



Basic Doctrines: Baptism

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Basic Doctrines: Baptism

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the meaning of the initiation rite of baptism
2. Learn that baptism marks the beginning of the Christian experience
3. Find out when an appropriate time is for baptism
4. Discover the most meaningful practice of baptism

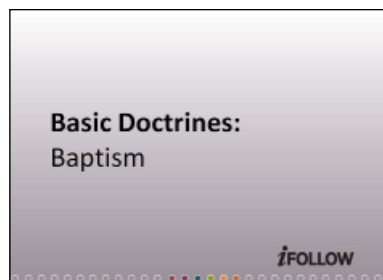
Content Outline

- A. Christian life is a like a long race
- B. Following Christ begins with an invitation
- C. Baptism is an outward act that marks the decision to follow Christ
- D. Baptism is a symbolic re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection
- E. Baptism doesn't insulate us from difficult times
- F. Baptism puts us together with other Christ followers
- G. One should mature enough to understand the meaning of baptism before engaging
- H. Immersion best illustrates the implications of following Christ
- I. Rebaptism is sometimes appropriate

Background Material for the Presenter

Foot Race

The Badwater Ultramarathon is recognized globally as “the world’s toughest foot race.” This legendary event pits up to 90 of the world’s toughest athletes—runners, triathletes, adventure racers, and mountaineers—against one another and the elements. Covering 135 miles non-stop from Death Valley to Mt. Whitney, CA in temperatures



up to 130F, it is the most demanding and extreme running race offered anywhere on the planet.

The start line is at Badwater, Death Valley, which marks the lowest elevation in North America at 280' below sea level. The race finishes at Mt. Whitney Portal at 8360'. The Badwater course covers three mountain ranges for a total of 13,000 feet of cumulative vertical ascent and 4,700 feet of cumulative descent.

The international field ranges in age from 28 to 64. Winners are expected to complete the course in about twenty six hours but the course will remain open for 60 hours.¹ Are you planning on entering the race this year? The author of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a race:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1

Imagine that you are in a race, not an ultra marathon, but a more modest foot race. You look up above the crowd ahead of you and see the starting banner. You look down to confirm that your registration numbers are safety pinned on your chest. You're excited and at the same time a little bit unsure of yourself. You've never done this course before. But you're committed. The starting pistol fires, the crowd cheers, and off you go with thousands of your closest friends on down the road.

If following Jesus can be compared to a race, how does one go about starting the race? Where do you sign up? How do you register? Where do you get your numbers? Jesus prescribes an initiation rite for his disciples to administer to new followers:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." Matthew 28:19

The Invitation

The start of a foot race is marked by the sound of a pistol shot and the crossing of the starting line. The start of the Christian life is marked by an initiation rite entitled baptism. How does one go about getting baptized? What information is required in order to make a decision? Listen to the story of an Ethiopian as he enters the race.

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

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

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Acts 8:30-35

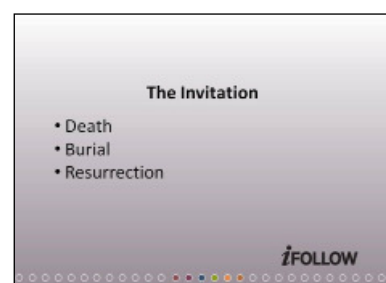
Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

You can’t enter a road race unless you know about it. The same is true with the initiation rite into the Christian faith. For baptism to be purposeful, the person considering baptism needs to know the significance of baptism.

The power of baptism is not magical in any way. There is not any supernatural power in the water, in fact as we will see most any water will do, although you need to have quite a bit. The power of baptism is in its rich symbolism. Paul breaks down the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:3,4.

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.”

Death--The word baptism literally means to dip.² In Bible times the new believer is dipped down under the water. How much breathing do you suppose you can do under water? None. And if someone is kept under water for say fifteen minutes, what’s going to happen? Death. Dipping reminds us of the death of Jesus Christ at Calvary.



Burial—As we are baptized by immersion, the water covering our body symbolizes burying all of our old baggage of sin, guilt, shame, and mistakes.

Resurrection—As our head comes up out of the water what is the first thing we do? Breathe! As that breathe of fresh air fills our lungs it represents the new life, even as Jesus was raised by His Father from the grave.

The event is unforgettable because it is so tactile. Our brain has an easier time remembering things when we experience them rather than just hearing about them or seeing

them. God designed baptism to be an initiation rite whose memory lasts a lifetime. Every time you see a body of water, or go for a swim, you will remember your baptism. You will remember the cool wetness as you first put your toes in--the slight butterflies in your stomach as you were submerged--the joy that you sucked in with that first breath of air--all reminders of your public declaration of your commitment to Jesus Christ.

