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ECHOES OF GRACE, STREAMS OF HOPE

Bill Rose

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The Water Speaks

Echoes of Grace, Streams of Hope

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The First Drops

hen Elijah told Ahab, 'Go on up and eat and drink, for the sound of a heavy rainstorm can be heard.' So Ahab went on up to eat and drink, while Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel. He bent down toward the ground and put his face between his knees. He told his servant, 'Go on up and look in the direction of the sea.' So he went on up, looked, and reported, 'There is nothing.' Seven times Elijah sent him to look. The seventh time the servant said, 'Look, a small cloud, the size of the palm of a man's hand, is rising up from the sea.' Elijah then said, 'Go and tell Ahab, "Hitch up the chariots and go down, so that the rain won't overtake you."' Meanwhile the sky was covered with dark clouds, the wind blew, and there was a heavy rainstorm. Ahab rode toward Jezreel. Now the Lord energized Elijah with power; he tucked his robe into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel."

-1 Kings 18:41-46

The Water Speaks

There's something about rain. Not just the kind that interrupts your picnic or ruins your hair — real rain. The kind that comes rolling in with dark skies and wind that smells like change. You feel it in your chest

before you feel it on your skin.

Rain has always been more than weather. There's something deep and meaningful about it. It doesn't just show up in Bible stories, it shows up in many other stories when something big is about to change.

In The Lion King, it's raining when Simba finally defeats Scar and claims his place as king. The downpour washes away the ashes of the past, and a kingdom begins again.

In Beauty and the Beast, it's raining when Belle kisses the Beast for the last time before the rose falls. Water runs down his face as the old curse is broken and a new man stands where the beast once did.

In Shawshank Redemption, Andy Dufresne bursts from a prison pipe into a thunderstorm, arms outstretched, rain soaking his skin, shedding the rags of his captivity.

Even Forrest Gump has it — Lieutenant Dan screaming into a hurricane until something in him finally breaks and heals at the same time.

We know what rain means, even if we can't explain it. It means something is being washed away. Something new is starting. And maybe that's why people are emotionally moved by water. The water speaks to their soul.

That's the kind of rain Elijah was waiting for. He prayed for it like his life depended on it, because, in a way, it did. Seven times he sent his servant to look toward the sea. Seven times, nothing. Then — finally — a cloud no bigger than a man's hand rose from the horizon. That's all it took. Soon the sky was black with clouds, and a wind swept in carrying the

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first drops of a storm that would drench the land.

When the Sky Finally Breaks

You have to imagine the sound. After three and a half years of nothing but dust and brittle leaves, the first drop must have felt like a miracle you could hold in your hand. People probably ran outside, blinking at the sky like they'd forgotten what clouds even looked like. And then there's that smell — if you've ever lived through a long dry summer, you know it — when rain hits hot dirt. It's earthy and electric, like the scent of hope you didn't know you'd been craving.

I remember that smell.

I was thirteen, standing on the worn-out baseball field at Falcon Children's Home, where the bases were just patches of dirt somebody had given up on watering years ago. Sixty-five kids lived there, ages three to eighteen spread out across 45 acres surrounding the ball field right in the middle. We played under skies that hadn't offered us much more than sunburn and dust. And that month, the dust in my own life thickened. My dad was released from prison after seven years. I hadn't spoken with him since he was arrested. I always hoped one day we could reunite and have a relationship. I had gone so long without a father and truly thought maybe now I could experience having a Dad again. Before I could even think about what that meant, he took his own life. I was devastated.

My mom was caught in the grip of addiction. She was unfit to parent. Somewhere deep down, I already knew the word "fatherless," but now I could feel the weight of "orphan" in my bones.

I was scared, and I didn't know who to turn to. So one night, I prayed.

Not the kind of prayer you'd repeat in Sunday school. More like a groan. *Dear God, my life sucks. Can You make it better?* That was it. No theology. No carefully folded hands. Just the kind of raw honesty that slips out when you're in a drought and you're not even sure if clouds still exist.

That week, something happened. The first time I ever sensed God speaking to me wasn't in a church pew or at an altar — it was in the shower. I remember standing there, wrecked. I couldn't stop thinking about my dad, about how I'd probably never get another chance to know him. The weight of it crushed me. I sobbed under the water, because in a house with eleven other boys, the shower was the only place you could hide your tears. The bathroom fan hummed, the water kept pounding, and I thought I was alone.

But I wasn't.

Steam curled around me like a cocoon, and somewhere in the middle of my sobbing, something cracked open inside me. In the rhythm of water hitting tile, in the echo of my own brokenness, I heard it — not an audible voice, but something softer, like Elijah's gentle rain.

God reminded me of the men He'd already placed in my life — Dean Strickland, John Gipson, Mark Whitfield — good, solid men who had quietly been fathering me without the title.

I pressed my hands against the tile and bowed my head, my forehead resting against the wall as if I couldn't hold it up anymore. My chest heaved, and I wasn't even sure if I was crying or just breathing too hard.

That's when it happened.

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Like a whisper and a thunderclap at the same time, the words formed in me — words that didn't feel like they came from me at all:

"God... is my Father."

It hit like a wave I wasn't braced for. I gripped the soap shelf, but the tears came anyway — hot, unstoppable. I said it again, louder this time, as if speaking it could make it more true: "God is my Father."

I wasn't just saying it; I was believing it. All those years of wondering why I didn't have a dad who stayed, why I was the kid who had no home to go to for Christmas, why I was the boy who prayed one night in a whisper, Dear God, my life sucks.... — all of it came rushing back in one collapsing moment. But now... I wasn't the boy begging for someone to see him. I was the son who had been seen all along.

The water streamed over me like some kind of baptism, washing away a weight I'd been dragging around for years. I didn't rush it. I just stood there, letting the truth sink in, like rain on dry ground, until it felt etched into my bones. I didn't even notice how long I'd been standing under the shower until the heat gave out and the water turned cool. When I finally stepped out, I knew I wasn't just rinsed off on the outside. Something deeper had shifted.

The drought in my soul wasn't over, but the first drops had fallen. God was drawing me to Himself.

The Beginning Of Redemption

At the children's home, we went to church every Sunday. Back then, it was just part of the schedule, like brushing your teeth or lining up for dinner. But after that night in the shower, I started paying attention. I

leaned in when they talked about Jesus. I listened differently when the gospel was preached. For the first time, I realized I wasn't just broken — I was sinful. And somehow, impossibly, I was loved.

I had watched baptisms before, never imagining I'd be one of the wet ones. But since surrendering my life to Christ in secret, there was this pull to make it public. So I asked Pastor Danny if I could be baptized. That news spread through the church faster than free pie at a potluck. The old saints lit up like Christmas trees, and before I knew it, the baptism tank was filling.

It happened on a Sunday night. Honestly, it didn't feel holy at first — it felt awkward. The dressing room smelled faintly of wet carpet, and the water in the baptistry was colder than I expected.

The baptistry sat behind the pastor, framed in a big cutout window with a painted mural of what I guess was supposed to be the Jordan River. It looked like a scene from a low-budget Bible movie. They handed me a white robe and asked me to wear it into the baptismal. So, naturally, I stripped down completely in the dressing room and put it on — stark naked.

Nobody warned me that the robe was basically made of pool float material. The moment I stepped into the water, it started rising up around me like a stubborn life jacket. I panicked for a second, pushing it down with my elbows, praying no one noticed. But then I stopped thinking about it.

My heart was pounding in my chest — not because I doubted what I was doing, but because I knew this moment was more than ritual. It was a burial.

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The weight of years came with me into the water. Shame that had shaped my identity. Regret I had tried to out think. The silent agreements I had made with the lies that told me I was too broken to belong. They all followed me in.

Pastor Danny's eyes were bright. "Bill Orthmann," he said, "because of your expressed faith in Jesus, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Then he leaned me back into the water. The water closed over my face, and for a split second, it was like time stopped. I felt the strange heaviness of being suspended between two worlds. Then — just as quickly — I was pulled back up, gasping for breath and blinking away the drops in my eyes.

It's hard to explain, but something shifted in that moment. I didn't just hear about grace anymore; I felt it soaking through every part of me. The old me — the one who thought God's promises were for other people — stayed under that water. The one who came up had a new name written on his heart. I came out not as the orphaned son of a jacked up family, but as a child of God. Like the rain on Mount Carmel, it was proof that the drought had finally met its match.

Baptism isn't just a ceremony — it's a thunderstorm in your soul. It's God saying, The old is gone. The new has come. It didn't happen when my life was neat or easy. It came right in the middle of a drought. Stepping into that water didn't solve all my problems. I still carried questions, habits, and scars. But for the first time, my story wasn't just about surviving. It was about thriving. I felt like God was saying, This is the start of something new. You belong to Me now.

And that was the beginning of redemption.

Seven Times Nothing

One of the hardest lessons I keep relearning is that God doesn't work on my timeline. I think about Elijah on Mount Carmel. He had just watched God send fire from heaven to consume an altar soaked in water, and you'd think rain would come immediately after that kind of miracle. But no — Elijah had to pray seven times, sending his servant back again and again to look toward the sea. That's not how I would've written it. I would've made the clouds roll in right after the fire, like a Hollywood movie. But God's timing isn't just about spectacle — it's about faith.

Baptism works the same way. You don't get baptized because you've got your life perfectly sorted out. You get baptized because you've learned to trust the One who can send rain. You step into the water in obedience, and you step out believing the sky will break in God's time. And when it does, you'll realize the rain isn't just about ending the drought, it's about showing you the God who can bring life to dry places.

Substance Beneath The Surface

Baptism is both deeply personal and impossibly universal. It's personal because it marks *your* story — your moment when the water touched your skin and you knew something in heaven had shifted. And yet, it's universal because it's been happening for thousands of years to people in deserts and jungles, in rivers and bathtubs, to prisoners and kings, to kids from broken homes and to people who thought they didn't need saving until Jesus found them.

The Bible doesn't present baptism as a casual, optional thing. It shows up as a defining act for anyone who decides to follow Jesus. Peter preached in Acts 2, and the crowd was cut to the heart, asking what they should do. His answer was simple: Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. That day, three

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thousand people stepped into the water.

Baptism is a physical act that declares a spiritual reality. It's not magic water. It's not the pastor's hands. It's the obedience that matters. It's the public declaration that says, *I belong to Jesus now. The drought is over.*

For Israel, the rain on Mount Carmel wasn't just weather — it was covenant renewal. For the early church, baptism wasn't just tradition — it was identity. It was saying to the watching world, *I'm not who I was anymore. The old me is gone. Christ lives in me now.* And if you've ever been in a spiritual drought, you know how much a declaration like that matters.

I think that's why my own baptism hit me so deeply. I didn't step into the water thinking, *Well, this will solve everything.* I stepped in believing that the same God who spoke to Elijah, who broke the drought with rain, who claimed Israel as His people — that same God was claiming me.

And that's the thing: baptism is both an ending and a beginning. It's the end of a life defined by guilt, shame, and spiritual famine. And it's the beginning of a life defined by mercy, grace, and the steady downpour of God's presence.

When The Father Calls Your Name

hen Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. But John tried to prevent him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?' So Jesus replied to him, 'Let it happen now, for it is right for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John yielded to him. After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight.'"

-Matthew 3:13-17

I had a dream one night. Not the kind you forget by breakfast, but the kind that crawls into your ribs and stays there.

It began with heat — one of those desert days where the air feels heavy enough to crush you. I was standing on the banks of the Jordan River. People were lined up in the dust, each one carrying something I couldn't see but could somehow feel — like invisible backpacks of guilt and regret.

