

Next Steps Conversation Guide

Decision Counseling at First Baptist Church Jacksonville

We are so thankful for you and your desire to counsel those who are responding to God's Word through the ministry of First Baptist Church Jacksonville. As we seek to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life, we want to help each and every person who reaches out to take their next step of faith.

We talk about "next steps" because we believe everyone is on their own journey of faith, moving from milestone to milestone as they learn more about Jesus and the Bible. As they walk with God in their life, they will be somewhere on the following pathway

Salvation → Baptism → Church Membership → Discipleship & Serving

Our goal as Decision Counselors is to help people bridge the gap and take the next step (the arrows) between each of these key milestones in their Christian journey, starting with salvation and eventually becoming serving disciples of Jesus Christ. As people prepare to take the next step, we want to make sure they understand exactly what the Bible teaches about each of these, and we want to make sure they know what to do in order to take that next step whether that's repenting of their sins for the very first time or by joining a group where they can grow in their love for Jesus and other people.

Along the way, people will meet bumps in the road, divert off the path, or simply need prayer from a fellow believer. We want to meet people in those moments to pray with them or even to recommend they seek further counseling from a pastor or through the Grace Center for Biblical Counseling at our church.

As we seek to shepherd and counsel people through the spiritual decisions they make, it is helpful to have a framework by which we converse with those responding to the Word of God. This guide is designed to provide you with talking points, questions to ask, and key Scripture passages to walk you through common counseling conversations you will have as a Decision Counselor.

This guide is not intended to be memorized. Instead, it is designed to serve as a resource for you to periodically review and be familiar with. We pray that it will be a useful manual for you as you grow in your ability to point people to Jesus.

Opening

When someone approaches the Next Steps station, here are some ways to engage them.

- Hi, thanks for stopping by our Next Steps station. My name is _____. What's your name? What brings you here today?
- Good morning! My name is _____. What's your name? How can we help you take your next step?
- Hello! I see you've filled out a Next Steps card. What did you mark down as your way to respond to God's Word today? I would love to talk with you about that.

Salvation

What we are trying to discern when counseling:

- Do they understand the gospel?
- Do they have a biblical understanding of Jesus' perfect life, substitutionary death, and resurrection?
- Do they understand and are they convicted of their own sin?
- Have they turned from their sins and to Jesus alone for salvation?
- Do they understand that salvation is a free gift of God and not a result of their works?
- Remember, we are not selling "fire insurance" but want people to have a real love Jesus and become his disciple.

Questions to ask the responder:

- What do you believe about Jesus?
- What do you know about Jesus' death and resurrection and why it matters?
- After hearing today's sermon, are there any sins in your life that you are feeling convicted about?
- Have you repented of your sins, meaning have you turned from a lifestyle of rebellion against God and his commandments and committed your life to him in obedience?
- Have you placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation?
- Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?
- If you were to die tonight, and God were to ask you, "Why should I let you into heaven?" what would you say?

Things to explain to them:

- Use the fourfold framework of | God | Man | Christ | Response (Repent & Believe) | to help explain the gospel.
 - **God** is our holy creator who has told us how to live.
 - We have **sinned** against God by disobeying his commandments and failing to live up to his perfect standard. All of us are rebels against the king, and we deserve punishment for it.
 - But **Jesus Christ** who is fully God and fully man came to live a perfect life among us. When he died on the cross in our place, he took our sins upon himself. He bore the wrath of God and the punishment of death on himself for us. He then rose again from the dead three days later in victory over sin, death, and Satan forevermore.
 - We can be reconciled to God and have eternal life with him if we **repent of our sins** and place our **faith in Jesus as Savior** and commit to following him as Lord.

Key verses:

- Genesis 1:1; John 3:16; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9

Next Steps:

- If they truly understand the gospel and have repented of their sins and placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, their next step is to be baptized in obedience to Christ's command (Matthew 28:18-20).
- If you discern that they still do not truly understand the gospel, ask to follow up with them later in the week to continue to talk about the gospel and what it means to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus' finished work for them.

