

Baptisms and Parent/Child Dedications

At Grace Gathering we offer two main venues to practice baptism and parent/child dedications. The practice of baptism is mandated in Scripture for every believer. The practice of parent/child dedication is nowhere mandated in Scripture but is often a desire of parents.

The two main venues where we practice baptisms and dedications are in the corporate service or in the house church setting. While we offer the venue of our corporate gathering, our encouragement is to pursue these practices in the house church setting if possible. This is more of a family atmosphere and is more intimate than a large crowd gathering.

For those who would prefer to be baptized or dedicate their child in one of the corporate gatherings, please e-mail Sue Heckley at sheckley@gracegathering.com for more information on when that can be arranged.

For those who choose to do this through the house church venue, here is some information for mentors regarding how to organize these events.

Baptism

Choose a location: a pool, pond, or lake work well during the warm part of the year. Also, there is a baptistery in the Great Room of the church building. If you would like to use the baptistery, this needs to be scheduled and reserved in advance through the church office.

Invite the whole house church family: Choose a day or time where most, if not everyone, can attend and witness the baptism. Sometimes a house church team (a cluster of 3-5 house churches) may want to have a combined baptism event. Whether it is a team event or one house church, try to include everyone.

Invite other friends and family: A baptism is a great opportunity to invite others (particularly those not yet Christians).

Include a shared meal: Have a meal before or after the baptism. A picnic, eating in someone's home, or using the church facility are all options. Ask everyone to bring something so that no one person has to foot the bill. Some may choose to simply have desserts or something light.

Music: Having the group sing a song or two is optional as well.

Mentor Oversight: As the mentor of the house church or as the coach over a team, take responsibility for oversight. Whoever is getting baptized, make an effort to verify that the person understands the gospel and has made a decision to place faith in Jesus. This can be done informally or by using a written questionnaire as a tool (we have those available). Ask the person to complete the study we have on baptism. Reading a passage of Scripture on baptism and having prayer are both encouraged by the mentor or by someone he/she delegates during the event. Encourage the person getting baptized to choose someone instrumental in their decision to be the one doing the baptism (or you as the mentor could do it). Give the option as well for the person to write and read a testimony of how God has worked their life.

Conclusion: There is no right or wrong way of organizing a baptism. Therefore, be as simple or creative as you would like. Most people in the NT got baptized the very day they came to Christ, therefore, there was not a pre-planned event. Creating an event, however, for a spiritual family like a house church, can be a time of great celebration and rejoicing. It also offers an opportunity to invite and reach out to unbelievers. As a mentor, if you have questions or need assistance, contact your coach. May God bless and lead his church as we reach people for Christ and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Parent/Child Dedications

We do not have any records in the New Testament of parents dedicating their children to God. We have an example of this in the Old Testament when Hannah dedicated her son, Samuel (I Sam. 1:21-28). However, even in this case, it was a unique dedication as Hannah was committing her son to live and serve at the tabernacle.

We do have passages in the New Testament that do affirm the blessing of children and the desire from parents to see them experience a special blessing from God. Luke 18:15-17

People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "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."

While the disciples considered spirituality something for adults only, Jesus made it clear that even babies can receive his special blessing and attention.

Parent/child dedications are different from baby baptisms. Baptism in Scripture was always practiced after a person made a commitment to repent and believe in Jesus. Most of the time when parents baptize their babies what they are in essence saying is that they want to dedicate their child to God. This desire is very appropriate even though baptism is not the right venue

for that. A parent/child dedication is simply a venue created by the church to communicate the desire parents have for their child.

In many ways a child dedication is a commitment by the parents to raise their children according to godly values. The most common way God blesses children is through the dedication and godliness of the parents. The greatest gift parents can give their children is to raise them with the love and instruction of God.

Therefore, a parent/child dedication is as much about praying for the child as it is praying for the parents to fulfill the role God has given them.