Some had whole suitcases of shame. Others just a small pouch of

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unspoken sin. The river didn't care how much they carried. And then I realized who was standing in the water. It was John, the Baptizer, the wild prophet who preached repentance in the wilderness. He would lower them into the muddy current with one hand behind their back, the other over their chest, and then they'd come up gasping. It was like the river was in on the plan, conspiring with God to give each person a fresh start.

That's what I thought this was about — second chances. Until *He* showed up.

When the Air Recognizes Him Before You Do

We'd all heard rumors about Jesus. Some said He was another rabbi. Others whispered He might be *the One*. But when He walked down toward the water, the air changed. Not like the buzz of celebrity — deeper. Quieter. Like the atmosphere knew Him before we did.

He didn't push to the front. He just walked like He belonged there, like the river had been waiting for Him since creation. When He reached the Baptizer, there was no speech, no show. Just:

"Baptize Me."

The Baptizer froze. This was the guy who called religious leaders "snakes" to their faces and now his voice cracked:

"I need to be baptized by You... and yet you come to me?"

Jesus didn't argue. He simply said,

"Let it happen now, for it is right for us to fulfill all righteousness"

And so they waded into the water — knee deep, waist deep. The sunlight hit the surface and cast golden ripples across their faces. He placed one hand on Jesus' back and the other on His chest.

And then — down He went.

The same muddy water that had swallowed the failures of tax collectors and soldiers closed over the sinless Son of God. When He came up, the sky tore — not violently, but like a seam that had been stitched shut since Eden and finally gave way. Light poured through. A dove glided down and rested on Him. And then came the Voice. Not loud like thunder, but strong enough to shake the marrow of my bones:

"This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight."

When You've Never Heard That Before

I can't explain it, but something in that moment felt personal — like the words weren't just for Jesus. They were for me. An echo for every orphan, every unwanted child, every person who's never once heard a parent say, "I'm proud of you."

I grew up with that ache. Even after I met Christ, I struggled to believe I was fully wanted. Intellectually, I knew God loved me. But deep down, there was always that voice: Sure, He saved you. But maybe He just had to. Maybe you're only in because of pity, not because you're wanted.

That's what made this scene different. I could feel the Father's voice cutting through those lies. The Son hadn't done any miracles yet. No sermons. No cross. No resurrection. And still the Father declared: "in him I take great delight."

I realized then — affirmation from the Father isn't a paycheck you earn; it's the birthright of a child who belongs.

The Day Jesus Stood in Line

As I reflected on the baptism of Jesus, I couldn't help but wonder...why

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Jesus? Jesus didn't seem like He needed to be baptized. He didn't have anything to repent of. So why in the world did He wade into the Jordan and let the Baptizer lower Him under that muddy water?

John's baptism was for repentance — for people who knew they had sinned and wanted to turn their lives back toward God. And here comes Jesus, the spotless Son of God, standing in line like a sinner.

It's almost offensive. Like a surgeon waiting his turn in the ER, pretending he needs a doctor. But this is what I've learned: Jesus wasn't getting baptized because He needed forgiveness — He was doing it because we did.

It was an act of identification. The Son of God was stepping into our mess, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with tax collectors, drunks, and desperate people, saying, "I'm with them." And that's where Jesus' baptism gets personal for me.

I Was the Kid No One Claimed

When I was ten years old, I packed my life into a black trash bag. I didn't own a suitcase. Trash bags were faster, easier, and let's be honest — no one from social services was thinking about presentation. I had been removed from my home more than once, but this time it was for good. My family was broken in ways that didn't get fixed overnight. So the state sent me to Falcon Children's Home.

I remember the ride there — the back seat smell of stale coffee and paperwork, the caseworker's tired eyes in the rearview mirror. I was quiet. Kids like me learn early that if you stay quiet, you might survive the day.

When we got to the home, they gave me a small room and a set of rules. They also handed me a number — not literally, but that's what it felt like. You're one of dozens. You're here because there's nowhere else for you to be.

For years, I felt out of place. Being in the system teaches you something — that belonging isn't automatic, and love often has terms and conditions.

Jesus Stepping Into My Line

When I read about Jesus standing in line at the Jordan, I think about that boy with the trash bag and the boy who felt invisible in the orphanage. I think about a Savior who didn't just wave from heaven and say, "Hope you make it out okay."

He stepped into my line.

The orphan line.

The guilty line.

The line for people who don't belong anywhere.

When He came up out of that water, the heavens opened and the Father's voice thundered: "You're mine." That's the miracle of baptism. Not just the water. Not just the ritual. But the declaration.

Truth was breaking through my hardened heart.

- In Christ, I am no longer defined by abandonment, failure, or sin. I am a beloved son of God.
- In Christ, I live from the Father's affirmation, not for it. I can stop performing to earn what's already been given.
- In Christ, I am sent into the world not as a spiritual orphan trying to prove myself, but as a son on family business.

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And just like the Jordan kept flowing after Jesus stepped out, this story keeps moving — through me, and through every life He touches.

If the Son of God would step into the muddy water for me, I can step into whatever He's asking of me. Because the God who wades into your mess will never leave you there alone.

Where the Dream Meets Reality in Baptism

As a foster kid, public declarations of belonging were rare. I was used to fading into the background, not stepping into a crowd to say, "This is who I am now." Baptism is the opposite of disappearing — it's letting the whole world see whose name you now carry.

Jesus' baptism tells me that God doesn't stand at a safe distance, waiting for me to climb my way up to Him. He steps into the same water I step into — not because He needs cleansing, but because He's claiming me as His own.

And maybe that's why, when the Father's voice declared, "This is my Son," something in me whispered, That's my Father, too.

The Long Echo of the Father's Voice

The Father's words at the Jordan weren't just for Jesus. The New Testament makes it clear: if you're in Christ, His identity becomes your identity. The Father looks at you through the Son and says:

"You are my child."

"You are loved."

"I am pleased with you."

That's not sentiment — it's reality. And like any reality, it demands a response. For me, that response was slowly learning to live like it's true.

To pray without fear of rejection. To repent without running away. To take risks in mission because I'm no longer trying to earn my place at the table. And maybe most importantly — to speak that same affirmation over others. Because there's a whole world full of spiritual orphans who have no idea the Father is calling their name.

The Jordan River moment didn't end with the Father's affirmation. It was the launchpad for Jesus' public ministry. Right after this scene, He's led into the wilderness to be tested, then begins preaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom.

That's the pattern for us too:

Identity in the Father.

Affirmation from the Father.

Mission with the Father.

Too many of us try to jump straight to mission without identity, or we search for affirmation in the wrong places. But you can't skip the first two steps and expect to last in the third. For me, believing I was truly a son changed everything.

Fast Forward: Adoption

When I was almost sixteen, God gifted me with something I had prayed for countless times: parents. They finally came to adopt me. My father was kind, steady, and full of laughter that made you feel safe. My mother was gentle, a teacher with eyes that could see right through fear. They didn't just tell me they wanted me — they showed it. For the first time in my life, I felt unconditional love.

And then came the name change. My last name was no longer Orthmann, the name I had carried as a shadow of my past. Now it was Rose. A single

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word that carried permanence, dignity, and a sense of belonging I had never known.

I will never forget the day I signed my new last name. The pen felt heavy, like it knew the weight of what was happening. Orthmann was a name tied to a life that never felt like home. But when the papers slid across the table, I wrote "Rose" in my own handwriting for the first time.

Rose.

It wasn't just a name. It was a declaration. My father and my mother had chosen me. Not because they had to, but because they wanted to. I felt that deep, unshakable sense of unconditional love. For years, I'd been living in survival mode — always scanning the room, always bracing for the moment something would break. But in that moment, in their home, something inside me finally stopped running.

That kind of love changes you. It gives you a safe place to fail, to grow, to ask questions without fear. And when you find it, you realize just how much of life you've been trying to navigate without it.

This is exactly what baptism teaches us spiritually. It's an outward expression of an inward reality: in Christ, we are adopted. Romans 8 says it plainly:

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father."

-Romans 8:15

Just like my earthly adoption affirmed me as a son, baptism affirms our spiritual adoption. We are no longer orphans. We are claimed. We are

loved. We are beloved sons and daughters.

And just like my last name changed when I was adopted, baptism is a symbolic "renaming." In Christ, you are a new creation: dead to the old, alive in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says it well:

"So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come!"

Living in the Father's House

After being adopted, living in my parents' home was an adjustment. It wasn't just about having food or a bed. It was about learning that I could stay without fear. That I could be clumsy, make mistakes, and still be loved.

Baptism works the same way spiritually. It's not a one-time check mark. It's the declaration that you have entered the Father's house. And in that house, you are safe. You are accepted. You are empowered.

Jesus' baptism shows us that belonging precedes behavior. He didn't heal the sick or preach the Sermon on the Mount first — He was baptized. And only then did the Spirit descend, equipping Him for the mission.

The Ongoing Battle

Even after adoption, both earthly and spiritual, there are moments when the orphan mentality creeps back in. Fear. Doubt. "Do they really love me? Do I really belong?" Baptism reminds us to step out of that mindset. To remember: you are claimed. You are loved. You are sent. The same God who stepped into the muddy Jordan steps into your mess today. He doesn't just see you surviving. He sees you *adopted*.

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As I was growing in Christ, I kept a journal and devoured Scripture. Then one day I read this in Romans 9,

"I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,' and I will call her who was unloved, 'My beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

I stopped cold. God was naming me.

God says I'm Somebody

When you're a teenager, the word "nobody" isn't just a word. It's a hallway you walk down at school. It's sitting alone at lunch because your friends found a better table. It's hearing your name only when you're in trouble. And I've been a nobody before. But God says, "I call nobodies and make them somebodies."

That wrecked me.

Because if God says I'm somebody, then I don't have to wait for friends or coaches or parents or anyone else to say it. And when you believe you're somebody? You walk different. Your eyes don't stay glued to the floor. You stop apologizing for existing. You even start imagining that maybe your life could matter to somebody else, too.

God says I'm Loved.

I will call her who was unloved, 'My beloved.' This one was harder for me to believe. Being loved sounds great until you realize it means letting someone see you — like, the real you. Not the "try hard" you or the "don't care" you. Deep down, everybody wants to be fully known and feel fully loved. God says, "Even if you mess up. Even if you're awkward. Even if you blow it — I still love you."

That's different. That's not crush-love or friend-love. That's stay-love.

God says I'm His Child.

This is the line that re-affirmed everything God had been teaching me all along:

"In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

I'm His kid, I'm not auditioning for His approval. I'm not bargaining with Him to keep me. He's already decided I'm in. Here's the thing: when you start to see yourself the way God sees you, it messes with you. In the best way.

Because if I'm somebody...

If I'm loved...

If I'm His child...

Then I don't have to hustle to matter. I don't have to beg for scraps of attention. I don't have to live like an orphan anymore. Baptism is about that — about letting the world know: *I see me the way He sees me now*. And once you see yourself like that...you can never unsee it.

The Mountain & The Window

o the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came up and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

-Matthew 28:16-20

Imagine the scene. It's sunrise on a mountain in Galilee. Below, stretched out like a quilt, are villages and deserts, seas and cities, every tribe and tongue Jesus had in mind when He spoke His final words. And there's Jesus — freshly resurrected, scars still visible, glory just beginning to leak through the cracks of the universe. He's going to give His disciples one last word before He ascends into heaven.

When someone important knows they're about to leave, their last words matter. If it's a grandparent on their deathbed, you lean in closer, straining to hear every syllable. If it's a friend at an airport, mouthing

something to you as they get on the plane, you study their lips from a distance.

Jesus looked across it all, and then back at the men who had followed Him for three years. "Go," He said. "Tell them. Baptize them. Teach them everything I've taught you. And remember — I am with you always."