Literature to provide:

- "What is the Gospel?" and/or "Who is Jesus?" tract
- Baptism information pamphlet (if ready for next step of baptism)
- Paperback Bible (mark some of the Key verses listed above in it)

Baptism

What the counselor is trying to discern:

- Have they been baptized already in the past? If so, was it before or after their conversion?
- Were they baptized as an infant?
- Were they baptized in a cult or apostate church (Mormons, Jehovah's Witness, etc.)?
- Were they baptized by immersion or by sprinkling?
- Do they mistakenly believe baptism to be required for salvation?

Questions to ask:

- Could you tell me a little about your baptism? Where and when did it take place? How were you baptized?
- What do you understand baptism to mean?
- Do you think you fully understood the gospel and had put your faith in Jesus alone *before* you were baptized?

Explain to them:

- Baptism is an act that tells the world we have been saved by Jesus Christ through our faith in him.
- Baptism is an outward, physical sign of an inward, spiritual reality.
- Baptism is the act of being immersed, or dipped completely, in water as a symbol of a believer's union with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.
- Baptism does not save us, but it is a public profession of the faith we already have in Christ.

Key verses:

- Acts 10:47; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12

Next Steps:

- If they have been baptized by immersion after their conversion, there is no need to be re-baptized. Instead, the conversation might move more towards helping them with assurance of salvation. If so, take them to passages like John 10:28-29, Romans 8:38-39, and 1 John 5:11-13.
- If they have been baptized by immersion after their conversion but have not joined the church, their next step is joining the church in membership.
- If they have not been baptized by immersion after their conversion, they need to be baptized. Their next step is to meet with a pastor to continue talking about what baptism means and to set up logistics. Obtain their contact information on a Next Steps card and let them know a pastor will be reaching out to them soon!
- If they have not repented of their sins and placed their faith in Jesus Christ, see the Salvation section above.

Literature to provide:

- Baptism information pamphlet

Membership

What the counselor is trying to discern:

- Is the responder a member of First Baptist? If not, are they interested in joining the church?
- Do they understand the Scriptural basis for membership and why church membership is vital?
- Are they a believer in Jesus Christ who has been baptized by immersion after their conversion?

Questions to ask:

- Are you a member of another church? If so, which church?
- What brought you to First Baptist?
- Why are you desiring to become a member of First Baptist?
- What's your favorite thing about our church?

Explain to them:

- Church membership is both biblical and crucial.
- A member of our church is someone who has repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ and followed him in New Testament baptism.
- To become a member of our church, we have a short process:
 - (1) Fill out the **Membership Form** so we can get to know you.
 - (2) Attend our **Membership Class** which is a luncheon with our pastors held on the first Sunday of each month immediately following the 10:45 AM worship service.
 - (3) **Meet** with a pastor.
 - (4) Our congregation **votes** once a month on all new folks wanting to join.
 - (5) We **celebrate** our new members in our weekly worship services.

Key verses:

- Acts 2:42; Romans 12:4-5; Hebrews 3:12-14; Hebrews 10:24-25; Hebrews 13:17

Next Steps:

- Fill out the Membership Form at fbcjax.com/membership-form and a pastor will follow up with them afterwards!
 - If they prefer to fill out a paper form, these are available at the Next Steps station. Leave the completed form at the station for Pastor Austin to pick up.

Literature to provide:

- Membership information card

Serving

What the counselor is trying to discern:

- What ministry is the responder interested in serving?
- What experience or history does the responder have in the ministry they are inquiring about?

Questions to ask:

- In what ways has the Lord gifted you to serve him and the church?
- What areas of ministry, if any, have you served in the past? Do you believe this was a good fit for your gifts or skills?
- What do you do for a living? What skills are employed in that job? Have you considered serving in a similar capacity in the church?
- Do you play an instrument or sing?

