



BAPTISM | A PARENT'S GUIDE

At August Gate, our mission is to know, love, and follow Jesus together by His grace and we believe this begins in the home. As parents, our first priority in the mission of God is to faithfully make disciples of our own children. Because of this, one of the most common questions that arises is: "*How can I know if my child has genuine faith?*"

Christian parents may ask this question for a number of reasons, but one of the most common is because we want to faithfully lead our children to obey the commands of Jesus to believe the gospel, repent of sin, and be baptized as a declaration of the work of His Spirit in their lives. When God is working, who are we to stand in the way and say He isn't? We must guard against the temptation to withhold the assurance, comforts, and benefits of faith simply because we don't want to appear to be moving too quickly.

However, it's just as important to guard against the opposite temptation of giving our kids false hope. This often happens when a child dutifully and joyfully learns the lessons, repeats the words, and gets to work pleasing Mom and Dad. If we're not careful, moving too quickly can confuse a simple desire for affirmation in the home with a genuine relationship with Jesus, which sets a child up for confusion and doubt in the future and makes it all the more difficult for him/her to grasp the gospel at a heart level later in life.

So how can we guard against *both* of these temptations and lead our children to know, love, and follow Jesus with us by His grace? How do we know if our children have genuine faith? What should we do if we can't tell? What should we do if we can? These are the questions we hope to answer in the next few pages, but before we can do so, we need to understand 3 foundational realities:

1. What Faith Isn't;
2. What Faith Is; &
3. What Faith Does.

What Faith Isn't

Every parent wants to believe the best about their child. Whether it's in sports, music, academics, or theater, we all desire our kids to excel. However, this innate parental desire can often blind us to the reality that our kids aren't as amazing as we may like to think. After all, most of us know "that guy" whose parents should have told him a decade ago that he couldn't sing and saved him a lot of embarrassment! What we need to understand is that this tendency is just as strong when evaluating their faith as it is when we're evaluating their jump shot, their intellect, their charm, or their chances of making it on American Idol. Because of this fact, it's important for us to be clear about what faith isn't.

- *Faith isn't knowing the right answers.* | As James 2:19 tells us, "**You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder!**"
- *Faith isn't doing the right things.* | Paul says in Galatians 2:16 that "**by works of the law no one will be justified.**" That is, simply obeying the rules can never be enough to make us right with God.
- *Faith isn't a desire for salvation.* | In Luke 18:18-30, a rich man came to Jesus seeking salvation, but he left unsatisfied because he wanted God's salvation on his own terms.
- *Faith isn't a fear of hell.* | This is the negative form of the previous statement. Wanting to avoid the consequences of sin isn't the same as reconciliation with a holy, gracious God.
- *Faith isn't confession.* | Pharaoh (Exodus 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Numbers 22:34), Achan (Joshua 7:20), Saul (1 Samuel 15:24,30; 26:21), and Judas (Matthew 27:4) all said the same thing: "I have sinned." And yet they were all destroyed by the just wrath of God for their rebellion because their confession of sin was not accompanied with genuine repentance.
- *Faith isn't sorrow over sin.* | When he was confronted with the wickedness of his actions, Judas fell into a deep sorrow. Again, though, even this sorrow drove him not to repentance but to suicide (see Matthew 27:3-10).

What Faith Is

Identifying what faith isn't, though, is only half the battle. We must be on guard for counterfeits, but if we don't know what we're looking for, we'll never be able to cultivate genuine faith in our children. So what is faith? In the Bible, the closest we come to a simple definition of faith is found in Hebrews: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. And without it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." (Heb. 11:1,6)

Coupled with the claims of Christ, the promises of God, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament affirmation and application of the gospel, we can summarize Biblical Faith as the simple, certain persuasion that:

- Jesus is Real ("He exists" - Heb. 11:6);
- Jesus is Right ("Assurance of things hoped for and conviction of things not seen" - Heb. 11:1); &
- Jesus is Better ("He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" - Heb. 11:6).

First, we must believe Jesus is real. We may find helpful lessons from fables, but what we will never find is true salvation. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

Second, we must believe Jesus is right. Christ is all or He is nothing, and genuine faith requires that we surrender fully to His will, wisdom, word, and ways. While He openly invites all, Jesus is clear that we can only truly come if we are willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Mark 8:34).

Finally, we must believe Jesus is better. Genuine faith takes Jesus at His word and embraces Him...

- As the bread of life who alone can satisfy our hungry souls (John 6:35);
- As the light of the world who shows us the truth of who God is and who we are (John 8:12);
- As the door who gives us access to the Father (John 10:7);
- As the resurrection and the life who gives us a sure hope that not even death can steal from us (John 11:25);
- As the good shepherd who leads us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, provides for us, and protects us from every enemy (John 10:11; Psalm 23);
- As the way, the truth, and the life who leads us into the fullness of who God is and all that He has for us (John 14:6); &
- As the true vine who alone can give us full and fruitful life, not only now but for eternity (John 15:1)!

What Faith Does

The reason that the mission of August Gate is to know, love, and follow Jesus is because each of these elements is essential to a life of true faith. This is equally true whether someone is 8 years old or 70 years old. Yes, it may look different or be expressed in different words, but all of these must be present in those who believe Jesus is right, real, and better than anything else the world has to offer. In other words: knowing, loving, and following Jesus is what faith does, and where any of these are absent, there is no faith.

Faith Knows Jesus

The first evidence of genuine, Biblical faith is knowing Jesus truly. As parents disciplining our kids toward baptism, we want to make sure they're able to:

- Articulate the gospel in a simple, clear way;
- Understand the significance of the cross;
- Identify themselves as sinners in need of grace; &
- Affirm that God loves them because of His mercy and not because of any good works (including baptism) that they have done or will do.

Faith Loves Jesus

The second evidence of genuine, Biblical faith is loving Jesus deeply. As parents disciplining our kids toward baptism, we want to make sure they are:

- Developing personal rhythms of Bible reading, prayer, and worship;
- Asking questions about God's word and how it applies to their lives;
- Believing God's promises; &
- Growing in love for God's people (the church).

Faith Follows Jesus

The third evidence of genuine, Biblical faith is following Jesus faithfully. As parents disciplining our kids toward baptism, we want to make sure they are:

- Obeying Jesus *because* they're loved, not *so that* they will be;
- Repenting for sin when they see it; &
- Showing the fruit of the Spirit more and more in their lives.
"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Big Questions

With this foundation in place, we can now answer the important questions we asked at the beginning:

How do we know if our children have genuine faith?

Using the list of bullet points under "What Faith Does" as a checklist, prayerfully ask God to give you wisdom to be able to identify where your child is at. As you consider these things, praise God for where you see Him working. In the same way, plead with Him to do what only He can if some of these are still missing. Above all, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)

What should we do if we can't tell?

Continue praying that God will work through you to draw your child into a relationship with Him. Continue pursuing your child and shepherding his/her heart in a way that shows them the love and truth of Christ. And continue preaching the gospel in your home and living it out "so that in everything [you] may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." (Titus 2:10)

What should we do if we can?

If you're convinced your child does not yet believe, then you simply continue loving and pursuing them as above. However, if you're convinced God has given your child faith and brought him/her from death to life, having "delivered [them] from the domain of darkness and transferred [them] to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins," then your pastors want to know so we can celebrate with you all that God is doing!

When you believe God has done this saving work in your child's life and you're ready to help him/her take the next step toward baptism, contact info@augustgate.com to set up a baptism interview.

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matt. 19:14)