Hills Ahead

If you have done a road race before you know that there is an initial exuberance that propels you across the starting line and for the first part of the race. And then your lungs start to heave, your heart rate picks up, you feel a slight burn in your legs and you realize that this race is going to be work! The same is true of the Christian journey. It's not always a walk in the park. Sometimes it can be challenging. There is risk involved. It happened to Jesus.



“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” Matthew 4:1

If you have time, read the previous chapter, Matthew 3, and you will find out that this temptation happened immediately after Jesus' own baptism. It is normal to run into challenges after getting baptized.

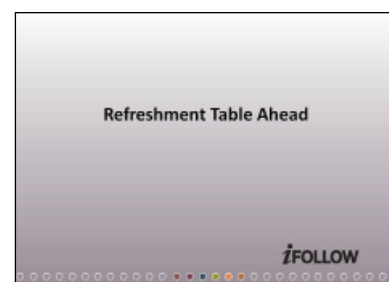
Fortunately in a road race there are things that keep you going. First, there is a general solidarity among those in the race. You cheer each other on, encourage one another and realize that you're not alone, that you're going through the experience together. And like the foot race when you initiate your Christian journey you become part of a diverse team.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free... I Corinthians 12:13a

Paul uses the word body as a metaphor for the church.³ There is something wonderful that happens when we start our race with Jesus. We join a new affiliation--fellow believers. Our nationality, ethnicity, gender, language, class, caste, or political party does not matter. Our new affiliation trumps them all. These fellow travelers can give us support, and assistance through the challenges ahead.⁴

Refreshment Table Ahead

On a road race not only do we have our fellow runners to look to for support and encouragement but there are also rest stops along the way where we can replenish the fluids that have been expended so far. In the Christian race that



replenishment in the journey with God is the 'drinking of the Spirit.' "—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." I Corinthians 12:13b The Holy Spirit is with us every step of the way, providing us with the spiritual replenishment we need to face the challenges that come our way.

Runaway Bride

Road races are scheduled months and even years in advance. Some races use the internet for registration and are so popular that they fill up within a few hours of opening. Unlike road races, the Christian race can be initiated most anytime. In fact, the Ethiopian wondered why he couldn't be baptized right away.

"As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?'" Acts 8:36

Baptism is a commitment to following Jesus. Baptism shows you are a part of God's family. Like a wedding ring, it is a visible reminder of an inward commitment made in your heart."⁵

Many today are afraid of commitment. People are reluctant to settle on a life career or a life partner, and especially choosing a life religion. Why? In this day of instant messaging it is risky to make a decision because you never know if something better will come along.

To avoid that risk some feel that they should try to explore all the world religions first, and then after settling on one world religion, explore all of the denominations in that religion, and then after settling on one expression of that faith, try out all of the houses of worship of that particular denomination, and then and only then will they have enough information to make a decision.

Of course such thinking is nonsensical. A thousand lifetimes would not provide enough time for that kind of exploration. Like the Runaway Bride the fear of commitment creates the greater risk of missing out on the joys of following Jesus.

In the film Maggie finally comes to terms with her fears in the following scene:

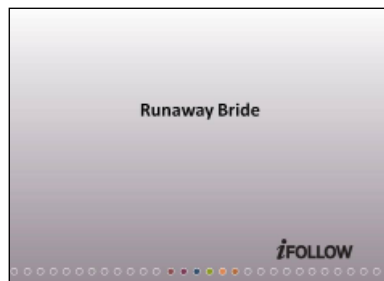
Maggie: I love you, Homer Eisenhower Graham. Will you marry me?

Ike: I... I've got to think about this a little bit.

Maggie: Good. I was hoping you'd say that.

Ike: [laughing] You were not!

Maggie: I was, because if you said "yes" right away, then I wouldn't get to say this next



part, and I've been practicing.

[Maggie sits down, clears her throat]

Maggie: Ready?

Ike: I'm listening.

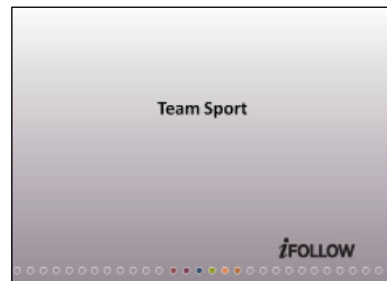
Maggie: I guarantee there'll be tough times. I guarantee that at some point, one or both of us is going to want get out. But I also guarantee...

