



Child Baptism Policy (Revised version, January 2020)

THE VISION AND VALUES

At Birmingham Vineyard Kids, our aim is to ensure that every child is given regular opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel, to be filled with the Spirit and to be invited to live out the life of a full Christian disciple, at an age-appropriate level. We believe that people of any age are able to experience the Holy Spirit, be saved by Jesus Christ from their sin, and enter into a genuine relationship with their heavenly Father.

We don't want to set any pressure or expectations on children or families to initiate baptisms. For many children faith in Christ is something that can grow over time as a result of many experiences and choices to follow Jesus. We want to recognise that we have numerous ways to encourage and affirm a child's growing understanding of the love of God, the call to follow Jesus and genuine experiences of God's presence and power. We would invite you to talk about and treasure these moments in family life as we also seek to recognise these important moments as we lead BV Kids.

We therefore believe that baptism, as the Biblical sign of a life that has been given to God in faith, is an appropriate step for anyone who is a genuine follower of Jesus.

While it is not possible to perfectly ascertain somebody's relationship with God from the outside, we are looking for the same signs of discipleship in our children as we are in adults who wish to be baptised.

1. A personal experience of salvation - a moment when they know they said 'yes' to God. If this happened when they were too young to remember, this should be affirmed by their family or those closest to them who were present. It may be appropriate, as part of the baptismal discernment process, to take the child through 'Why Jesus?' or another short, gospel-presenting tool, and have them affirm their belief and/or pray the end prayer once they are happy they have understood it and accept it for themselves.
2. A living, personal relationship with God (a sense of God's presence at regular intervals in their daily life and both the desire and regular practice of prayer and worship, as affirmed by child and family).
3. An age-appropriate understanding of the gospel and central truths of Christianity
4. Regular attendance at and participation in Sunday church and small group (for children, this will be determined in conversation with the relevant Kids group leaders)
5. A pursuit of holy living that can be shown to have resulted in behaviour that is in line with the Bible. Someone does not have to be perfect to get baptised but should be able to show that they are moving towards living a holy life in Jesus. This means they should be able to acknowledge areas where they struggle and be repentant and taking steps to grow towards Christian living in

line with the wisdom of the leaders around them (family, kids leaders, pastoral staff).

FOR PARENTS

Baptism is a sacred moment and a serious, lifetime commitment, and not to be entered into lightly.

Children (like adults) should never be pressured into baptism - it must be a decision they make in line with their own level of commitment to God and as a response to what He is doing in their hearts and lives. Children (especially young children) are much more susceptible to pressure than adults - they are very attuned to what they think might be expected of them in a given situation and much more likely to say yes to what they perceive that expectation to be. This is especially true when talking to someone they love and/or look up to, such as a parent or kids team member.

We should therefore be very careful, whatever our role in a child's life, from recommending or suggesting baptism when the child has not mentioned it. Statistics show that children who have all the hallmarks of a genuine faith in Jesus and who can talk about their experiences with God and tell the story of when they committed their lives to him, are much more likely (400% more likely) to stay in church and following Jesus if they are allowed to be baptised when they ask (rather than being told they are too young). However, if a child who does not have a personal faith or is as yet unable to articulate it gets baptised 'because they feel they should' or for any other reason than their own commitment to God and the leading of the Holy Spirit, this can have the opposite, detrimental effect.

DISCERNING WHETHER A CHILD IS READY FOR BAPTISM

Children who get baptised, like adults, will be asked the following questions:

- Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?
- Do you turn away from everything you know to be wrong or sinful?
- Do you promise to follow Jesus Christ all the days of your life?

While parents should celebrate their children asking to be baptised, they should not rush hurriedly into the decision but take time to help the child process the commitment they are making. This will involve talking to them about their relationship with God, their behaviour and any patterns of sin that might be apparent in their lives, and about the sacrifices and commitments Christians make in order to follow God.

Accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour

If the child has not made a personal, verbal commitment to following Jesus in the memory of either parent or child, it would not be appropriate to baptise them. However, if a child is asking for baptism and they are not sure whether this has occurred, parent and child may like to go through 'Why Jesus?' or some other short, gospel-presenting tool, and have them affirm their belief and/or pray the end prayer once they are happy they have understood it and accept it for themselves.

The child will also need to understand, and be living out, what it means to have Jesus as Lord of your life (the person who you listen to and whose guidance you ask for and follow when you're not sure), and to have him as Saviour (the understanding that each of us is sinful and therefore unable to have a relationship with God until Jesus died for us and we accepted his death in our place).

Turning away from sin

The child should be able to say what is Biblically right and wrong (in an age-appropriate format) and be doing their best to live this out. This does not mean they need to get everything right all the time, and there should be an underlying understanding of grace, that we are loved and accepted by God because of who Jesus is and what he's done, not our works. However, the child should understand that their actions matter to God and that because they have a new life in Christ, some actions are not acceptable. 'What would Jesus do?' can be a helpful framework for helping children to think through specific issues they may have or to prepare them for future moments of decision.

Following Jesus all the days of your life

The child should be aware that baptism, and following Jesus, is a lifetime commitment.

THE PROCESS OF MOVING TOWARDS BAPTISM

When we counsel adults who want to be baptised, we will ask their small group leaders whether they show signs of being committed to Christ; with kids, we will do this with their Kids' team leaders as well as parents. If there is a question around whether the child has given their life to Jesus, serious concerns about behaviour, or a lack of regular discernible discipleship either in the child or their family, we will, as with adults, recommend waiting to be baptised while these issues are thought through and resolved.¹

This process will involve the leadership team (or a designated member responsible for baptisms, currently Becky Stamps):

- Talking to the child's parents or guardians and asking them questions in line with the above values and discernment process
- Gaining permission from the child's parents or guardians to baptise their child
- Arranging an appointment for the child to talk, on their own, to a member of pastoral staff with whom the child is familiar. This will be a relaxed, age-appropriate interview where the staff member will answer any questions

¹ We are aware that everyone's family looks different, and that a child may well have come to faith from a non-Christian home, in which case their devotional life, their attendance at church services etc. may not be where we would like it to be. In this instance, we would seek to make sure that we were investing in that child, putting structures in place around them that would enable them to be discipled, supported and loved by the church. Whatever the family situation, if there are concerns about the level of discipleship within a family raised as a result of a baptism enquiry, we would see this as an opportunity to work with the family involved, supporting the parents in their spiritual leadership of their children and helping the whole family take steps towards the full life of faith that God is inviting them into in Christ - as we would with an adult baptism candidate.

the child has and help ensure that the decisions is being made in line with the values and discernment process above.

- Liaising with the relevant Kids team leaders to ensure that values and discernment process are followed
- Staying in contact with the child and their family through the process
- If a decision is made to baptise, making sure that the child and their family have all the relevant information about the day that they need, in good time.

Every child that is publically baptised will be required to:

- Gain permission from their parents.
- Be endorsed by the relevant Kids or Youth leaders.
- Give a public confession of their faith (usually a video testimony)
- Be baptised in a public service (usually Big Church, sometimes other services)

If you have any questions about child baptism please speak to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.