Explain to them:

- Serving in the local church is an assumption of all believers in Jesus, and it's an expectation that all members of First Baptist be serving in some capacity.
- Areas where we can always use more servants:
 - Nursery, choir & orchestra, guest services & hospitality
- Many of our ministries require the person to be a member of the church:
 - Next Gen ministries (Preschool, Elementary, Students)
 - Sunday School teachers & Life Group Leaders
 - Choir & orchestra
 - Weekly Hospitality ministry volunteers (guest services, ushers, coffee shop)
- We take the safety of our children and our church members very seriously. We require background checks for almost all of our serving roles.

Key verses:

- Mark 10:45; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 4:10-11

Next Steps:

- If the responder is unsure of what ministries they are interested in, their next step is to go to fbcjax.com/serve to explore options for serving.
- If the responder is interested in a particular ministry (like Middle School or orchestra), mark that down on the Next Steps card and let them know someone from that ministry will follow up with them soon.
- If the responder is not a member of the church, their next step is church membership, since this is a prerequisite for many of our volunteer roles.
- If they are interested in one of our Ministry Partners outside of the church (First Coast Women's Services, Trinity Rescue Mission, Sidewalk Funday School, etc.), let them know that Pastor Austin will be happy to connect them with that ministry. Get their information, and he will follow up with them.

Literature to provide:

- Serving information card

Discipleship (Sunday School, small groups and connections)

What the counselor is trying to discern:

- Is the responder already part of a Sunday School class or small group?
- Is the responder happy with the group they are currently in? Why or why not?
- What is the responder's understanding of the role of community and discipleship in the lives of Christians?

Questions to ask:

- Have you been a part of a Sunday School class or small group in the past? If so, where and who was your teacher?
- Are you wanting to attend a couples class or a men's/women's class?
- What is your age range?

Explain to them:

- At First Baptist, we have a genuine care for people, and the best way to experience that is to be a part of a Sunday School class or small group where you can meet and fellowship with other believers on a regular basis.
- Sunday School and small groups allow you to connect with people in a similar season of life as you seek to live a lifestyle that looks more and more like Jesus.

Key verses:

- Acts 2:42; Ephesians 4:1-6; Galatians 6:1-2

Next Steps:

- Point the responder to fbcjax.com/sundayschool where they can see a listing of all our classes, locations, and times.
- Walk them to their Sunday School class or Life Group and introduce them to the leader!
- Refer to the Sunday School Locator Guide at the Next Steps station to help the responder find a group to join. If you are available to, please walk them to their meeting space or find a Guest Services volunteer who can help them find their way.

Literature:

- Sunday School Locator Guide

Counseling (Pastoral counseling or formal counseling from the Grace Center)

What the counselor is trying to discern:

- Is the responder struggling with a life-dominating sin?
- Is the responder struggling with a sin that will need regular, intensive discipleship to overcome?
- Has the responder experienced a recent hardship or setback such as loss of a loved one, divorce, or major illness?
- Does the responder feel as though there is a stigma around receiving counseling?

Questions to ask:

- Are you interested in receiving formal biblical counseling by one of our pastors or counselors?
- Have you ever been to biblical counseling before?
- What is your understanding of the power of God's Word and the Holy Spirit in your life?

Explain to them:

- We believe the Bible is sufficient to handle all of life's problems. We are totally committed to the Bible at First Baptist and want to see people overcome life's difficulties by the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Our Grace Center is staffed by certified counselors and pastors who are willing to help you.
- Counseling at First Baptist is free of charge.
- We prioritize the members of our own church if we have a waiting list.

Key verses:

- Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:3-4

Next Steps:

- If the responder is interested in biblical counseling from the Grace Center, their next step is to fill out the forms found on fbcjax.com/biblical-counseling.
- If the responder is interested in talking with a pastor about their struggle, their next step is to provide you with their contact info on the Next Steps card. Pastor Austin will pick this card up and follow-up with the responder.
- If the responder is not interested in receiving counseling, steer the conversation towards the Gospel and discern their understanding of salvation and sanctification (see Salvation section above).

