

Kids, Salvation, and Baptism: Can Kids Be Saved? Should They Be Baptized?

by Pastor Karl Bastian

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." —Luke 18:17 (NIV)

One of the questions I often hear in children's ministry is: "Can kids really get saved?"

The short answer? **YES!** In fact, Jesus Himself held up childlike faith as the model for how adults should come to Him! In Luke 18:17, Jesus made it clear that the kind of faith that embraces the Kingdom of God is exactly the kind of simple, trusting faith that children so beautifully express.

Adults, in all their complexity, often stumble over what children grasp so naturally: *I need Jesus. I trust Him to save me.*

I was only four years old when I understood my own need for a Savior. I asked Jesus "into my heart"—a phrase that, to a child, simply means inviting Jesus to be the ruler of your life. That decision was real. The Holy Spirit works in ways that transcend age, intellect, and maturity. The simplicity of the Gospel makes it accessible to even the youngest among us:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

What about baptism?

Do kids need to be baptized to be saved?

This is where some confusion arises. A few church traditions teach that baptism is required for salvation, citing verses like "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). However, these verses are not teaching that baptism is the agent of salvation, but rather that it is the expected outward response of someone who *has been saved* through faith.

Even those who lean toward baptismal regeneration typically soften when asked: "If someone accepted Christ on Friday, planned to be baptized on Sunday, but died on Saturday, would they be with Jesus?" The answer is nearly always: Yes—because salvation rests in faith in Christ alone (John 3:16), not in any work or ritual.

Baptism is incredibly important—it is commanded, modeled by Jesus, and is a beautiful public declaration of faith. But it is a **response** to salvation, not the requirement for it.





What about children and baptism?

In our ministry, we joyfully baptize children—but with thoughtful care. Over the years, I've developed a simple set of guidelines to help parents and children approach baptism meaningfully.

First, we encourage that the desire to be baptized be initiated by the child—not by parents. While it's natural (and beautiful) for parents to long for spiritual milestones for their children, baptism is a personal act of obedience that should flow from the child's own understanding of their faith.

Second, we recommend waiting until at least 3rd to 5th grade. This isn't a legalistic rule, but a guideline grounded in wisdom and experience. At this age, children are typically able to better grasp the significance of baptism—and remember it. I've met countless adults who were baptized very young and later say, *"I don't really remember it"* or *"I didn't fully understand it,"* leading them to seek re-baptism later. We want this to be a joyful and memorable spiritual milestone.

Of course, there are exceptions—when a child truly demonstrates understanding and a heart of obedience, we want to honor that. I will never forget a young girl named **Laura**, who came to me years ago requesting to be baptized. At that time, our church had a policy that children had to be twelve years old to be baptized — a policy meant to encourage maturity and comprehension.

As I gently explained this to Laura and suggested she wait a few more years, her eyes filled with tears and she asked me with childlike sincerity, *"So I have to remain in disobedience to God until I'm twelve?"*

I smiled and encouraged her to ask that very same question to our lead pastor. I knew he would recognize her genuine desire and deep understanding of Jesus' command. Sure enough, the following Sunday, I had the joy of baptizing Laura—a moment none of us will forget. She reminds me still: when a child is truly ready, they can express that readiness with clarity, conviction, and faith.



To support this process, we provide a simple Bible study parents can do with their children, helping them explore salvation and baptism together. And when younger children sincerely request baptism, I meet with them and their parents personally to discern their readiness and understanding. If appropriate, we joyfully make exceptions, because it's ultimately about the child's faith, not their age.

Bottom line: Yes, kids can—and do—come to genuine faith in Jesus! And yes, they should be baptized—but not to be saved. Baptism is a step of obedience and celebration because they are saved.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." —Matthew 19:14

It is one of the greatest privileges in children's ministry to lead kids to Jesus—and to walk alongside them as they take each step of faith. Let's encourage them to trust in Jesus fully, and to follow Him joyfully, one step at a time.

- Pastor Karl Bastian