

**This booklet is organised into a week of daily studies,
each of which include:**

- a short reading,
- one main Scripture to memorise and revise,
- bible verses/passages to look up,
- study questions.

**It's Week 4 in an 8-week series on the foundational
teachings of Christianity called, *The Basics*.**

**In writing these studies, I've attempted to provide
people with something that can be used both in
personal devotions and group Bible study. I have also
tried to cater to new Christians as well as the Christian
who has many years of faithful Christian living under
their belt.**

I'll let the reader decide how well I've succeeded :).

Baptisms.

**The Basics.
(Hebrews 6:1-2)**

Advertising Your Commitment.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 1.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

What sort of husband or wife keeps their wedding quiet? What kind of mother tries to keep the birth of her baby secret? Perhaps for in very extreme situations, but even then most people *want* other people to know their good news. And if you've made a commitment to follow Jesus and make him your God, why wouldn't you tell the world?

Baptism is a Christian's public advertisement that they now belong to Jesus Christ. It doesn't make you a Christian, but it does tell other people that you *are* a Christian. It's an act that says, "My old life is behind me. My new life is now with Jesus." It's normal, it's expected and it's a Biblical command.

*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:37-38)*

Now, some cultures understand the significance of this ceremony better than we do. In some countries where becoming a Christian is understood to be a rejection of your family or plain illegal, you can get away with dallying in Christianity. In some places you can even make a commitment! But once you get *baptised*, the gloves come off and the Christian reaps the often horrible consequences of choosing to follow Jesus in that society.

In our society we are not as clear on ceremonial symbolism. We are a people who like to be able to choose what to ceremonies to involve ourselves in and what to leave out. Couples will live in lifelong de facto relationships without getting married. Children pass into adulthood without any understanding of when it happened or what is required of them. It's the *meaning* that matters, apparently. And where we still do have ceremonies, it's a matter of pick-and-choose.

"For my funeral I'd like a local Aboriginal opening, a traditional Anglican service, an American Indian blessing and a number of

spiritually meaningful Indie rock songs."

But that won't work with Jesus. When it comes to celebrating your allegiance to Jesus Christ, *God* has determined what the ceremony is; not you. And why?

Well, even though baptism is your declaration that you are committed to Christ, it is also a declaration that God is committed to you. He has determined that baptism will symbolically declare certain things about this commitment, things that walking up the front of a church doesn't communicate, nor signing a commitment card. Even a heartfelt prayer for forgiveness fails to capture the full meaning of becoming a Christian like baptism does.

So, does that mean we need to have understood the full meaning of baptism before we get baptised? No, not at all. Very few people getting married have a clue what they're letting themselves in for. The important thing in baptism is to make the commitment; God will bring a greater understanding and appreciation of that commitment as the years go by.

Have you been baptised? What significance does baptism have for you right now? Ask God to reveal to you a deeper appreciation of what baptism means for you and for him as you read these devotions this week.

Revise: Hebrews 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...

Read also: Acts 2:41, Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, 2:11-13.

Questions:

1. Why did God provide a simple pre-packaged ceremony for entry into the Christian life?
2. Baptism is an essential public advertisement of your decision to follow Jesus, but it is not the only way to "advertise" your commitment. How else can (and does) your life advertise Jesus?

Made One.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 2.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

When I first met Mark, I couldn't place his accent. He looked Korean, but didn't have any Asian accent I had ever heard before. In fact, his appearance influenced my thinking so much that when he told me he was from Germany, I almost didn't believe him.

You see, Mark was born in Korea to a Korean mother and an American father. His father left before he was born, and, tragically, his mother died while he was still young. He was placed in an orphanage until a German couple adopted him into their family, gave him their name and took him back to Germany.

So Mark, despite being born in Korea, looking like a Korean, and having Korean and American birth parents, is German.

Claudia is neck-deep in debt. She met and married John and took his name. John is a very rich man and the moment they marry the legal responsibility for Claudia's debt extends to John as well. Now both John and Claudia are neck-deep in debt, but both are also very rich. So, when John pays off the debt, Claudia will have paid off the debt as well, leaving them both free to enjoy their remaining riches.

All through the book of Acts in the Bible, Christian baptism is described as being "baptised in the name of Jesus Christ" or "baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus". In other words, baptism is not just a public symbol of our dedication to him, it is also a symbol telling people that *he* has accepted *us*, the signing of the adoption papers, the saying of the wedding vows. We are his and known by his name: *Christians*.

That means, like Mark, we are adopted and become part of God's family and share in his privileges and inheritance. That also means, like Claudia we are married to a rich man in Jesus and we share in his privileges and inheritance, including his payment for our sins.

