus?
- Baptism will be in front of the church family. How do you feel about that?

How Are We Preparing Our Children for Baptism at Providence?

Discipling a child is one of the greatest responsibilities God has given a parent. It is not something for parents to “outsource” to anyone else. But parents are not alone. The church seeks to come alongside parents as they disciple their children towards faith in Jesus. We do this through prayer and community support, but also through a form of Christian education called catechesis.

Historically, catechesis has been the church’s process of preparing people to partake in the sacraments. Following this tradition, Providence has committed to taking all our 4th and 5th graders through the [New City Catechism](#). Over the course of these two pivotal years in their development, children will progress through the entire catechism, learning “all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of [God].”

Two Practical Guidelines for Parents

First, in light of our process for catechesis, our recommendation is that children wait until 4th grade to pursue baptism. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, but rather a general guide for parents. The purpose of the guideline is to establish a normal practice that is connected to the process of catechesis in community. Parents are invited to talk with elders about exceptions to the norm. That is part of our mission to “come alongside.”

Second, the norm in the church is for baptism to precede communion. Therefore, we request that parents refrain from serving their children communion until they have been baptized. This is a good opportunity for parents to teach their children about the meaning and significance of the sacraments. We encourage parents to bring their unbaptized children up with them during communion to receive a word of blessing from our elders or deacons. For more reasoning behind the order of participation in the sacraments, you can [read this article from Yancey Arrington](#).

What Do I Do if I Believe My Child Is Ready to Be Baptized?

If at any point a parent believes their child is ready to be baptized, our pastors are thrilled to enter that process. We will schedule a time to talk with them about their relationship with God, their understanding of the gospel, and their desire to be baptized. You can email baptism@providenceaustin.com or talk to one of the pastors directly.

Furthermore, if you have any questions about baptism and how you can engage your kids in these discussions, we would love to talk with you!

*In Christ,
The Providence Elders*