[starts to cry]

Maggie: ...that if I don't ask you to be mine, I'll regret it for the rest of my life. Because I know in my heart... you're the only one for me.⁶

Team Sport

Two runners found themselves next to each other at the same pace on a road race. As the miles pounded away they became acquainted and began to support each other--that was until the goal line was in site. Suddenly the competitive spirit took over and new friends became rivals as each tried to beat out the other across the finish line. Ultimately a road race is a competitive solo event.



The Christian race on the other hand, is a team event from beginning to end. The initiation rite of baptism is never practiced alone. There are no self baptisms mentioned in the Bible. In every case it is a seasoned believer baptizing a new candidate. In fact in most cases it was a very public event. In fact the gospel of Mark shows that the baptism of Jesus was a very public event.

“The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River... At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan” Mark 1:5,9

Jesus chose to be baptized not in order to be cleansed from sin, but rather to publicly model the initiation rite for His followers. In the same way baptisms today can serve to influence others. If you are planning on getting baptized you should invite your friends and family. When they see your baptism and realize that you're serious about beginning a new life, it may give them the pause they need to consider that they too may wish to start a new life with Christ.

Registration Required

One time a runner tried to run a 10K without registering. Perhaps he was too cheap to pay the registration fee or didn't have the time. He tried to blend into the crowd at the starting line so the judges wouldn't see that he didn't have numbers on his chest. The man felt that he had the freedom to run with or without registering because it was a public roadway. It turned out to be a very difficult race for him. Without a number on his chest he felt excluded from the camaraderie of the other runners. Because he hadn't paid his entrance fee he didn't feel right about grabbing a cup at the water stations. As he lumbered toward the finish line a judge signaled him off the course. He wasn't allowed to finish the race without numbers on his chest.



In the Christian faith some feel that the initiation rite of baptism is not that important, but Jesus in Mark 16:16 puts baptism and belief in the same sentence as though one can't really exist without the other.

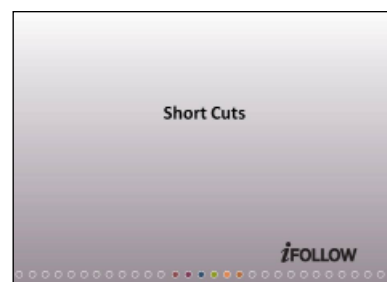
“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Baptism is a physical picture of a spiritual truth. Notice that salvation is not dependent upon baptism, but those who are saved will be baptized. This raises the question of all of the millions of God followers through the ages that haven't been made aware of the rich symbolism of baptism. Will they be left out of the kingdom? Fortunately we don't have to make those kinds of decisions. But we do get some clues from scripture. There is one New Testament incident of someone assured of salvation outside of baptism. He was the thief on the cross.⁷ However one could argue that had he lived, surely would have been baptized the first chance he got.

Short Cuts

Religious ceremonial cleansings and baptisms occur in most major faith traditions. In the Christian traditions there are a variety of ways of administering the rite from sprinkling, pouring, to full body immersion.

However as we read the accounts of baptism in the bible we find that it was exclusively a full body experience. Let's continue with the story of the Ethiopian in Acts 8: 38,39.



“And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the

Lord suddenly took Philip away...”

It is clear from this and other descriptions in the New Testament that baptism was practiced as a full body immersion. In fact for many centuries baptism was practiced only by immersion.⁸ It wasn't until the Middle Ages that the innovations of pouring and sprinkling were added (perhaps because of convenience or the lack of water). Unfortunately much of the meaning of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is lost without the practice of full body immersion.

Old Enough to Know Better

Occasionally in a road race you will see a runner pushing a high tech stroller. Inside the lucky infant effortlessly gets a firsthand view of the race. It's a great workout for the parent and the hope is that the infant will be infected with the joy of running. But in the meantime, is that infant running the race? Technically, 'no'. It was not the infant's decision to run the race. The lucky kid just got thrown into the buggy and got a free ride out of the deal.



Some churches today offer the initiation rite of baptism to infants and toddlers.⁹ While it might be a commendable act for the parents to perform, infant baptism misses out on the very meaning of baptism. A Bible baptism was an individual response of faith upon hearing and believing the good news. There are no New Testament records of baptisms for infants and toddlers, likely because they are not old enough to hear, understand and accept the good news. For the baptism to have its full meaning it makes more sense for a child to be mature enough to grasp the basics of faith and then be given a personal choice for baptism.

That doesn't mean that children and infants should be left out altogether. In fact Jesus scolds his disciples for trying to hold the mothers back from bringing their children to him for His blessing.