As the Bible says:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by

baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Baptism is a symbol of our union with Jesus, and it's because of that union that we participate in his debt-paying death and his new resurrected life, with all the blessings that go along with a perfectly lived life. In other words, while the death and resurrection we share with Jesus is an extremely important and essential truth recognised in baptism, *the primary reality baptism celebrates* is that **we have been made one with Jesus**.

Ask God to open your heart to revel in the wonderful truth that you are one with Jesus, part of his family and co-owners of everything that belongs to him, including his sin-scorching death. It is only through this co-ownership that our evilness can be done away with without doing away with us, and through this co-ownership we receive the undeserved rewards he earned.

Revise: Hebrews 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works...

Read also: Acts 10:48, 19:5, Ephesians 1:3-14, Ephesians 5:25-33..

Questions:

1. Adoption and marriage illustrate our oneness with Jesus, but they are not perfect illustrations. How does each correspond with the truth of our oneness with Jesus and how do they not quite fit? Which do you prefer and why?
2. Many people think we join Jesus in his death and resurrection, and then become one with him, but Romans 6 shows that we become one with him and *then* share in his death and resurrection. What does that order tell us about God's attitude toward us (Romans 5:8)? How can that help us when we muck up?

More Than Repentance.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 3.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

In the early days of Christianity, a man called Apollos started speaking out about Jesus. He was fearless, debating and defeating those who hated Christianity and proving from the Bible that Jesus was the Deliverer the Jews had been looking for. But he had a problem. He only knew the baptism of John.

Now, John the Baptist baptised people (not surprising considering his name!), but his baptism was not Christian baptism. His God-given job was to tell people to get ready by turning away from evil because the Deliverer was coming, and his baptism symbolised their intention to turn away. So, for Apollos to stop at the baptism of John was like getting ready for a party but never actually going.

Fortunately, a Christian couple took Apollos under their wing and explained this to him, but there are still many people today who do not understand and need to be shown the difference between Christian baptism and the baptism of John.

Maybe that's you. If so, try this:

Jesus, while he was on earth, told a story about two brothers. The younger son left home and wasted his father's money on drugs, women and drink, while the older son stayed at home and worked the farm. One day, when the younger son had run out of money, he came to his senses and decided to change his ways. He went back to his father and asked to be taken on as an employee - he didn't think he deserved to be considered his father's son anymore.

This self-understanding is the repentance that John's baptism signifies.

The boy's father, however, would have none of it. Sure, the boy didn't deserve to be called his son, but his behaviour wasn't why he loved him in the first place. Instead of throwing him out, he threw him a party and called him, "My son".

That is a picture of what Christian baptism signifies.

The story continues and the older brother returns from working out on the estate. When he finds out what his father has done for his brother, he explodes.

"What are you doing? This son of yours robbed you blind and wasted your money on sex and drugs, and you welcome him back with a huge party??? What about me? I've been here all along, slaving away for you. When have you ever thrown a party for me?"

The older brother was convinced he deserved his father's acceptance because he had always done the right thing. He was unable to see that his father's affection was given, not earned and that is why he could not accept his father's free gifts.

John's baptism was a way of getting people from older brotherhood to younger brotherhood. It helped people realise they needed to go to the Father in complete dependence on him. Once they knew they had nothing to give, they were able to receive his free gifts of forgiveness and life through Jesus when he came.

Christian baptism now *includes* John's baptism - returning to God in repentance - because you can't receive God's gift without it, but it is also *more than* that. Christian baptism signifies that in Jesus we have received forgiveness and life, completely apart from anything we are, have or do.

Christianity itself is not merely recognising our evilness and trying to do better; it is recognising our evilness and going to God through Jesus because we can't do anything else. Ask Jesus to help you to humbly admit your wrongs and joyfully accept his gifts as signified in baptism.

Revise: Hebrews 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God...

Read also: Acts 18:24-19:7, Luke 15:11-32.

Questions:

1. How does being aware of our sin and at the same time being aware of God's love and forgiveness given through Jesus affect our attitude toward God, others and ourselves?
2. How do repentance and faith feature in your life today?

Cleaning Up.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 4.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

My Dad is really into tracing family history. It can be fascinating to find out where our family has come from. For instance, my height and build come from my mother's father. Professionally, both my brother and I trained as teachers and there are a good number of teachers in our family history. There are even patterns relationally between my father and his children: my father married a nurse, and so did all his sons.

But weaknesses get passed on too. One of our ancestors was an alcoholic and our family is in some ways a textbook example of the generational effects of alcohol addiction. Thankfully, there is also a strong Christian presence in our family history, and that is still the religion of many in our family today.

