

**REVISED**

# IT'S MY CHOICE

— **STEVE & MARIT CASE**

**TEACHER'S MANUAL**



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# HOW TO USE THE IT'S MY CHOICE STUDENT WORKBOOK

*It's My Choice Student Workbook* is a companion book to *It's My Choice Teacher's Manual*, a set of 10 age-appropriate Bible studies for 10–15 year old young people. There are three sheets for each of the 10 studies:

- Scripture Sheet
- Work sheet(s)
- Family Talk Sheet

The workbook sheets for each of the lessons are included in the *It's My Choice Teacher's Manual*.

## LEARNING HOW TO PARAPHRASE CAN BE A DIFFICULT BUT VERY USEFUL SKILL

### SCRIPTURE SHEET

This sheet lists the five texts used in the study. Some people can quickly memorize Scripture. Some people feel a sense of accomplishment when they read a text without making any mistakes. But ask them what it means and they may have no idea, and their face is likely to show it. The purpose of this paraphrase sheet is to help the student *understand* each text by putting it into one's own words. The next step would be to apply the biblical truth the student is coming to understand. If the word "paraphrase" is too difficult to understand, use a phrase like "put it in your own words" or "summarize what we just read." We encourage teachers and parents to assist the student(s) in developing this thinking skill by offering a few examples to stimulate the young person's thinking in this direction. In a school setting, the teacher may spend some time on the five passages before the study so the students are ready when the baptismal study session begins. Parents can do the same thing with their children at home. When you make an application, give a primary emphasis to personal application rather than applying it to everyone else!

# HOW TO USE THE IT'S MY CHOICE STUDENT WORKBOOK



## **WORK SHEET**

This sheet contains questions and exercises pertinent to the study. The Work Sheet is designed to stimulate thinking and provide material for group discussion. Some of the sessions will have more than one page in the Work Sheet. While this is intended for use in a baptismal class setting, students who are part of a class at church or school will also benefit from discussing these topics at home, perhaps in a family worship setting.

**IF YOU WANT TO REALLY HIT PAYDIRT,  
HAVE THEM CONTINUE THIS TOPIC WITH DISCUSSIONS AT HOME**

## **FAMILY TALK SHEET**

Seven questions for family discussion offer family members an opportunity to share insights, beliefs, and convictions about each study. This can provide additional development for older children who may have already been baptized as they continue to grow in their faith and understanding. It can be the means of planting seeds for younger children as they look forward to their own baptism. It's a great forum for adults to share their own faith journey with their children. This includes their present understanding as well as what they recall from their childhood.

The Family Talk Sheet is for family sharing—not quizzing or grilling the young baptismal candidate. This is a tool for families to communicate with each other about spiritual topics. We recommend putting advance thought and preparation into these discussions rather than “winging it.” Each sheet includes a spot for you to add your own questions and comments for that topic.

Young people's faith and commitment receive a significant boost when they hear their parents talk about faith. It's even greater when



## HOW TO USE THE IT'S MY CHOICE STUDENT WORKBOOK

the children talk with their parents about faith. And the greatest impact comes when parents and children engage together in spiritual dialogue about these topics

### **SIMPLIFIED BAPTISMAL VOWS**

The official baptismal vows of the church have been developed over many years, with special attention given to each word and its usage. However, most children simply cannot understand this precise, technical language. Because of the need to paraphrase the baptismal vows for so many baptismal candidates (of a variety of ages) during decades of pastoral work with young people, I (Steve) finally wrote out a simplified version. I want to say “Thank you” to the numerous pastors who have reviewed these vows and provided valuable input and edits.

Please understand that these have *not* been voted as official baptismal vows. We include them here because this Bible study material targets young people. To promote understanding and growth, we recommend that students study the official vows side by side with the simplified vows.

Our prayer is that the many young people who make a decision for baptism have an understanding of their commitment through the use of these studies. We pray that they will continue to grow in their faith throughout their adolescence and beyond.

### **MENTORING**

Baptismal preparation candidates get lots of attention leading up to their baptism in addition to the baptism itself. But there’s often an abrupt dropoff. Please follow through to be sure each person baptized gets connected to a spiritual mentor. The end of this book includes information about that as well as a certificate for both the mentor and the mentee to sign.

# I THINK I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED



An anxious parent approaches you. “Pastor, will you please visit my son? I think it’s time for him to be baptized. Soon he will enter adolescence, and I’m afraid that if he’s not baptized now, perhaps he never will be. Being baptized might be an anchor point for him through the turbulent teen years.”