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” Mark 10:13-16

Many churches today offer a service for those parents who wish to dedicate their children to Jesus. The blessing service is an opportunity for the parents to make a public commitment of their desire to let God work through them in the awesome responsibility of parenting. If you have a child that you would like to dedicate to the Lord you may

wish to contact the pastor or your small group leader to make arrangements.

Do-Over

Sometimes runners injure themselves and can't go on. Sometimes they get ill and have to stop by the roadside to wait until their stomachs settle down. Other times they are simply overwhelmed by the challenge and step off the course. In any case the race clock keeps ticking. It can't be reset. There are no do-overs.

In the race of the Christian life there are 'do-overs.' It is possible to reset the clock and start the race again. Acts 19:1-5 tells one story of a re-baptism.

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?' 'John's baptism,' they replied. Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."

There are several reasons why some are considering getting baptized again. Maybe you would like to join them if:

1) You discover a greater truth about God.

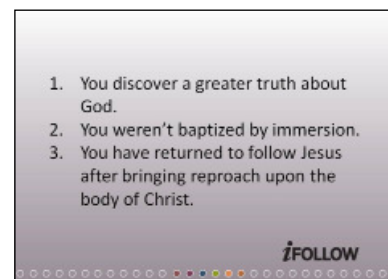
In the case cited, the disciples discovered and accepted Jesus as the Son of God. It was appropriate for them to be baptized again. It may be that your view of God has been greatly expanded through Living with Hope.

2) You weren't baptized by immersion.

Only immersion has the full symbolism of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3) You have returned to follow Jesus after bringing reproach upon the body of Christ.

Since your initial baptism you have fallen away from the faith but now you have confessed repented and would like to be initiated back into the Christian family again.



Ready, Set Go!

When the starter's gun goes 'pop', the runner tries to cross the starting line as soon as possible. The runner doesn't stop and think about it, or talk to the crowd, or tie his shoes or get a drink. He makes haste as quickly as possible to get across the line and start the race.

Have you heard the starting gun? If so, I urge you to move toward the starting line as quickly as possible. In the New Testament, people were baptized as soon as they believed. At Pentecost, 3,000 were baptized the same day they accepted Christ.¹⁰ As we have seen the Ethiopian leader was baptized on the spot when he was converted,¹¹ and Paul and Silas baptized a Philippian jailer and his family at midnight. There are no delayed baptisms in the New Testament. If you haven't been baptized as an expression of your faith in Christ, do so as soon as possible, as Jesus commanded.¹² Be sure to talk to the pastor or your small group leader today to make the arrangements for your baptism.



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Additional Resources: (Endnotes)

<http://www.badwater.com/index.html>

In fact baptism is one of those few words that comes directly from the original common Greek language, the language of the New Testament.

“And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Colossians 1:18

There is an entire lesson study in Living With Hope on the subject of the church entitled Community Center.

Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 120-121.

Runaway Bride, released by Paramount in 1999, written by Josann McGibbon and Sara Parriott

Luke 23:39-43

Matthew 3:16 says that Jesus “went up out of the water” after His baptism.

Infant baptism is predicated on the concept that there is saving power in the actual rite of baptism itself. Thus if a child should die without being baptized he would be doomed to damnation. However as has already been pointed out, this author believes that salvation comes from the power of Jesus, not from the physical act of baptism. What happens to the fate of a child who dies before becoming old enough to choose salvation? That decision is above my pay grade! I’ll leave that one to the graces of our God.

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” Acts 2:41

“At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.” Acts 16:33

This paragraph is from Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 121.

A more complete statement of belief is found in the 15th fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church entitled Baptism:

“By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance

of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12, 13; Acts 16:30-33; 22:16; 2:38; Matt. 28:19, 20.)”

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Discussion Questions

1. According to the Bible what are the requirements that someone needs to meet in order to be baptized?
2. In what way is baptism a metaphor for salvation?
3. How is baptism like the start of a race?
4. Describe some of the refreshments that are available to those who are running the Christian race?
5. How is baptism by immersion a better metaphor than some of the more convenient methods of baptism?

Group Activity

1. **Choose a partner.** Ask your partner “what’s the most memorable race you have ever completed?” Now find out who in the group has completed the most interesting race. Interview them briefly about what it feels like to start the race, run the race, and cross the finish line.

2. **Have someone describe their baptism.** What did they experience? What were they feeling? Did they ‘live happily ever after?’ Would they recommend baptism to someone else? (It may help to prompt someone ahead of time on this one so they can be prepared to share their testimony).

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Group
Activities

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