It is the Great Commission. His last words before ascending into heaven. A mission so audacious it feels impossible: And right in the middle of it all? Baptism.

That fascinates me. Out of all the things He could've said — preach polished sermons, execute solid ministry strategies, tighten up your theology — He chose this: make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. Because baptism is not just a ritual. It's the doorway into discipleship. And I think about that mountain a lot. Because I had my own mountain. It just didn't look like theirs. Mine was a bedroom window.

My Galilee Moment

I was fourteen, maybe fifteen, when I started having these random dreams. They would linger and keep me awake sometimes even through the next night. My bed was positioned in the corner of the dorm room next to a window that faced out into the middle of the children's home campus. There was a light in the middle of the field, and the kids jokingly called it a prison spotlight to prevent us from escaping. I would press my forehead against that cold dorm window until the dew outside made the glass sting, and looking at that light I'd whisper prayers until I drifted off. Some nights it felt like heaven was only a breath away, waiting just outside the pane. I didn't pray polished prayers. I stumbled through words that sounded more like groans and wonderings. But in the middle of all that clumsy faith, I was falling in love with Jesus.

THE MOUNTAIN & THE WINDOW

And love like that has side effects. It leaks. Transformation isn't something you can quarantine. When God starts changing you, the newness spills into every crack and corner of your life. For me, it came as a restless desire: I wanted to see other people changed too. I wanted them to know Jesus the way I was starting to know Him — not as a distant figure in a book, but as someone who is alive. I imagined how conversations about Jesus could change everything for everyone. I became that kid at the lunch table, slipping Jesus into conversations like seasoning, hoping my friends would taste and see for themselves. It wasn't strategy. It wasn't slick. It was the overflow of a heart that was just waking up to calling.

There was one man who kept fanning that flame inside me — Mr. Mark. Out of sixty-something kids on campus, he had this way of noticing me. Most nights, he'd stop by my room. Not to lecture, not to enforce rules, not to tell me to turn out the light. He'd just sit down and pray with me, or let me ask questions.

I had so many questions. One night I asked him, dead serious, "What if the devil came into my room, and I shared the gospel with him? Do you think he would get saved?"

Mark chuckled. Not in a way that made me feel foolish, but in a way that made me feel seen. Then he looked at me and said, "You've got a passion for evangelism." That moment mattered. When someone steady points to a fire in you and names it for what it is, you stop trying to put it out. Those were the seedlings of a lifelong calling.

Learning in the Shadows

It was no accident that the man who would become my dad — the one who adopted me — was also a pastor. If Mr. Mark watered the soil of

my calling with encouragement, then my dad showed me what it looked like when calling grew into action. I became his shadow. Suddenly I was riding shotgun to hospital visits, late-night counseling sessions, and Sunday after Sunday of ministry.

I watched him preach, yes — but more importantly, I watched him love people when nobody else was watching. He showed me ministry wasn't just a pulpit; it was presence. It was listening. It was carrying burdens that weren't yours. Everything I know about ministry started in those car rides, those living rooms, those ordinary sacred moments.

Looking back, I realize I wasn't just tagging along. I was being discipled. I was being shaped into the kind of person who could someday stand on my own "Galilee mountain" and hear Jesus say, "Go. Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them."

Worshippers With Doubt

I love that Matthew's account of the Great Commission includes this line: "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted." Isn't that comforting? They were standing in front of the resurrected Jesus — radiant, alive — and still, some doubted. And yet those were the very people He entrusted with His mission. Not the religious professionals. Not the theologians. Just ordinary men, torn between worship and doubt.

That gives me hope. Because some days, even after years of ministry, I feel like that teenager with his head on the windowpane, wondering if God could really use me. And yet He says, "Go."

The Authority and the Weight

I'll never forget the first time I preached and invited people to be

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baptized. I was twenty-eight, a youth pastor, preaching the story of Naaman who dips in the water 7 times at the command of the prophet, and is healed from leprosy. "Don't stop at six," I told them. "Go all the way! Give your full self. Complete surrender." That night, twenty-six students were baptized.

I went home and laid my head on the pillow, feeling the joy of walking in the calling. And also the weight. Because now there were twenty-six new disciples who needed to be taught, trained, and sent. Baptism is the doorway, but discipleship is the house.

I didn't consider it at the time, but what I was living out was something ancient — something that started on another mountain two thousand years ago. Matthew 28 paints the picture. Eleven men stood on a hillside in Galilee, staring into the eyes of the risen Jesus. These weren't polished professionals. They were fishermen, tax collectors, zealots — ordinary men just like me who had followed Him long enough to know He was no ordinary man.

And then Jesus said words that must have rearranged their insides:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..."

That was the moment. The hinge point. They were no longer just students of a rabbi; they were carriers of a kingdom. The Great Commission wasn't just a task list — it was an identity shift. Jesus was saying, *This is who you are now. This is what your life is for.* That changes everything.

Leading The Resistance

In the first century, baptism wasn't sentimental. Nobody was handing out monogrammed towels. Nobody was making sure grandma got the

front row for the perfect family picture. There wasn't a hashtag waiting for it on the social feed. Baptism wasn't about nostalgia — it was about defiance. When you went under that water, you were saying out loud what could get you killed: "I have a new King, and His name isn't Caesar."

And honestly, nothing's changed. Baptism still whispers rebellion. It still says, "I don't belong to the world anymore. I belong to Jesus." In some countries, you can quietly believe in Jesus and fly under the radar, but the moment you're baptized, alarms go off. Because baptism is allegiance made visible. It's not a theory — it's treason against the darkness.

And that's what the Great Commission really is. Not a sales pitch. Not a product launch. It's an invitation to join the resistance. To stop being just a consumer of Jesus and actually become a contributor to His mission. It's taking your role in the story God is writing.

One of my favorite Sundays ever was a baptism service — a few dozen people went public with their faith that morning. But here's the part that still makes me smile: I didn't baptize a single one of them. Not one. I'm the pastor, the founder, the guy who gave the sermon and made the invitation. But that day, it wasn't my hands in the water. Friends were baptizing friends. Husbands baptizing wives. Moms baptizing their kids. Teenagers baptizing each other. And it hit me: this is what resistance looks like. Ordinary people stepping into the mission, carrying the torch, taking ownership of the kingdom. For just a moment, I think I caught a glimpse of what Jesus must have felt when His disciples started doing the work themselves.

When The Doubts Creep Back In

I imagine the disciples felt a strange mix of fear and wonder. Who were

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they to go into all nations? Who was I, a kid with his forehead pressed against a dorm window, to think God might use me to change anyone's life? But calling rarely makes sense at first. It stretches you into places you never thought you'd fit.

The disciples grew into their calling. At first, they stumbled. Peter and John got arrested. Thomas wrestled with doubt. Paul, who wasn't even there on the mountain, would later get beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. Calling isn't glamorous. It's costly. But step by shaky step, they accepted it, and the world was never the same.

That's the pattern, isn't it? We hear the call, often when we're still raw and unpolished. We accept it in fits and starts, not knowing what it will demand of us. And then, over time, God grows us into it.

When I think back to that window, that cold glass against my forehead, I realize I was in my own Galilee moment. The details were different, but the invitation was the same: to give my life to Jesus, not just in belief, but in mission. To be part of His story of redemption in the world.

I'm still learning what that means. I'm still growing in the calling. Some days it feels heavy. Some days I feel like that fifteen-year-old kid again, full of questions, wondering if God could really use me. But then I remember the disciples. I remember my Dad. I remember Mr. Mark. And I remember Jesus on that mountain, saying words that echo through centuries: *Go. Make disciples. I am with you always*.

The Lifelong Conversation

Baptism isn't the finish line. It's the doorway. Through it, we declare allegiance, confess the Triune God, dramatize the Gospel, and step into a new life. And every time I see it happen — whether in a river,

a baptistry, or a horse trough in someone's backyard — I remember: God still transforms people. God still calls.

Calling isn't a one-time event. It's a lifelong conversation. It's the window, the laughter of a mentor, the shadow of a pastor-dad, and the whisper of Jesus on a mountain. It's hearing Him say, "This is who you are now. This is what your life is for."

And it's waking up every day to say, trembling but willing: Okay, Lord. I'll go.

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Diving Deep

hat shall we say then? Are we to remain in sin so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)"

-Romans 6:1-7

Alright, let's just take a deep breath here and wade into Romans 6 the way you'd walk into the ocean. First your toes, then your ankles, and before you know it, the waves are pulling you further than you planned. That's what Paul does with sin and grace—he drags us out deep and then points back to the shore: "Don't forget where you came from, but also don't forget where you're going."

Sin: Dead but Still Noisy

Paul is basically saying: You can't be both dead and alive at the same time. If you've died to sin, then sin doesn't get to be your boss anymore. But here's the tricky part — sin doesn't take the hint. It's like an old landlord who still shows up at the apartment you moved out of, banging on the door, demanding rent.

Sin will knock, but the point Paul is making is that you don't live there anymore. You've changed addresses. You're not under its lease. You don't owe it anything. Freedom from sin doesn't mean sin magically disappears. It means sin has lost its legal right to dominate you. It's still there, still loud, still obnoxious, but powerless — unless you let it back in.

The Funeral and the Future

Here's where baptism shows up in Paul's argument. For Paul, baptism is a death ritual. It's a funeral. Your funeral. When you go down into the water, it's not a bath. It's a burial. You're saying, That old me? The one addicted, ashamed, angry, selfish? He's dead. We drowned him. And when you come up, you're not just dripping wet — you're alive in a whole new way.

The same power that raised Jesus from the grave is now pulsing in you. You can stare temptation in the face and say: I belong to resurrection life now. You can literally say to yourself: I've already died to that. That's not me anymore. I'm baptized. I've got a new identity.

The Mode Of Baptism

For some, when you think about baptism, you might imagine a polite little sprinkle. Like, someone flicking water on you with a spoon while saying "God bless you." Sort of like sneeze etiquette. But the more you

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dig into it, you will see baptism is not just about water — it's about story. Big story. Gospel story. And the mode of baptism actually matters, not because God gets hung up on technique like some divine referee, but because it's tied to the whole death—burial—resurrection story. It's meant to preach without words. But really, when you look at the words used to describe this, the mode reveals itself. You can't really bury somebody with a spray bottle.

A Plunge Into Transformation

English gives us the word *baptism*, but the Bible wasn't written in English. It came to us through Greek — a language that can feel a little intimidating at first, like every word belongs on a fraternity sweatshirt. But here's the good news: sometimes Greek is refreshingly straightforward.

Take the word baptizō. It's not just a fancy church word — it's a kitchen word. There's actually a distinction in Greek between baptō and baptizō. **Baptō** means to dip or wash. You baptō your dishes to get them clean. **Baptizō** goes further. It carries the idea of change, of transformation. You don't just dip a

cucumber in vinegar; you *baptizō it*, and it comes out a pickle. The cucumber doesn't just

get wet — it becomes something new.

That's the sense of the word in the New Testament. Baptism wasn't a polite sprinkling. It wasn't poetic fluff. It was full immersion, an act that pictured not only going under the water but coming out different. Changed. So when John the Baptizer was dunking people in the Jordan River, it wasn't a ritual for staying tidy. It was a plunge into transformation.

Jesus Didn't Take the Easy Way

I love how Matthew records Jesus' baptism: "After Jesus was baptized, just as he was coming up out of the water." That line is so simple it's easy to skip. But think about it — Jesus went down into the water and then came up out of the water. That's not how you describe somebody being sprinkled.

Same with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He and Philip both climbed into the water, like they were wading in together. And then they came out. If pouring a little water on his head was enough, Philip could have just carried a canteen and saved them both the trip. But immersion wasn't about convenience — it was about the picture.