The book of Hebrews is a book that traces the "family history" of Christian truth. The writer of Hebrews takes the historical accounts, the laws, the promises and the prophecies that came through the Jews in the Old Testament, and he shows how they lead to our understanding of Jesus and the gospel. So, when the writer talks about "instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" in Hebrews 6:2, he is thinking about all the instructions about each of those topics that are found throughout the whole Bible. All the meanings contained in the Old Testament washings lead up to and are contained in Christian baptism; all the meanings in the Old Testament practice of the laying on of hands are contained in the Christian practice of laying on of hands; all the Old Testament teaching about a renewed creation is found in the Christian teaching about resurrection of the dead; and everything about judgment is found in some way or other in the Christian teaching on eternal judgment.

So, you'll find Bible translators translate Hebrews 6:2 using either the word "washings" or the word "baptisms" depending on what they want to emphasise: the Jewish "ancestry" of Christian baptism (washings), or the Christian "descendant" of the washings found in the Jewish Law (baptism).

So how do the Old Testament washings feed into Christian baptism?

Cleanliness. The washing in the Old Testament ceremonies was to clean people and things from defilement.

Defilement? Sure. Some of the ways you became unclean or defiled according to God's Law in the Old Testament were:

- if you had certain skin diseases,
- after you had sex,
- after touching a dead body,
- if you ate or even touched certain animals, or
- (for women) after you had given birth.

And, of course, people were unclean if they broke God's Law.

It was important, therefore, for the Israelites to clean themselves so they could approach God, and that is what the "washings" were for.

When Jesus came, his death paid the price, not just for sin, *but it also paid the price for every kind of defilement*. His baptism incorporated all the washings that made his people ceremonially clean and when we are joined with Jesus in Christian baptism we too are washed clean from every defilement laid out in the Old Testament and much more.

Think about how your baptism declares that you share in Jesus' perfect life, death and resurrection and how that means you are completely clean!

Revise: Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of instruction about washings,...

Read also: Exodus 30:17-21, Exodus 40:12-15, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Hebrews 10:19-22, Titus 3:5.

Questions:

1. What are some modern day examples of things that make a person defiled or unclean?
2. What day-to-day results come from seeing yourself as unclean? How would realising your "cleanness" change that?

Formalized.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 5.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

The writers of the Bible were not tame animals. They clearly teach that it's only by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection that anyone can find eternal life and escape eternal death. That is why we know that baptism doesn't actually *do* anything, it just *signifies* something.

And then those same writers come out with verses like this:

Mark 16:16 *Whoever believes **and is baptized** will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

Acts 2:38 *And Peter said to them, "Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 22:16 *And now why do you wait? **Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins**, calling on his name.'*

These verses seem to teach that you have to be baptised to be saved! How does this work?

Fortunately for us, Peter, an early Christian leader, provides a helpful explanation.

Peter was talking about Christian suffering. He used the story of Noah and the Great Flood to compare the people who persecuting Christians in Peter's day with the people who mocked Noah and his family while they were building the Ark. Remember, says Peter, the flood came and killed everyone except Noah and his family. He goes on:

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 3:21)

In other words, baptism saves us from the coming judgment on the world, but it's not the wetting we get that saves us. We are saved by formally calling on God to forgive us because we identify with Jesus' death and resurrection.

(Huh?)

It might be bad business practice, but it's quite possible to appeal to someone for a loan and receive it, and yet the formal signing of the papers happens later. The fact that you haven't signed an agreement doesn't affect the money or change the fact that an agreement has been made, but it does mean it hasn't been *formalised*. And when you finally do sign on the dotted line, you are, in reality, making the agreement again - formalising the informal one.

Baptism is the *formal* appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus. You might have informally appealed to him beforehand, but there are proper procedures to go through. That doesn't mean you are not one with Jesus if you haven't been baptised. Nor does it mean your sins have not yet been forgiven. What it *does* mean is that you haven't *formally* asked for it yet.

This means, of course, that baptism is far more important than many people today think it is. People *can* be saved without it. It's just that we're not *meant* to be saved without it.

Can you say, "I've been saved through baptism"? Many Christians today would feel their heart shrink back from saying that because they have been so forcefully taught that only Jesus' death and resurrection saves. Peter, however, shows that there's a closer connection than between baptism and our salvation than we normally allow. Ask for God's Spirit to educate your heart into a biblical view of the relationship between baptism and salvation.

Revise: Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands...

Read also: Romans 10:9-13, Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 Peter 3:13-22.

Questions:

1. Formalities can lead to empty ritual, but God obviously doesn't consider that to always hold true. What other formalities do we go through observe in the Christian life and how can we prevent them becoming empty?
2. Look at Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16. How would you explain to someone that they do not teach that you need to be baptised in order to be saved?

Join the Ancient Club.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 6.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

Australian Aboriginal cultures initiated boys into manhood in different ways depending on the tribe. They might have learned dances, performed rituals or undergone circumcision. (Ouch!)

