

# Helping Children Prepare for Baptism



*We can be prayerful, intentional, and patient as we help our children take this step along the covenant path.*

**By Lucy Stevenson Ewell**  
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Being baptized and confirmed is an exciting milestone for children in the Church. While many look forward to these ordinances, it's also common for children to feel nervous or afraid.

As a writer for the *Friend*, the Church's magazine for children, I've heard many stories of children who fear they aren't ready to make this covenant. Some worry that they don't have a strong enough testimony. Some are afraid of water. And some feel an incredible amount of pressure to be perfect.

Here are a few ways to help your child feel prepared and confident to take their next step on the covenant path.

## Intentionally Teach

It can be easy to think of baptism as a rite of passage or just something that happens when your child turns eight. But really, baptism is a sacred choice, which means they need to understand *why* it's important. Intentionally teaching them can help make baptism more meaningful (and less frightening). Teach them the way you would any person learning about the Church before getting baptized.

It's important for us to teach children about the covenants they will make at baptism. And the good news is, this isn't something we



have to (or should) try to do overnight or in one week. Studying the gospel over time as a family is the best way to help your child prepare to make this covenant. There are a few things that are especially helpful to focus on as your child's baptism approaches:

- In simple terms, discuss how being baptized means promising to follow Jesus Christ.
- Read about baptism in the scriptures, such as Mosiah 18:8–10. Explain the verses so your child understands and can teach the ideas back to you. For example, one recently baptized girl in Hawaii, USA, described “bear one another's burdens” as “help everyone whenever they need help.”
- Make sure to talk with them about the gift of the Holy Ghost, and share experiences you have had when the Holy Ghost has blessed your life.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRYAN BEACH

Some children may worry about baptism because they don't think they have a strong enough testimony. Help your child remember the good feelings they have had while doing something kind, singing in Primary, or talking about the gospel. Encourage them to think of ways they know that Heavenly Father loves them. Explain that all of these are the beginnings of a testimony and that their testimony will grow over time as they keep making good choices.

### Show What to Expect

If your child is nervous about getting baptized—or even if they don't seem to be—it can be helpful to talk about what to expect. A good place to start is preparing them for the interview they will have with their bishop or branch president. Helping your child answer questions like, “Why is baptism important?” and “What does it mean

to take upon you the name of Christ?” can help them be prepared for this discussion. Help your child remember that the bishop is there to help them be ready, not to quiz them or put them on the spot. And remember, you can always accompany your child in the interview, if desired.

Another thing to prepare your child for is what to expect physically on the day of the baptism. Show them how to stand when they are in the font. You could even invite the priesthood holder who will be baptizing your child to practice the physical motion of baptism while out of the water, so your child knows what it will feel like to be dipped down and lifted back up. Explain what will happen during the confirmation.

If your child is afraid of going underwater, prayerfully consider ways you can help them overcome that fear as their baptism approaches. Maybe you and your child could watch someone else be baptized to see how briefly they are underwater. Perhaps you and your child could practice plugging your noses and putting your faces in the water together for a few seconds at a time. There might be someone in your area who teaches children to swim who would have some advice. Whatever you do, make sure you do it with love and patience.

The more prepared a child feels about the physical details of baptism, the more they will be able to relax and focus on the spiritual covenant they are making.

## Focus on Progress, Not Perfection

Sometimes, maybe because we talk so much about the cleansing aspect of baptism, children misunderstand and think they're supposed to be perfect after the ordinance. One of the most common stories we hear at the *Friend* is the panic a child experiences when they make a mistake for the first time after being baptized. After feeling so clean and pure, arguing with a sibling or forgetting to do a chore can make them feel like they've ruined that good feeling forever!

As parents and leaders, it's crucial that we help our children understand the principle of repentance. Do our children understand that recognizing our mistakes and learning from them is part of how we learn and grow here on earth? Do they know that they can pray for forgiveness at any time? and that when they take the sacrament each week, they renew those covenants they made at baptism? Testify that the chance to repent is a blessing and a gift. Baptism isn't about being perfect now but rather about entering the covenant path and taking daily steps to become more like Jesus Christ.

## A Beautiful Beginning

Instead of seeing baptism and confirmation as the destination, we can help our children see it as a beautiful beginning—the start of a new life as a covenant disciple of Jesus Christ. Whether your child feels excited, nervous, or a little of both, you can make sure they don't walk this path alone. By being prayerful, intentional, and patient, we can help our children feel joy as they take this step back to their heavenly home. ■

You and your child can read all about baptism in this month's issue of the *Friend* magazine! Here are some resources you might find especially helpful:

- "Finding Sabrina's Testimony." As her baptism approaches, Sabrina learns that she has more of a testimony than she thought. (See page 4.)
- "Repenting and Trying Again." A boy learns that he doesn't have to be perfect to be baptized. (See page 20.)
- "Make Your Own Baptism Book." Have your child cut out and color the pages of this booklet to help them remember the special parts of their baptism. (See page 24.)