The Drama of Death and Life

Paul takes this even further in Romans 6. He describes baptism as being "buried with Christ" and then raised to walk in new life. Colossians 2 repeats the same picture — burial and resurrection.

Let's pause and admit: the symbolism is kind of epic. It's like God gave the church its own living drama. The act of going under water is not just about cleansing (though that's in there too). It's about identifying with the whole Jesus story — His death, His burial, His resurrection.

Immersion tells the whole story in three acts:

Going under – that's death. You disappear. You're buried.

Being under – that's the grave. It's dark. It's final. You're gone.

Coming out – that's resurrection. New breath. New life.

It's like the gospel in fast-forward, and you get to play the lead role.

The Early Church Didn't Do Half-Dips

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Now, some people might say, "Well, maybe immersion came later. Maybe the early Christians were more chill about it." Except...they weren't. The Didache, which is basically a first-century how-to manual for church life, straight up says: baptize in running water. If you can't, use other water. If you really can't, then pour water three times. That's not anti-pouring, but notice how it frames it: immersion was the norm, pouring was the backup plan.

Church fathers like Tertullian and Origen also describe baptism as full-body washing, burial, rising. Archaeologists have even found baptisteries — massive stone tubs in early churches — big enough to dunk adults. You don't build a swimming-pool-sized baptistry if you're planning to sprinkle with a teaspoon.

Theology in 3D

So why does it matter? Why not just shrug and say, "God knows my heart"? Because immersion preaches without words. It's theology in 3D.

Death, burial, resurrection – the gospel enacted with your body.

Cleansing – not a little rinse, but a full plunge. Whole person, whole forgiveness.

Public witness – you're not hiding this decision. You're stepping into the water in front

of others, saying, "This is my new life." It's bold. It's not convenient, but that's kind of the

point.

But What About Sprinkling?

Sprinkling and pouring have history too. They popped up mainly out of necessity — when someone was too sick to be immersed, or when water was scarce. And God, being gracious, honored those moments. But the exception eventually became the rule in many traditions. The

original practice got traded for convenience.

Here's the key thing: baptism doesn't save you. Jesus saves you. Baptism is obedience, symbol, declaration. So no, I'm not saying the thief on the cross needed a dunk tank. But if we have the opportunity to do it the way Jesus and the early church did, why wouldn't we? It's kind of like writing a love letter by hand versus sending a text. Technically, both communicate the message. But one carries the weight of history, poetry, and presence.

The Grace to Get It Right (and Wrong)

This is where we need both conviction and grace. Conviction — because the Bible shows immersion as the normal, intended practice. Grace — because people's experiences and traditions differ. Some folks got sprinkled as babies and sincerely thought they were obeying Christ. God isn't up in heaven with a clipboard, shaking His head like, "Sorry, wrong method. Invalid." Grace matters. But so does truth. So the invitation is simple: if baptism is supposed to be burial and resurrection, then maybe it's time to go all in. Literally.

What It Means for The Church I Lead

When it comes to baptism, we try to keep it simple but sacred. We don't just hand someone a towel and hope they figure it out — we sit with them, pray with them, answer questions. I open the Scriptures and teach about what's really happening in that moment. It's not a ritual to check off. It's a story to tell, a confession to declare, a grace to receive.

I've baptized people in a church baptistry, in lakes, in swimming pools, even in makeshift troughs. To me, the location isn't the point. What matters is creating space where someone can step into the water and say with their whole life, "I belong to Jesus." I also try to lead with grace. Not

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everyone comes from the same background. Some people were sprinkled as infants, others never grew up in church at all. My job isn't to make anyone feel like they got it wrong before — it's to help them see the beauty and weight of being immersed into Christ now.

Baptism carries both weight and joy. It's heavy with meaning, yet light with celebration. I don't count baptisms like tallies on a scoreboard. I remember the stories. I see their faces. Because every time someone goes under the water and comes up dripping, it's not about numbers — it's about resurrection.

Going Under, Coming Up

At the end of the day, baptism by immersion isn't about arguing Greek verbs or pulling rank with church fathers. It's about telling the story of Jesus with your whole body.

The story where death doesn't win.

The story where graves don't hold.

The story where water becomes a stage, and you rise out of it dripping, gasping, alive.

It's not polite religion. It's resurrection theatre. It's messy and wet and unforgettable. So if you're wondering whether baptism by immersion is worth it, imagine this: you step into the water, shaky and unsure. You let yourself go under — buried with Him. For a breathless moment, it's all dark and silent. Then you come up, gasping, and the crowd cheers. You're dripping wet, grinning like a fool, and it hits you — this is new life.

That's the gospel. And you just preached it without saying a word.

The Chariot Ride

o Philip started speaking, and beginning with this scripture proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. Now as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, there is water! What is to stop me from being baptized?' So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any more, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through the area, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea."

-Acts 8:36-40

Most churches treat baptism as a polite tradition. Like casseroles at church potlucks or potpourri in the women's restroom — everybody assumes it's supposed to be there, but nobody really asks why. The baptismal tank gets filled once a year, and then we clap politely while somebody in a white robe gets dipped in the water, only to emerge dripping like they've just finished a polar plunge. The pastor gives a hug, someone takes a blurry photo, and then we all move on.

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But here's the thing — baptism isn't a side dish. It's a main course. It's not an accessory to faith; it's a proclamation. And not just any proclamation — it's one of the loudest, boldest, most misunderstood statements a Christian can make.

And when it comes to who should get baptized, and when, the church has been arguing about it for centuries. Is it for babies? For adults? For anyone who gets too close to a baptismal tank and slips in?

Here's the spoiler up front: baptism is only for those who've made a conscious, personal decision to follow Jesus. Which, spoiler number two, usually doesn't describe infants.

To really see this, we've got to walk with Philip down a desert road in Acts 8.

A Desert Road and a Surprising Question

Picture this. Philip — the same Philip who had been preaching in Samaria and watching crowds respond to the gospel — is told by an angel to leave all that ministry success behind and take a road through the desert. Not exactly a smart growth strategy. But Philip goes.

There on the road, he meets an Ethiopian eunuch riding in a chariot, reading Isaiah aloud. This guy is wealthy, educated, spiritually hungry. But he's also an outsider. Eunuchs weren't exactly invited into the inner circles of Jewish religious life. And yet, here he is, squinting at the scroll, trying to make sense of it.

Philip runs up, hears him reading, and asks, "Do you understand what you're reading?" The eunuch says, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?" So Philip climbs in, starting with Isaiah 53 — the prophecy of

the suffering servant — and tells him the good news about Jesus. And somewhere along that dusty road, the eunuch believes.

Then comes the line that changes everything.

"Look, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36) Not, "Should I wait until I've memorized some creeds?" Not, "Does this mean I have to sprinkle my kids now too?" Not, "Can I get baptized just in case I believe later?"

No. The eunuch hears the gospel, believes the gospel, and then immediately asks for baptism. This isn't just a historical footnote. It's the blueprint.

Belonging and Baptism

This was the last person anyone expected to be included. Wrong race. Wrong body. Wrong past. If anyone had reason to feel shut out, it was him. Yet the gospel flung the door wide open. That's what baptism is really about: belonging.

In the ancient world, a eunuch was usually a man who had been castrated, often while still young, so he could serve in a royal court without the risk of family entanglements, divided loyalties, or sexual scandal. Eunuchs could rise to positions of immense power, but their physical condition and the stigma that came with it meant they were always outsiders. And why wouldn't a eunuch belong in Israel's story? According to the law in Deuteronomy 23:1, eunuchs were barred from entering the assembly of the Lord. They could come close, but never all the way in. Always near, but never fully home.

Imagine living with that: able to worship from the fringes, but not welcomed at the table. Add to that the man's race — he wasn't Jewish,

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he was African. Add to that his job — he was a treasurer for a pagan queen. Add to that his body — forever altered in a way he did not choose. Every label screamed "outsider."

And yet, on that desert road, Philip opened the Scriptures and preached Jesus. And when they came to some water, the eunuch asked the only question that mattered: "What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" The answer was stunning: nothing. No race. No status. No past. Not even the very thing that once excluded him from God's people. The only requirement for baptism was faith in Christ.

This makes Christianity both the most exclusive and the most inclusive faith in the world. Exclusive, because Jesus is the only way to God. Inclusive, because *anyone* — no matter their history, identity, or wounds — can come through Him.

That's what Jesus does. He takes the people everybody else leaves out — tax collectors, fishermen, prostitutes, Samaritans, lepers, eunuchs — and He writes them into the story. He doesn't demand they conform before He includes them. He includes them first, and then He transforms them.

And here's something else: the eunuch probably wasn't traveling alone. He was a royal official, overseeing the treasury of Ethiopia's queen. That means he would have been surrounded by attendants, guards, and servants — an entire caravan watching him stop the chariot, step into the water, and be baptized in the name of Jesus. Can you imagine the scene? A man once barred from God's assembly, now fully welcomed, standing waist-deep in desert water as heaven declared, "This one belongs."

History tells us that this may not have been the end of his story. Some of

the earliest church traditions suggest that the Ethiopian eunuch carried the gospel back to Africa. In fact, Ethiopia became one of the first nations with a strong, enduring Christian presence. Think about it: the outsider became the first missionary to his homeland.

That's what belonging looks like. That's what baptism declares. That in Jesus Christ, no one is left out and everyone is invited to advance the mission.

When Is Someone Ready?

If baptism is meant for believers, the next big question is: when exactly is someone ready? The Bible doesn't give us an age, but it does give us a picture. A candidate for baptism should be able to:

Understand the gospel.

Repent and believe personally.

Publicly identify with Christ.

That rules out toddlers who can't even tie their shoes, let alone articulate faith. But it doesn't push baptism off until midlife either. Plenty of kids and teenagers can genuinely understand and respond to Jesus. As a rule of thumb, many churches look somewhere around ages seven to nine — old enough to grasp the basics, old enough to say it in their own words.

The youngest person I've ever baptized was five. I was nervous about it, so I knelt down to ask him a few questions. Within a few minutes I realized he either had the gospel in his heart or the best-acting parents in the world. When I asked why he wanted to be baptized, he said something like, "I prayed to receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I want my friends and family to believe too. Maybe if they see me get baptized, they will."

You don't argue with that.

Why I Believe Baptism Follows Faith

This is where the conversation sometimes gets tender. For many people, baptism is tied to a childhood memory they don't even recall — something done for them, not by them. I don't want to dismiss those stories or the deep faith of parents who longed to dedicate their children to God. I only want to share why, as I've searched Scripture, I've come to believe baptism is best understood as a personal act of faith.

When I look at Jesus Himself, Luke tells us He was baptized around thirty years old (Luke 3:21–23). That's not infancy — that's adulthood. And His baptism wasn't about forgiveness. It was about obedience, about stepping publicly into His Father's plan. Later, when Jesus gave His disciples their commission, He didn't say, "Find every stroller you can and baptize it." He said, "Make disciples... baptizing them" (Matthew 28:19). In other words: faith first, baptism next.

That's the same rhythm we see throughout Acts:

"Those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

"When they believed... they were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

"Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy

Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47).

The Philippian jailer and his household believed, then were baptized (Acts 16).

Every time, it's response, not prequel. Which is why I often describe baptism like a wedding ring. The ring doesn't make the vow; it declares it. Without the vow, the ring is just jewelry.

Peter calls baptism "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (1 Peter 3:21). Paul ties it to faith and adoption in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

And in Acts 2:38, it's linked with repentance. These are things you can't outsource or borrow. They have to be your own. That's why I believe baptism is best reserved for when faith is personal. Babies are beautiful, but they can't yet repent or consciously trust Jesus. Baptism is their future "yes" to God — not something spoken over them before they can speak it themselves.