In New Zealand, Maori used to initiate youths into adulthood by tattooing their face while the youth stoically refused to cry out. Any cry meant the ceremony was stopped, and the incomplete tattoo was left as a sign of shame.

Initiation rites have been popular since time immemorial. Even today there are a number of clubs or secret societies that have initiation rites - anything from memorising rules or verses to illegal, life-threatening pranks. And people submit to these rites because - let's be honest - we all want to be part of the group.

Christianity has an initiation rite, but it's not life-threatening; it's life giving. It is baptism in water, done in front of witnesses by someone who is already part of the Church. It is by baptism that you are recognised as part of the family. As Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians:

*There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* (Ephesians 4:4-6)

And what a huge family! When you join the Church you are becoming part of a community bigger than any *Facebook* group. Millions and millions of people from today back through the centuries have gone through the same initiation process. That one rite, however it was done, links you to everyone else who has confessed the name of Jesus and obeyed his command to get baptised.

Think about it. Your obedience means you are walking in the footsteps of kings and queens, princes and paupers, rich and poor, intelligent and uneducated, famous and forgotten. You are one with shoemakers and history makers. You are part of a family that is made up of people from all nations. You are experiencing what Paul, Peter, John and many other Bible characters experienced and you are taking part in a movement they

suffered and died for.

And that's not all. You are also one with the people of God who took part in the washings in the Old Testament Law and every person since the beginning of creation who has put their trust in God.

But the most incredible part of it all is that your baptism puts you in the shoes of Jesus himself, the head of the family of God, the Son of God, God Himself. (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34)!

When you are baptised you take part in an initiation ceremony that ushers you into an ancient, God-designed club. You are not alone, you are part of a community; you are not "out", you are "in"!

Baptism is undertaken by an individual but joins them to a family. Thank God for the companionship he's provided you with on the journey of faith.

Revise: Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead,...

Read also: Isaiah 49:5-6, Hebrews 12:1-2, Revelation 5:9-10, Revelation 7:9-17.

Questions:

1. Our faith is designed to be walked out with others. Do you see your faith as individualistic or community-centred? How does that affect the way you are living as a disciple of Jesus?
2. Being baptised into the Church through Jesus is meant to provide us with an amazing community of love-filled brothers and sisters. Unfortunately, we all so often fall short. How could the initiation of baptism affect how you react to less-than-perfect fellow Christians?

Tell Them About It.

Baptisms. Week 4, Day 7.

...and of instruction about washings... (Hebrews 6:1-2).

Philip was in this hot and dry place at the command of God. Why, he didn't know, but he was sure that it would become clear soon. And sure enough, the desert road he was walking along gave up the answer - a chariot carrying an important looking Ethiopian.

"Go over and join this chariot," said God's Spirit.

Philip obeyed and ran over. As he got nearer he could hear the Ethiopian reading from the Biblical book, Isaiah:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.
"In his humiliation justice was denied him,
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked the Ethiopian.

"How can I, unless someone guides me?" the Ethiopian said, and he invited Philip up into the chariot to explain it to him. And, starting with the passage the Ethiopian was reading, Philip told him about Jesus' death and resurrection.

As Philip explained the gospel, they came upon a body of water and the Ethiopian exclaimed, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptised?"...

Wait a minute!!! What's going on here??? Where does Philip tell the Ethiopian about baptism?

Long time readers of the Bible will recognise this story from Acts 8:26-40 in the New Testament, but have you ever wondered why the Ethiopian immediately talks about being baptised?

Well, obviously, Philip had told him about it. Quite simply, sharing the message of Jesus with someone *includes telling them they need to get baptised*. Check out Acts chapter 2. When people asked Peter what they should do after they realised they had killed Jesus, he said, "*Repent and*

be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (verse 38). And then, whenever people become Christians through the rest of the book of Acts they are baptised as a matter of course.

How different from our day. We make the mistake of telling people that becoming a Christian is completely internal. But that's not quite true. It is true that our internal faith in what Jesus has done is what saves us, but baptism is *the way we respond*. So, when people ask, "What shall we do?" we are to say, "Believe and be baptised".

[Jesus said,] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a)

Adding baptism to gospel presentations may be difficult for many of us. We have only ever been given two options - baptism itself does something mystical to save us or it is just an added extra to the real gospel. Ask God himself how to biblically integrate this truth into your witnessing and confirm it with other Christians around you.

Memorise: Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.

Read also: Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12, Acts 9:17-18, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 16:33, Acts 18:8.

Questions:

1. When you heard the message about Jesus, were you told about baptism as well? How has that affected the way you have understood baptism up to this point?
2. The Salvation Army historically has not baptised people or celebrated the Lord's Supper because they believe it distracts people from cultivating the inward reality of faith. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. When you tell people about Jesus, do you include baptism as the God given way to respond? Do you *have to* every time? How *might* you do it?