When a mentor or coach is overseeing a parent/child dedication here are some suggestions:

- 1) Invite as many people from the house church as can make it.
- 2) Invite family and friends of the dedicating family.
- 3) Include a carry-in meal if possible to celebrate the event with socializing and food.
- 4) If there is enough room, a home is usually the best and most intimate environment. If a home is not large enough, a room or two in the church facility can be reserved. Work through the church office if that is needed.
- 5) If the parents would like to include a short testimonial about God's blessing in their life, this can be encouraging (but is optional).
- 6) The mentor could read a passage of Scripture relevant to children or parenting, and then offer a prayer focused on the child and focused on the parents. Writing the prayer out and reading it during the prayer time can be helpful as well. Laying hands on the parents and/or child is also optional as well.

Like with baptisms, be as simple or as creative as you would like.

Sample Parent/Child Dedication

We are calling this brief ceremony today a parent/child dedication. The reason we call it both parent and child is because the essence of the dedication is a commitment the parents will make in front of you today that they will parent their child in the ways of God. God uses the parents as the instruments of his blessing, and the recipient of his blessing is the child.

Let me say a couple things about the background of parent/child dedications. Scripture nowhere mandates a ceremony to take place for parents to make public commitments with regard to their parenting. However, for those who do choose to participate in a ceremony such as this one, it can be a meaningful pledge in front of family and friends that parents take seriously their responsibility to train their children spiritually.

The most explicit example we have in Scripture of a parent dedicating their child to God is when Hannah dedicated Samuel in 1 Sam. Hannah was overcome by the joy of receiving God's blessing and wanted to make sure God knew that she held her child with an open hand, that in fact the child was God's.

It is important to note also that when a baby is dedicated, God does not remove sin or bring salvation to the child. The dedication is a prayer that one day the child will make a decision to repent of sin him or herself and place faith in Jesus for eternal forgiveness.

God communicates in his word the love he has for children and the commission he gives parents to train children according to his word.

Let me read a sampling of passages in this regard:

PS 78:4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

PS 78:5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,

PS 78:6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

PS 78:7 Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

PS 103:17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children--

PS 103:18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

PS 127:3 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.

PS 128:4 Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD.

PS 128:5 May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem,

PS 128:6 and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

PR 14:26 He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

PR 17:6 Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

PR 20:7 The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.

PR 22:6 Train ⁿ a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

EPH 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

EPH 6:2 "Honor your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise--

EPH 6:3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." ⁿ

EPH 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

LK 18:15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.

LK 18:16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

At this time let me allow each couple to introduce themselves and their family, and then I would like them to introduce other family and friends who came today to witness this event.

Let's start with the Abbotts.

David and Jessica please introduce yourselves and your immediate family? Could you now introduce those who came today to witness this event?

Let me ask those who came today to celebrate with the Abbots, do you have any words of encouragement or words of advice for them? Anything you would like to say by way of encouragement?

Let's now move to the Mckees.

Could you please introduce yourselves and your immediate family? Could you now introduce those who came today to witness this event?

Let me ask those who came today to celebrate with the Mckees, do you have any words of encouragement or words of advice for them? Anything you would like to say by way of encouragement?

Let me ask both couples the following five questions, and if you couples agree, please respond with a yes.

1. Do you recognize today your child is a gift from God and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing?
2. Do you now dedicate your child to the Lord who gave him/her to you all, surrendering all worldly claims upon their lives in the hope that they will belong wholly to God?
3. Do you pledge as parents that, with God's fatherly help, you will bring up your child "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," making every reasonable effort, with patience and love, to build the Word of God, the character of Christ, and the joy of the Lord into his/her life?
4. Do you pledge to provide, through God's blessing, for the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of your child?
5. Do you pledge, God helping you, to make it your regular prayer that, by God's grace, your child will one day repent of sin and place faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for the fulfillment of all God's promises to him/her, even eternal life; and in this faith be baptized and follow Jesus as Lord and obey his teachings?

Let's now pray both for the child and for the parents. I would like to ask David and Jessica to come as the house church mentors to pray for them as well. My wife and I are David and Jessica's spiritual coaches, therefore, I would like to pray for these dedications as well.