Some have compared baptism to circumcision, the sign given to infants in Israel. But circumcision was an external mark tied to belonging to a nation. Baptism, Paul says, is being "buried with Christ... and raised with Him through faith" (Colossians 2:12). That's not just ritual. That's transformation. Circumcision marked you as part of a people. Baptism marks you as part of a new creation.

And that, to me, is the beauty of it. Baptism is deeply personal, yet also part of God's bigger story. It's not about erasing anyone's past — it's about clarifying what the water has always meant: belief first, then baptism. A step into the river with Jesus, where grace continues its work in us.

But Doesn't This Exclude People?

This is where people get nervous. "If we don't baptize babies, aren't we excluding them?" Nope. Baptism isn't what makes someone part of God's family. Faith does. Waiting for believer's baptism doesn't exclude children. It honors them. It lets them own their faith instead of borrowing yours.

Infant baptism is usually more meaningful for the parents than for the child anyway. It's a photo op, a grandparent moment, a proud-parent moment. Nothing wrong with those desires — but the biblical answer is baby dedication. That honors the parents' intentions without robbing

the child of their own future baptism moment.

Conviction and Invitation

Now here's the tricky part. Lots of people grew up in traditions that practiced infant baptism. They love Jesus. They're sincere. And they might feel like this conversation is a jab at their past. But God's grace isn't boxed in by our methods. He saves by faith, not by rituals. That doesn't mean we get sloppy with obedience. It just means we extend grace while we pursue truth.

Believer's baptism is both conviction and invitation. Conviction — because Scripture consistently links baptism with personal belief. Invitation — because anyone, at any time, can step into the water when the time is right.

Taking Ownership Of Your Faith Journey

I always remember Rebecca when I'm discussing this subject with others. Rebecca was seventeen when she made her decision to be baptized. She had grown up in church, prayed at the dinner table, sang the hymns her parents loved, and knew all the stories by heart. And yet, when I announced a baptism service at our upcoming youth gathering, she couldn't shake the nudge in her heart that this was her moment.

There was just one problem — she had already been baptized. As an infant, her dad, a devoted pedobaptist, had proudly stood in the church holding her tiny body while the minister sprinkled water on her head. To him, that act was sacred. It was his way of saying, "This child belongs to God."

So when Rebecca told him she wanted to be baptized at seventeen, he was stunned. Shocked, even. He couldn't understand why she felt

the need to "do it again." He worried her actions were in some way dishonoring to the faith and love he had poured into her at her birth. In a moment of frustration, he even pulled me aside — his voice low, but heavy with concern — and asked why I, as her youth pastor, would encourage something that seemed to dismiss her first baptism.

What he didn't see — at least not yet — was the struggle in Rebecca's heart. For weeks, she had wrestled with questions: Would my dad think I'm rejecting his faith? Am I saying my childhood baptism didn't matter? Will this cause a rift in my family? At seventeen, those were heavy fears. But she came to realize that her decision wasn't about rejecting her past — it was about owning her faith in the present. She wanted to step into the water, not because her dad had carried her there as a baby, but because Jesus had carried her here as a young woman.

When the day came, she walked into the water with quiet determination. I baptized her in front of her friends, her church family, and yes, her dad — who sat in his folding chair with arms crossed and uncertainty in his eyes.

But something shifted afterward. He saw his daughter climb out of the water with joy written all over her face, and it finally clicked. She wasn't rejecting him, or what he believed. She was embracing the very thing he had always wanted for her: a life fully surrendered to Christ.

Later, he admitted it to me, almost sheepishly. "I guess this isn't a bad thing after all. She chose for herself what I always prayed she would choose." That moment became a reminder for me, too: faith can be passed down, but it can't be lived secondhand. Rebecca's baptism didn't erase her first one — it fulfilled it.

What This Means for Me as a Pastor

For me, baptism isn't just a line item on a church calendar — it's something I walk with people through. I've learned not to assume that everyone knows what baptism is about. So I slow down. I teach it clearly. I tell the story of what baptism means in light of the gospel, not just what it looks like in the water.

When it comes to kids and new believers, I take extra time. I don't want them stepping into the baptistry because of pressure or tradition. I want them to know Jesus for themselves. I've had conversations at church, but also on living room couches and in coffee shops — always aiming for clarity, never rushing.

I encourage, but I don't push. Faith has to be genuine, and sometimes it takes years for someone to get to that point. That's okay. God writes the timeline, not me. And when people come from different church backgrounds, I try to be both gracious and faithful. Gracious, because baptism stories carry baggage for some. Faithful, because Scripture gives us a clear model. I want to hold truth and grace together in the way I lead.

Baptism, for me, is both weighty and joyful. It's weighty because of what it declares: death to the old, life in Christ. It's joyful because every person in the water is a living story of grace. Because baptism isn't about numbers. It's not about programs. It's about stories — real lives, real faith, real transformation.

Why Wait for Faith?

At the end of the day, believer's baptism isn't about excluding infants or complicating church life. It's about preserving the biblical link between faith and baptism. Jesus modeled it. The apostles preached

it. The early church practiced it. And the eunuch on the desert road proves it:

He hears the gospel.

He believes the gospel.

He sees the water.

He asks the question,

"What prevents me from being baptized?"

The answer then is the same answer now: nothing — if you believe.

Baptism is not a ritual for the unaware. It's a declaration for the believing. It's the moment you go public with the gospel written on your heart: death, burial, resurrection. And if you ask me, that's worth waiting for.

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e presented them with another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a person who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the plants sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared. So the slaves of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?' He said, 'An enemy has done this.' So the slaves replied, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, since in gathering the weeds you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, but then gather the wheat into my barn.'"

-Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus told a story about a farmer who planted good seed. Perfect rows of wheat, destined to become bread. The farmer slept at night with a full heart, knowing that what he planted would eventually feed his family, his village, maybe even his nation. But while he slept, an enemy crept in under the cover of darkness and scattered weeds across the same soil. By the time the wheat sprouted, so did the impostors.

The servants wanted to fix the problem immediately. "Do you want us to pull them up?" they asked. But the farmer said no. Because the roots of the wheat and the roots of the weeds were tangled together, and ripping one out too early would destroy the other. Let both grow together until the harvest.

It's the story of the world. Good and evil side by side. A Kingdom of wheat, and an infestation of weeds. A patient God, letting both grow for now, with the promise of a final harvest when all wrong will be undone.

But it's also the story of me. And probably you.

The Field in My Chest

Some days I feel like I have two different fields inside me. One is lush, green, full of promise. I sense God's Spirit at work — hope taking root, faith pushing through the soil, love stretching toward the light. But then, just as quickly, another crop appears. Anger. Lust. Jealousy. Cynicism. These weeds grow fast, often faster than the wheat. And the roots get tangled. I can't just yank them out without ripping something good in me too.

Paul described this in Romans: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing." That's the wheat-and-weeds tension. It's not just "out there in the world." It's "in here in my chest." Baptism, in that light, is not just a ritual with water. It's a winnowing. A cutting off. A burial of the old so the new can breathe.

Baptism as Winnowing

A farmer eventually separates the wheat from the chaff. Winnowing is messy — dust flying everywhere, grain falling heavy to the ground while the husks blow away in the wind. That's what baptism symbolizes.

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The Spirit begins winnowing me — burning off what doesn't belong, separating the false from the true.

The old nature doesn't just disappear instantly, though. The weeds still grow. But in baptism, I pledge allegiance to the wheat. To Christ, the Bread of Life. And little by little, His life in me starts to choke out the weeds.

I've Lived This Parable.

When I was eleven years old, my baseball team got together for a sleepover. I was pumped for all the things eleven-year-old boys love — basketball, whiffle ball, trampoline, swimming, four-wheelers, and at least three pounds of Cheez-Its. But later that night, the fun took a darker turn. In the upstairs bonus room, whispers started circling. One guy stood watch at the door, another blocked the stairs, and then Adam — the tall middle schooler with a peach-fuzz mustache — unzipped his backpack and pulled out an unmarked VHS tape he'd stolen from his uncle.

The mystery of that tape was electric. I felt like a kid strapped into his first roller coaster, "click, click, click" up the hill, bracing for the drop. And then the ride began. Images flashed across the screen — images that branded themselves into my mind. It wasn't scrambled cable or a half-hidden magazine; this was a whole new level. And I was hooked.

In the days and weeks that followed, my memory clung to every image, every movement, every face. I thought I had found treasure, but instead I had swallowed weed seed. What looked like fruit was actually poison. The thrill grew like a fast-spreading vine, wrapping around my thoughts, choking out joy. And along with the rush came a flood of shame. The highs always ended in a crash, and the guilt left me hollow. I wanted to

stop, but I couldn't. The weeds had taken root.

That VHS tape planted something in me that followed me through my teen years and into adulthood. Even in Bible college, called to ministry, I was still secretly trapped. I tried everything — sheer willpower, long prayers, self-made promises. But every time I thought I had pulled the weeds up, they grew back stronger.

Freedom didn't come by yanking at the weeds myself. It came when I let the wheat grow. It started with confession. With confession came accountability. With accountability came prayer. And slowly — not overnight, but over time — the life of Christ in me began to push back the weeds. His Spirit nourished what was true until the false began to lose its grip. The cravings weakened. The shame loosened. And eventually, what had once ruled me was dethroned.

To this day, I keep guardrails in place to protect my eyes and heart. Because weeds don't stop trying to sprout. But here's what I know now: my freedom didn't come from my strength. It came from God's favor. From His patient work of separating the weeds from the wheat in me.

The Patient Farmer

The farmer's refusal to rip out the weeds right away used to frustrate me. Why wait? Why let evil linger? But now I see the mercy in it. If God immediately uprooted every trace of sin in me, I wouldn't survive the process. My whole heart would be shredded.

Instead, He's patient. He lets the wheat grow stronger, deeper. He gives me space to bear fruit, even while weeds still exist around me. Baptism is a visible mark that I belong to Him, but sanctification — the slow growth of holiness — is the lifelong inward harvest.

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And one day, He promises, the weeds *will* be pulled out. Evil will be burned up, not just in the world but in me. My divided heart will finally be whole.

The Three Tenses of Salvation

Salvation in Scripture isn't just one-and-done. It's a whole timeline you're living inside.

We are saved (Past tense).

That moment you trusted Christ, you were rescued. Forgiven. Justified. It's like the verdict came down from heaven's courtroom: *Not guilty. Belongs to Jesus.* Done. Finished. Signed in blood.

We are being saved (Present tense).

This is where most of us live day-to-day. Sanctification. God is still chiseling at us, smoothing rough edges, detoxing our souls. Think of it like rehab after surgery — you're already healed, but you're learning how to walk in that healing. Grace is an ongoing renovation project in your heart. And you are realizing you have more power over sin than it has over you.

We will be saved (Future tense).

One day, the work will be complete. No more sin's noise, no more temptation's shadow. Glorification. This is the part where every crack in your character is mended, every tear wiped away, and you're finally whole. You're not just free from sin's penalty and power — you're free from its presence forever.

When sin whispers, "You can't change. You'll always be this way," you answer back:

Nope, I was saved — the old me is dead.

I am being saved — God's Spirit is rewiring my desires.

And I will be saved — the day is coming when sin won't even exist in me anymore.

It's past, present, and future grace colliding in your ordinary Tuesday morning. Sin may still talk, but you don't have to listen. Baptism reminds you that you've already had the funeral. And salvation — past, present, future — means you're not stuck in the cycle. You've been written into a better story.

The Bread of Life

When Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life, He was claiming to be the wheat that sustains us. Baptism ties us into His death and resurrection — our old weed-like self drowned, our new wheat-self raised. And here's the beauty: wheat isn't just grown to sit in a barn. It's milled, kneaded, baked, and broken so it can feed the hungry. In the same way, God intends to use our lives to nourish others. The weeds choke and steal. The wheat feeds and multiplies.