Literature to provide:

- "True Change" tract
- Grace Center information card

Prayer

A note about people asking for prayer:

- Sometimes prayer requests are simply prayer requests (Ex. “Please pray for my elderly mother who is having surgery next week”); other times, they are masked, but desperate, cries for help (Ex. “Please pray for me. I am battling addiction to alcohol”). Prayer requests can be incredible opportunities for sharing the gospel. As you listen to the prayer request, steer the conversation towards the gospel. As a responder shares a prayer request with you, discern whether or not the person needs more extensive follow-up from a pastor, or if they need to be referred to formal counseling, or if they need to be connected with other Christians in community to help bear their burdens.
- If someone responds with a significant need, collect their contact information so the church can follow up with them during the week.

Questions to ask:

- How can I pray for you today?
- What has the Lord laid on your heart that you need prayer for?
- As you’ve shared your prayer request with me today, I would love to hear more about your relationship with God. [Move the conversation towards presenting the gospel.]
- Thank you for sharing this with me today. I know it took a lot to open up about this issue. Let me pray for you about this now [Pray with them.] Would you be interested in receiving some counseling from one of our pastors or through our Grace Center for Biblical Counseling to help you work through this problem?

Key verses:

- Luke 18:1; James 5:16-18; 1 John 5:14-15

Information Collection

If someone comes to the Next Steps station for counseling, we always need to collect some personal contact information in order to follow up with them well. **Please make sure you get their first and last names and either a phone number or email address.** Fill this information out on a Next Steps card and mark what their next step is. In the Comments space at the bottom of the card, write any notes that would be helpful for following up with the person. Leave the card at the Next Steps station for Pastor Austin to pick up.

- “What is the best method of contact to follow up with you?”
- “What would be the best time for us to contact you?”
- “Do you mind if I or a pastor could give you a call later this week to talk about ____?”
- “Is there any other information for us to know to help us follow up with you?”

Closing

As you close out your time with a responder, make sure they are well cared for and that they don't have any lingering questions about their next step or where to go. Pray with them if they desire it.

- “Is there anything else I can help you with today?”
- “Do you have any questions about your next step?”
- “Do you know where your class is?”

Tips for Next Steps Conversations

- Be as clear as possible in your language and use of Christian vocabulary. We don't want to shy away from using biblical terms like "sin" or "sanctification," but we also don't want to assume that the responder knows what we mean by our terms or that they have the same definition for a term as we do. After all, this might be the first time they've ever come to church. Take time to define the biblical words you use.
 - **Example:** "The Bible says we are to repent from our sins. That means we are to turn away from and stop doing bad things like lying, stealing, or bursting out in anger at other people."
- Here is an example of the kind of conversation that might happen at a Next Step station.
 - **Responder:** "What you've told me about baptism is helpful to know, but I'm not sure I'm ready for it yet. Is it really necessary? I'm scared about having to get up in front of people on the stage!"
 - **Counselor:** "That's okay! As I mentioned earlier, the Bible teaches that baptism is the first step of obedience that any new Christian takes. If you've repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, then he commands you to be baptized as a public profession of your faith. But we understand that it can be a little daunting. Please take this pamphlet with you and read it over and continue to pray about it. When you are ready, follow the next step there on the bottom and reach out to one of our pastors or come back to this station. Do you mind if I give you a call later this week to talk more about baptism with you? We are here to help you when you are ready!"
- One way to help responders open up is to connect their response to what was preached in the sermon.
 - "What did you hear in the sermon today that caused you to want to respond?"
 - "What was it about today's sermon that made you realize you needed to step out and serve?"
 - "Was there a particular verse in today's Bible passage that stuck out to you?"
- Coat your conversation with Scripture. Romans 10:17 says "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." True heart change comes from the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Use the Key Verses listed above to season your conversation with the Bible!