There was a stretch of ministry when my sermons stopped sounding like good news and started sounding like thinly veiled rants. I was tired — tired of criticism, tired of complaints, tired of people acting like church was a customer service counter and I was the clerk. My heart was growing cold toward the very people I was called to love. During sermons, pain started leaking out — sometimes through sarcasm, sometimes through anger, sometimes just through a tone that was more defensive than pastoral.

It wasn't just the preaching. Everything in ministry felt heavy. I was still doing the work — visits, meetings, Sundays — but inside I was boneweary. Not the kind of tired a nap fixes, but the kind that hollows you

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out. My prayers were thin. My Bible reading tasted like dry bread. I was a pastor standing in a field where both wheat and weeds were growing, and honestly, I felt like the weeds were winning.

Then came a phone call. Someone in the church was in crisis. They didn't need polished answers or a three-point outline. They just needed presence. I remember driving over, praying the only prayer I could muster: "Lord, I don't have much right now. But if You can use what's left, use it."

I sat with them, listened, and at some point I shared a verse I had been clinging to myself: "God is near to the brokenhearted." I admitted I didn't always feel it, but I believed it was true. To me, it felt like I handed them crumbs. But to them, it was bread. Something shifted — tears came, hope stirred, a flicker of light broke into the darkness. Later, they told me that moment gave them strength to keep going.

I drove home still weary, still wrestling, but in awe. Somehow, God had taken the weeds of my weakness and woven them into someone else's harvest of wheat. That moment taught me what I keep forgetting: God doesn't wait for perfect fields before He plants His grace. He works in the messy ones — fields where weeds and wheat grow side by side. And sometimes, the very weakness I assume disqualifies me is the soil where God chooses to bear fruit.

Strength may impress people, but weakness is what makes us relatable. It's when I let others see the weeds — that I'm human, broken, still in process — that they lean in and actually listen. And I think that's what pastoring has slowly been teaching me: the goal isn't to pull up every weed. The goal is to trust that even in the mixed-up soil of my own life, God can still grow wheat.

The Coming Harvest

One day the wheat and weeds will be separated for good. The field of the world will be cleansed. My own field, too. And what remains will be gathered into God's barn — safe, whole, alive. Until then, baptism reminds me: I belong to the Bread of Life. And even when weeds grow tall around me, the harvest is certain.

Through The Water

oses stretched out his hand toward the sea, and the Lord drove the sea apart by a strong east wind all that night, and he made the sea into dry land, and the water was divided. So the Israelites went through the middle of the sea on dry ground, the water forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians chased them and followed them into the middle of the sea – all the horses of Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. In the morning watch the Lord looked down on the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud, and he threw the Egyptian army into a panic. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving, and the Egyptians said, 'Let's flee from Israel, for the Lord fights for them against Egypt!' The Lord said to Moses, 'Extend your hand toward the sea, so that the waters may flow back on the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen!' So Moses extended his hand toward the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state when the sun began to rise. Now the Egyptians were fleeing before it, but the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the middle of the sea. The water returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the army of Pharaoh that was coming after the Israelites into the sea – not so much as one of them survived!"

-Exodus 14:21-28

When I was a kid, I used to throw sticks into the spokes of my friend's bike tires. It was a dumb kind of entertainment — the kind that makes sense when you're ten and bored on a summer afternoon. One time, the stick caught just right, and my buddy flew over his handlebars like Superman without a cape. He landed in the grass, laughing and bleeding at the same time.

I thought about that story recently while reading Exodus. Because tucked inside the story of Israel walking through the Red Sea is this strange little detail: God literally jams up the Egyptians' chariot wheels. Pharaoh's soldiers are chasing Israel into the sea, and suddenly their wheels grind and drag like someone threw a stick in the spokes. Panic. Chaos. Soldiers screaming, "The Lord fights for them!" before the waters close in.

It made me laugh, in that nervous, holy kind of way.

Water in the Bible is so interesting to me. It's never just water. It's always a story. A crossing. A cutting. A beginning. And here's the part that gets me — every single one of us has to face it. The crossing. The water. The choice.

The Story Beneath the Story

The Israelites stood at the edge of the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army pressing down behind them. Try to picture it. Mothers clutching babies. Fathers hoisting sacks of bread and borrowed jewelry on their backs. Children asking, "Are we there yet?" while sand stung their eyes. And behind them: the thunder of hooves, the grinding of wheels, the flash of swords in the desert sun.

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Egypt wasn't just a country; it was a system of slavery that refused to let go. Pharaoh didn't just want cheap labor — he wanted control. Even after the plagues, even after burying his firstborn, he couldn't stand the thought of Israel walking free.

So God does something absurd. He splits the sea in two. Walls of water tower on both sides. Dry ground stretches like a highway to freedom. Israel steps in. Every footprint preaches the same sermon: You are leaving your old life behind. You are not slaves anymore.

But Pharaoh can't let go. He charges in. His army clatters down the same path Israel just walked. And that's when God jams the wheels. They panic. Moses raises his staff. The waters crash back. Egypt is cut off. Israel is free.

Here's the thing: as far as Israel could walk, they walked. They did their part. But at some point, you hit the end of yourself. And that's where God begins. I know that place well. Somewhere between the end of myself and the beginning of God. God doesn't just pull us out of slavery — He cuts us off from it. The waters close. Egypt is behind us. The old life loses its claim.

Which brings us to the next page in the story: circumcision.

Because the Red Sea wasn't just about water — it was about cutting off the old life. This is where the story deepens. The Red Sea wasn't just about water. It was about cutting. In the Old Testament, belonging to God meant circumcision. If you wanted to convert to Judaism as an adult, it required going under the knife. It was physical surgery. This procedure marked God's chosen people and set them apart from the world. A literal cutting away of flesh. Intimidating? Absolutely. Which

is why Jewish parents scheduled it for the eighth day — because nobody signs up for that at twenty. But the symbolism mattered: to belong to God, something old had to be cut off. Something had to die.

Fast-forward to Paul, who reframes it in Colossians 2:

"When you came to Christ, you were circumcised, but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision, cutting away your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with Him, you were raised to new life."

In other words: baptism is the new circumcision. Not the cut of the body, but the cut of the heart. That's why the number eight keeps surfacing. Babies circumcised on the eighth day. Noah — eight souls — saved through the flood. Peter draws the connection: "…eight souls were delivered through water. And this prefigured baptism, which now saves you — not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience to God." (1 Peter 3:21).

Eight means new beginnings. Eight means God is cutting off the old. Eight means you've crossed into something new.

Noah's Boat

The world of Noah's day was dripping with violence. Genesis 6 says every thought of humanity was bent toward evil. The earth itself was "corrupt and filled with violence." So God presses reset. How? Water. The skies crack open. Fountains erupt. Rain falls for forty days. The old world — the wicked, the corrupt, the dark — drowns beneath the waves.

And floating above it all is an ark shaped like a coffin. A tomb on water, carrying eight souls — Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives. When the flood finally recedes, Noah steps out onto a cleansed world. It's not

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perfect — he proves that quickly — but it's new.

The pattern is unmistakable. Water. The old cut off. The new beginning. It's the same as the Red Sea. And it's the same as baptism.

Naomi's Tears

Then there's Naomi. Her old life wasn't marked by sin or slavery — it was marked by tragedy. A famine drove her family from Bethlehem into Moab. There, her husband died. Her sons married Moabite women, but then they died too. By the time Naomi packed her bags, she was a widow who had buried her husband and both her boys.

Her name meant "pleasant." But she renamed herself "Mara" — bitter. It's easy to preach about sin like Pharaoh's army, or wickedness like Noah's generation. But sometimes the old life isn't rebellion. Sometimes it's just pain and hardship.

Naomi stands at the border of Moab with Ruth beside her, staring across the Jordan River. That river had once opened for Joshua's army, but now it opens to a grieving widow with nothing left but a stubborn daughter-in-law who refuses to leave her side. Ruth's vow echoes: "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God."

So they cross.

And here's the miracle: on the other side isn't just survival — it's redemption. Naomi finds bread again in Bethlehem. Ruth finds Boaz. And through their line comes David. And through David comes Jesus.

The crossing didn't erase Naomi's grief. But it reframed it. Her pain became part of a bigger story. What was bitter began to turn sweet. And

that's baptism too. It's not just about drowning sin — it's about God redeeming sorrow. Carrying our wounds into a story where resurrection gets the last word.

I've never known the hunger of famine or the grief of burying a spouse. But I have walked through what I call my *Naomi season* — divorce. Divorce is a famine of the soul. It's waking up in Moab with your hands empty and your heart hollow. I remember the sting of it — the nights staring at a TV, the long drives with no destination, the quiet of an empty house where laughter used to echo. And the hardest part wasn't the silence. It was the loss of identity. Ten years of my life had been bound up in another person, and when it ended, I didn't know who I was anymore.

Naomi said, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. The Lord has made me bitter." I get that. Divorce makes you bitter. Everything feels torn apart — your home, your stuff, even your soul. Court dates strip away what little remains until you're left wondering, *Is this really how it's supposed to be?*

Some people tried to comfort me with Bible verses. Others just reminded me that God hates divorce. And I thought, Yeah. I hate divorce too. Maybe God hates it because of how much it hurts the people He loves.

But even in Moab, God was not finished. In my bitterness, He surrounded me with people who cared — friends who carried me, moms who fed me, brothers who prayed for me. They were my Ruths, refusing to leave even when I tried to push them away.

And slowly, redemption came. Not as a lightning bolt, not as a quick fix. It sparked one Sunday morning in church. During a baptism service, of all things. While new believers were surrendering their lives to Christ in

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the water, I remembered my own baptism. I remembered not just who I was, but whose I am. And in that moment, I realized my circumstances did not define God's character. Jesus began to renew a right spirit within me.

Eventually, redemption wore flesh and showed up in the form of a new love — a woman who carried her own grief and her own scars, and a little girl who became my daughter. Just like Boaz stepping into Naomi's story, God wrote hope back into mine. Today, our broken stories are stitched together by His hand. We are a family, living proof that God turns bitterness into blessing, and emptiness into fullness.

Naomi thought her story was over. I thought mine was too. But God had another chapter waiting. He still does.

Jesus in the Jordan

This brings us back to Jesus. He walks twenty miles to the Jordan River. Twenty miles of dust, sweat, and sore feet. Why? To be baptized.

He waits in line with everybody else — tax collectors, soldiers, ordinary sinners desperate for a fresh start. And when John lowers Him into the river, the heavens tear open. The Spirit descends like a dove. The Father's voice thunders: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

But notice what happens next. Matthew says the Spirit immediately leads Him into the wilderness. Forty days of hunger, loneliness, and temptation.

From water to wilderness. Sound familiar? Israel walked through the Red Sea, then wandered forty years in the desert. Jesus walked through

the Jordan, then fasted forty days in the desert. It's the same pattern. The same story. And that's baptism for us. It's both crossing and calling. Freedom and fight. Rescue and refinement. It's God's way of saying the story isn't finished — it continues in you. Baptism is an invitation to step inside that story and let your life become the next chapter of God's ongoing work.

Our Crossing

Baptism is the line in the water. On one side: slavery, addiction, shame, sorrow. On the other: freedom, grace, promise, joy.

In between? Water.

The Israelites couldn't stay on the shoreline. Noah couldn't stay on dry ground. Naomi couldn't stay in Moab. Jesus didn't stand on the bank of the Jordan and nod politely — He stepped in. And so must we.

Why It Matters

Maybe you were sprinkled as a baby, and now you're not sure if baptism really counts. You don't want to offend your parents or grandparents, because in their eyes, that moment was sacred. To revisit it now feels like you're undoing their prayers. Here's the thing: baptism is not about dishonoring your family; it's about honoring the God who's calling you today. The faith of your parents was a beautiful gift — but now you get to own that faith for yourself. This isn't a rejection of their devotion; it's a continuation of their prayers.

Maybe you got dunked as a kid at summer camp because all your friends did it. You sang the songs, you cried the tears, but you didn't really understand what it meant. And now you wonder — should I do it again? Wouldn't that make the first time meaningless? Not at all.

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It's not that your first baptism "didn't count" — it's that baptism is meant to be tied to your faith, not your friend group. If your understanding was cloudy then, let the waters be clear now. God isn't trying to erase your past — He's inviting you to anchor your present.

Maybe you've put it off for more practical reasons. "My hair looks too good for that." "I don't want to be standing in front of everybody, soaking wet." "What if my makeup runs?" But here's the reality: the gospel has always been undignified. Jesus didn't hang on a cross with perfect hair. He didn't worry about appearances when He bled for you. Baptism is an invitation to lay down your vanity for a moment so you can take up glory forever.

Or maybe you've thought, "I'll do it when my family can be there." You don't want to rush it, because you want everyone important in your life to witness it. That's understandable — but don't let scheduling become your Pharaoh. Don't let calendars hold you in chains. Baptism is first about obedience to Jesus. And when you step into the water, you're surrounded by your spiritual family — the church. Trust God to take care of the rest.

Sometimes we hold back from God because of little inconveniences or fears. The truth is, baptism is about letting go of control. If you can trust God with your eternity, you can trust Him with all the little things.

Deep down, you know. God is calling you to cross. And if you've already been baptized, baptism is still a gift. A memory. A touchstone. A reminder of the day your Pharaoh drowned. The day your floodwaters receded. The day you stopped being Mara and started tasting bread again. Because baptism isn't just about water — it's about story. Rescue. Rebirth.

Pharaoh Still Chases

Of course, Pharaoh doesn't give up easily. Even after baptism, the old life tries to chase you down. Addiction whispers. Shame resurfaces. Sin lurks in the desert, offering shortcuts and lies. But your baptism is a reminder: Pharaoh has already drowned. The chariot wheels are jammed. The flood has receded. The Jordan has been crossed. The tomb is empty.

Sanctification — the long, slow process of becoming holy — is basically learning to live like the water really did part. Like Pharaoh really is dead. Like bitterness really can turn sweet.

Have You Crossed?

I once heard a Navy SEAL named Eddie Penney tell his story. It wasn't in some polished auditorium with lights and microphones. It was at a men's retreat, late at night, the kind of setting where you can smell smoke on your clothes for days. Eddie stood there, not as the warrior most men at the retreat had imagined him to be, but as a broken man, undone by the presence of God.

He had lived what most of us would call the dream — special operations, the prestige of the trident, a life of adrenaline and brotherhood that Hollywood tries to capture but always gets wrong. But underneath the medals and missions was a man unraveling. The wars overseas had bled into wars at home. He was haunted by loss, hardened by violence, and numbed by the cheap thrills of sin that followed him stateside.

For years, Eddie had built walls around his heart thick enough to keep out any sign of weakness. But at the retreat, by the glow of the fire, those walls cracked. As he told it, God showed him scene after scene of his life — the anger, the pride, the women, the drinking, the violence. He said it

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was like watching a movie of himself, except this time he couldn't look away, and he couldn't make excuses. Every frame whispered the same truth: *this has to die.*

The tears came — not quiet tears, but the guttural sobs of a man who'd carried too much for too long. His teammates might have called him unbreakable in the field, but here he was, broken before the only One who could put him back together. And in that moment, Eddie realized something: he had been living on the wrong side of the water.

You see, in Scripture, water is the great divider. Egypt on one side, freedom on the other. Death on one side, life on the other. Chaos on one side, creation on the other. Eddie knew exactly what side he'd been on. The side of control. The side of self. The side that felt like strength but was really slavery. And standing there by the fire, he also knew: it was time to cross over.

Baptism doesn't save a man — Jesus does. But baptism is the place you draw the line. The place where you say out loud, "The old me stays buried, and the new me rises." Eddie's story is proof that it's not about how tough you are, how disciplined you've been, or how many missions you've survived. In fact, sometimes your toughness is the very Pharaoh that chases you down to the water's edge. And only God can drown it.

That night, Eddie crossed. He let go of the old. He embraced the new. And now, when he tells his story, you don't just hear about Navy SEAL grit — you hear about resurrection. You hear about a man who finally found freedom, not in strength but in surrender.

The Bible is relentless on this point: God saves His people through water. Noah. Moses. Naomi. Joshua. Jonah. Jesus. You. Me. The pattern

repeats: the old cut off, the new born. The past drowned, the future opened.

So the question isn't, *Do I need to cross*? The question is, *Have I crossed yet*? And if you have, then maybe the question is, *Am I living like I crossed*? Because baptism is rescue. It's rebellion. It's Pharaoh drowning, Noah floating, Naomi crossing, Jesus rising — and you being set free.

So don't stand on the shoreline. Step in. Cross over. Be cut off from the old so the new can thrive. Because with God, the story always begins again — on the other side of the water.

Living Soaked

hen Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished. The tempter came..."

—Matthew 4:1-3

The problem with so many of our faith journeys is that we treat baptism like it's graduation. You wear the new tee, get your picture taken, maybe a certificate for the fridge, and then you think you've crossed the finish line. Done. Sealed. Over. But baptism is not the end of the race. It's the starter's pistol. It's the blast that sets your feet in motion for the long road ahead.

Think about Israel. God didn't bring them through the Red Sea just to say, "Congratulations, you're free now. Sit tight, I'll bring the Promised Land to you like Amazon Prime." No — crossing the water was only step one. What followed was wilderness. Testing. Manna. War. Trusting. Learning. Failing. Trying again. The same is true for us. Baptism is a line in the sand, but it's not the whole journey. It's God saying, "You're mine now. Follow Me. Trust Me when the desert gets hot."

Every time I baptize someone, I try to remind them of that. The water isn't just symbolic. It's a calling. An invitation. A chance to step into the story God has been telling since the beginning of time. And the current doesn't stop. Every choice afterward is living in that flow, letting it shape your heart, your eyes, your hands.

Sandy's Story

I will always remember Sandy's baptism. Sandy was one of the very first people to be baptized at our church, back when we were just getting started over ten years ago. I remember her from those early days — quiet, thoughtful, and wrestling with faith in a way that was raw and real. She would leave little notes on our connect cards, scribbled prayers and questions that revealed the battles in her heart. And sometimes, I'd look out at the congregation while preaching and see her tears quietly falling, her soul straining toward God in the middle of the sermon.

The day we finally opened the baptism tank, I called for anyone ready to step into the water. Sandy hesitated at first. You could see it — the weight of doubt and fear pressing against her. But then she stepped in. And when she came up, she was sobbing, soaked, and wide-eyed, as if the water itself had carried her beyond her own limitations. It was one of those moments where the river of God becomes tangible, where you can see the Spirit at work, moving someone through fear into freedom. That day wasn't just about a ceremony — it was about a story in motion, a life being carried forward by the current of God's grace.

Today, Sandy serves on our leadership team as pastoral staff, walking alongside others in faith, leading with the same vulnerability and courage she displayed in those first steps into the water. Her story reminds me — and all of us — that baptism isn't just an event. It's the beginning of a lifelong journey, a river we step into and keep moving

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through, sometimes hesitant, sometimes trembling, but always carried by the love of God.

Walking Worthy of the Calling

Paul said it like this: "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1). That's baptism language. Covenant language. It's also traveling language. God calls us out of Egypt, out of sin, and He says, "Now walk with Me."

Walking worthy doesn't mean perfect. It doesn't mean you never trip. It means you keep putting one foot in front of the other. It means when you fall, you get back up and keep going. It means you live like someone who has drowned Pharaoh in the water and stepped out into new life.

Sometimes people look back at their baptism like it's a picture on the wall. A relic. Something old and dusty. But baptism isn't just past tense. It's a calling that continues every day.

Walking worthy isn't flashy. It isn't a fireworks show. It's learning how to live soaked.

Remembering Your Baptism

The famous reformer, Martin Luther used to wake up in the morning, splash water on his face, and say out loud: "I am baptized!" Not "I was baptized." Not past tense. Present. Active. Today. Baptism is not just a date on the church calendar. It's an identity. It's who you are.

When Israel walked through the Jordan into the Promised Land, they renewed their covenant by being circumcised again. God wanted them to remember: You're not slaves anymore. You belong to Me.

The same is true for us. Remembering your baptism is remembering that you belong. When shame whispers, "You're still the same old you," baptism shouts back, "No — I've crossed. I'm new. Pharaoh drowned. Egypt is behind me."

Baptism as a Lifelong Calling

If baptism is the start, then discipleship is the marathon. It doesn't end until we step into the Promised Land of eternity. The call of baptism is lifelong because it keeps asking us the same question: *Are you still crossing? Are you still leaving Egypt behind?*

At a wedding, the vows are spoken once, but living them takes every day. No one stands at the altar, says "I do," and then says, "Great, I'm done with marriage." No — the vow is the starting point. The covenant continues.

In baptism, you've said "I do" to Jesus. Now every day you live it out. Every day you re-say those vows with your choices, your habits, your surrender. And here's the beautiful thing: baptism is also a promise on God's side. He says, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. You are mine." When you forget, He remembers. When you fail, He forgives. When you fall, He raises you up again.

Wet In The Wilderness

To follow Jesus is to live wet. To live like someone who has been washed, buried, and raised. It's not about perfection. It's about direction. It's about leaning into the story that God already wrote into your bones when you came up dripping. Every temptation you face is Pharaoh calling your name again. Every shame you carry is Egypt begging you back. But every time you remember your baptism, you remember: Pharaoh is dead. Egypt is drowned. You are free.

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So live soaked. Walk worthy. Keep crossing. Because baptism wasn't your finish line — it was the doorway into a life of discipleship that never ends.

I've always been fascinated by the turn of a page from Matthew 3 to Matthew 4.

Chapter 3 — Jesus is in the water.

Chapter 4 — Jesus is in the wilderness.

Jesus didn't march straight from the river to a throne. He didn't go from that spiritual high into a parade of glory. He went straight into the wilderness. No confetti. No applause. No honeymoon period. Just sand, silence, and Satan.

That's the pattern.

Israel came through the Red Sea — water, freedom, salvation — only to find themselves in the desert.

Jesus came through the Jordan — water, identity, mission — only to find Himself face-to-face with the enemy.

And you and I come through baptism — water, new life, belonging — only to find ourselves in a world full of temptation.

The wilderness is where faith gets tested.

Why Do I Keep Wading Back In?

Let's be honest: temptation is not an abstract idea for us. It's real. I've had those moments where I swore up and down, "Never again." Never again will I get sucked into gossip. Never again will I lose my temper. Never again will I open that website, or cheat on a test, or let fear run my decisions.

And then... splash.

There I am again, swimming in the very water I promised myself I'd stay out of. It feels absurd when you say it out loud:

- —"I said I was going to be non-judgmental, but then they spent money they didn't have on a boat they didn't need, and there I was...arms crossed."
- —"I said I'd eat right and take care of my body, but somehow my food groups have whittled down to candy, candy canes, candy corn, and syrup. Buddy the Elf would be proud."
- —"I said I'd stop cussing and start using educated words. But then someone cut me off in traffic, and suddenly I was fluent in profanity again. And of course, it was their fault—they made me say it."

Why do we do this?

Why do we find ourselves behaving in ways we know better?

Why do we keep diving back into waters we promised we'd never swim in again?

Who Pushed Us In The Water?

Not God. He may have led you into the wilderness, but He is not pushing you into sin. The first thing James tells us is clear: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone." (James 1:13)

God doesn't tempt because He's holy. That word *holy* might sound intimidating or dusty, but it simply means *separate*. Cut off from sin. Free from darkness. Pure light. John writes it this way: "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) Not an ounce. Not a shadow. Not even a whisper of evil. So when you're in the wilderness and temptation comes knocking, you can know this much for certain: it didn't come from Him. There are three usual suspects.

The Devil.

After Jesus was baptized, Matthew tells us, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1). The Spirit leads. The devil shows up. That's how it goes. The devil whispers, nudges, suggests, throws bait — but he can't make you bite. We love to say, "The devil made me do it," but that's just a cop-out. The devil doesn't have that power. He's clever, though. The devil tempts but He does not force.

The World.

Then there's the world. Shiny promises, easy applause, instant gratification. Demas, a ministry partner of Paul's, loved the world more than the mission and deserted him (2 Tim. 4:10). That's how the world works. It seduces. It distracts. And every time we chase its glitter, we feel farther from God.

The world says, "Take it all. Don't deny yourself." Jesus says, "Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Me." The world says, "Blend in. Conform." Paul says, "Transform. Renew your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

Our Own Desires.

And then, sometimes, temptation doesn't need a devil or a world. Sometimes it just needs me. James says it plainly: desire comes first, then sin, then death (James 1:14–15). That's the slippery slope. One small craving. One little compromise. Left unchecked, it destroys — not just me, but marriages, families, careers, ministries. The wilderness is often staring back at me in the mirror.

The Halftime Moment

I like the story of the Patriots playing the Jets once. The Jets were 0-9, but by halftime, the Patriots were behind. Coach Josh McDaniels walks

into the locker room and says, "Hey — we're going to win this game." Sometimes that's what we need: a halftime pep talk.

Temptation feels like game over, but it's not. Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. God is faithful... He will provide a way out" (1 Cor. 10:13). You can win. Not because you're strong, but because God is faithful.

How to Fight

It comes down to four things:

- 1. **Memorize Scripture.** Jesus fought temptation with the Word. "It is written." Quote it. Live it. Let it defend you.
- 2. **Resist.** Submit to God, resist the devil. He flees. You don't just pray once; you keep standing.
- 3. **Run.** Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is get out of harm's way. Don't cozy up to the fire. Flee. Protect your heart.
- 4. **Run to God.** When shame tries to leash you "You failed again" run to the throne of grace. Hebrews says we have a High Priest who empathizes, who walks with us in weakness (Heb. 4:15–16).

My Wilderness

I'll be honest. After baptism, seminary, even planting a church, I thought I'd outgrow some temptations. They just changed outfits. As a pastor, I'm tempted to measure my worth by the crowd. As a business owner, I'm tempted to cut corners. As a dad, I'm tempted to lose patience. Baptism didn't end the wilderness. It started it. But I don't walk it alone. Jesus already walked this road, and He walks it with me now.

Living Baptized in the Desert

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Baptism isn't just about the past. It's about the wilderness ahead. Temptation isn't if — it's when. Pharaoh will call. Egypt will beckon. But there is a way out. There is a Savior in the sand. So don't lose heart. Don't believe the lie that says you'll never change. Don't keep wading into the same old sin. You've crossed the water. You belong to Him. Even in the wilderness, you are never alone.

The River To Come

hen the angel showed me the river of the water of life —water as clear as crystal — pouring out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, flowing down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life producing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month of the year. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him, and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever."

-Revelation 22:1-5

I've always been drawn to water. Maybe that's why I can still remember the creek on the property behind my dorm, the one that cut through the woods like a secret. The water wasn't much — muddy in the summer, half-frozen in the winter — but it was alive. As kids, we built forts along its banks, daring each other to jump from rock to rock, usually ending up soaked and shivering. One time I built a bicycle ramp and pedaled my hardest hoping to clear the creek. I didn't. I went headfirst into the mud!

THE RIVER TO COME

That creek was where time slowed down. Where laughter echoed. Where the burdens of our past didn't matter. It wasn't just water — it was a place of freedom. I didn't know it then, but the afternoons with our little nets catching crayfish, frogs and minnows were training my imagination to believe in rivers that could carry more than just water and wildlife. That creek was muddy, small, and temporary. But deep down I think I was aching for a stream that was pure, endless, and true.

The Bible keeps pulling us back to water — not just as something that washes dirt off skin, but as something that carries eternity. From the chaotic waters of Genesis to the still waters of Psalm 23, from the Jordan where Jesus stood waist-deep to the river of life at the very end — it's all one long current moving in the same direction.

The story that began with a garden and a river will close with a city and a river. Water bookends the whole Bible. Eden had four rivers flowing out of it, nourishing the land, feeding life. Revelation closes with one river clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. One river to heal the nations. One river to quench every thirst. One river to carry us home.

I can almost hear the water. Like a future memory calling me home.

The First Stream

It's not an accident that the Bible opens with rivers. Water is life. And in Eden, water symbolized more than hydration — it symbolized wholeness. Shalom. Creation as God intended it to be.

I remember as a kid, when life felt torn apart, I would sit by that little creek and dream about a different world. A place where dads stayed. Where moms didn't vanish. Where kids weren't shuffled like playing

cards into different homes. Something about the water helped me imagine healing when everything else felt fractured. That longing — for something whole, something untouched by brokenness — is not just my story. It's humanity's story. We ache for Eden.

The Thirst Beneath Our Thirst

—Jeremiah 2:13

We all carry a kind of thirst. A thirst that wakes you up at three in the morning, staring at the ceiling, wondering if the life you're living is really the one you were made for.

That thirst is a gift. It's holy dissatisfaction. It's God reminding us that the cisterns we dig for ourselves — success, security, even religion — always crack and leak. The prophet Jeremiah said it plainly: "...my people have rejected me, the fountain of life-giving water, and they have dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns which cannot even hold water."

I know those broken cisterns. For me it was acceptance and approval, then later it became achievement. It was "if only people liked me, if I made the team, if I got the part in the play..." And eventually it became "... if I could just preach well enough, lead well enough, parent well enough..." — then maybe the ache would finally quiet down. But every time I reached the bottom of one of those wells, it was bone-dry.

Maybe you know that ache, too. Maybe your story has its own cracked cisterns. And maybe you're wondering if there really is a river that can quench the thirst for good.

The Spring The Never Runs Dry

When Jesus shows up, He doesn't just talk about water — He claims to be the water. He meets a Samaritan woman at a well and tells her:

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"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

—John 4:14

I've walked through enough dry valleys to know I'm thirsty for more than what this world can give. I'm thirsty for wholeness. For reunion. For Jesus.

I like to imagine my own kids playing by that final river — no fear, no tears, no need for me to explain why the world is so broken. Just laughter in the presence of Jesus. Just joy that never runs out.

And sometimes, when I'm tired — tired of striving, tired of fighting sin, tired of carrying other people's burdens — I imagine myself stepping into that water. Letting it wash away every weight I've carried. Finally free. Finally whole. Because in the end, the story isn't about our thirst. It's about the One who satisfies. And He is waiting for us by the river.

On the last day of a great feast, Jesus stands up and shouts: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." —John 7:37-38

I can't shake that image: rivers flowing from within. Not a trickle. Not a drop. Rivers.

Here's the thing — Revelation isn't just about someday. It's about now. That means the river doesn't just wait for us at the end of the story. It begins in us, right here, right now. Every act of forgiveness is a stream. Every word of encouragement is a current. Every prayer whispered for someone else is a ripple that carries farther than we know.

The kingdom of God isn't built by grand gestures as much as it is by faithful streams of living water pouring out of ordinary lives. We don't just wait for the river — we live from it. We become little tributaries, carrying healing, refreshment, life into dry places. When I forgive instead of retaliate. When I serve instead of demand. When I encourage instead of criticize. A trickle of that future river flows through me. And when the church is at her best — loving, forgiving, standing for justice, walking in humility — she's like an Oasis in the desert, hinting at the river that will one day flood the world.

It's no surprise when God called me to start a new church, he gave me a vision to lead people "from death to life in Christ." And He had me name the church, "Oasis."

Waters That Make The Desert Bloom

There's this vision in Ezekiel 47. A river flowing from the temple, growing deeper and stronger as it goes. It rushes out into the desert, then empties into the Dead Sea — the very picture of death and barrenness. And the salt water turns fresh. Trees grow. Fish swarm. Life bursts into places that had only known death.

I love that image. Because if I'm honest, some parts of my heart have felt like the Dead Sea. Salty. Barren. Toxic even. And yet the promise is that the river of God doesn't stop at the temple gates — it floods outward, into the wastelands, into the places we thought were too far gone.

This is the hope that steadies me when the world feels fractured beyond repair. Nations at war. Families split. Churches divided. Even my own soul pulled in a dozen directions. But one day, a river will flow and heal it all. The river isn't just about quenching thirst — it's about restoration. It's the answer to every ache. The undoing of every curse.

THE RIVER TO COME

I saw this once in real life, in a living room after hospice was called in. A friend of mine, Tim, was dying. I stood there, reading Revelation 22 aloud: "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." And I realized, even in Tim's living room, that the river had already touched him. His body was failing, but there was peace in his eyes that no sickness could poison. He was already drinking from the river of life, even as he waited to cross over into it fully.

That's the kind of healing we long for — not just physical, but spiritual. A healing that turns salty seas into freshwater lakes. A healing that makes even death lose its sting.

The Call Of The Current

Here's what gets me every time: the river isn't guarded. In Revelation, there are no armed angels checking your passport at the water's edge. The invitation is wide open. "Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." –Revelation 22:17

That line feels like it was written for me. Because there are days when I don't feel worthy of standing anywhere near the throne of God, much less drinking from His river. And yet the Spirit keeps saying: Come.

It reminds me of when my two young sons, learning to swim. They would stand on the edge of the pool, hesitant, toes curled around the concrete. And I'd be in the water with my arms open, saying, "Jump. Come." At first they doubted. But eventually they leapt. And when each of them hit the water, they find not fear but safety in my arms. I think the river of life will feel like that. Hesitation. Leap. Then a flood of joy so strong we'll wonder why we ever clung to the edge.

The River Home

Still, we're not there yet. We still live in the tension of thirst. We still feel the dryness of broken cisterns and the sting of salt water in our wounds. But there is a river to come. And one day, when the story ends and the new creation begins, we'll stand together at its banks. We'll see water shining like glass, running straight from the throne of God and the Lamb. We'll see trees that never wither, whose leaves bring healing to every wound and every nation. And we'll drink, finally satisfied.

Until then, every baptism is a rehearsal. Every communion cup is a taste. Every time we gather around the Word and Spirit, we're dipping our toes into the river that will one day carry us home.

So if you're thirsty, take heart. The water is coming. And in Christ, the invitation still stands: Come and drink, without price.

Maybe the whole story of Scripture is one long river. It begins as a trickle in Eden, it grows into a flood at the cross, it pours through our lives in the Spirit, and it ends in a tidal wave of new creation. And that, to me, is the beauty of baptism. It's deeply personal, yet part of God's bigger story. It's an invitation to step into the river God has been flowing through Scripture from the very beginning. When we enter the water, we're joining that story. We're reminded of the waters God used to rescue His people, the waters that wash us clean, and the waters He promises to pour into our lives. Baptism is both a step and a surrender: we don't control the current, but we let it carry us. We let God's story flow through us, shaping us, reshaping us, until we stand in that final city, soaked in His love, finally home.