In her third baptismal class, Sandy can’t always find the Scriptural passages, especially those in the Minor Prophets or the Epistles. She usually can read the passage without any trouble, but when asked to paraphrase it she draws a blank. However, she says she loves Jesus and wants to be baptized.

Jodi studies your expression, ready to say “I do” after each vow. But is she *really* ready to be baptized, or does she simply know the appropriate response and when to say it?

Most pastors have experienced these types of situations. And no matter what we decide to do, we’re usually left with a twinge of guilt and promise ourselves that we’ll handle it better next time. But the next time interrupts us before we’ve given significant thought to the matter, and the storehouse of pastoral guilt receives another offering. Only a few pastors have the luxury of turning over these predicaments to a youth pastor.

## STEVE’S EXPERIENCE

During my pastoral internship I got to prepare a number of children and teens for baptism. When I went to seminary, I hoped to resolve some of the issues from my internship. During my first quarter I took “Salvation,” a required six-hour class. This heightened my understanding and appreciation for Jesus and the salvation he offers me. Certainly a person should at least understand the basic issue of salvation before



## I THINK I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED

being baptized! I even entertained the thought that perhaps seminary training should be a prerequisite for baptism. But could the same level of appreciation and sincerity be present without seminary training? For that matter, is sincerity more important than knowledge? How can one accurately measure sincerity?

My own baptism had an embarrassingly low level of sincerity, primarily because when I *was* sincere (when my friends were being baptized), I wasn't old enough to be baptized. My parents had determined that I should wait until the age of 12, since that was when Jesus went to the Temple. Even though I attended church each Sabbath, I could *not* enter the temple of the baptismal font with my friends because I was only 11 years old when my classmates got baptized.

My baptism came a year later. A prankster friend had secretly put my name on a baptismal request form and placed it in the offering plate. The pastor followed up on this request with one brief session with me. My parents were active church leaders, and I had been through more than one baptismal class at the Adventist elementary school, so I was considered safe to baptize. For my part, I just wanted to get it over with so I could have some of the "food" during the Communion services that always went way past lunchtime.<sup>1</sup>

On the day of my baptism, the pastor paraded me in front of the congregation as a model of somebody willing to stand alone for Jesus, rather than following the crowd or needing friends to take the plunge with me. I remember thinking how out of touch he was with me, actually proclaiming the very opposite of what was my real situation.



# I THINK I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED



## MARIT'S EXPERIENCE

I grew up in the Netherlands where baptism generally comes at a later age than in the United States. Several of my friends and I decided we wanted to be baptized. Our local pastor started baptismal classes at his house on Friday nights for our youth group. My sisters were excited and we attended faithfully with our friends.

Frankly, I don't remember much of what we studied or discussed. But I do remember Friday night being the highlight of the week. I got baptized with a few of my friends when I was 17 and just before I left for Newbold College in England. The baptism itself was an emotional moment for me. It is difficult to put in words... I felt a warmth and closeness I had not experienced before. It was much more than merely a cognitive understanding. I was baptized with my friends into a faith community. Something that made my baptism extra meaningful was the fact I was leaving the country, and now I was connected to my home church on a different level.

## PREPARING FOR BAPTISM

What is necessary to "prepare" a person to be baptized? A simple approach asks, "Do you believe in Jesus?" If the person answers, "Yes," then baptize that person. A broader perspective includes the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical elements in addition to the cognitive ones. Many figure that going through a series of "classes" that covers a certain amount of content constitutes "preparation for baptism." This set of baptismal studies focuses on the cognitive element, with the purpose of being age-appropriate when it comes to thinking.



# I THINK I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED

## **I THINK...**

Thinking begins before an individual ever considers the philosophical world of Descartes ("I think, therefore I am"). Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget opened new vistas in understanding a person's capacity to think at various stages of one's cognitive development. Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development. These have significant ramifications for what we do to "prepare" young people for baptism.

## **STAGE 1:**

For the first two years of life an individual's cognition is based on exploration of the world through one's senses. Discernment comes through placing objects, any objects, into one's mouth, banging things together or on the floor, watching an object being moved about the room and noticing whether the object remains the same or is changed as a result of its change in location. Sitting up, crawling, walking, climbing, and running are also means of discovery. Adults may chuckle to consider this the thinking process of babies and toddlers, but most would agree that it is developmentally appropriate for that age group. We wouldn't seriously consider the stage 1 level of cognitive development adequate for mental assent to baptism unless its purpose was merely to splash and play in the water.

## **STAGE 2:**

During the next five years (approximately ages 2 to 7) a child's thinking can operate independently from the rest of the body's senses. During this time a child's imagination seems to know no boundaries, as simple objects like a pencil or block of wood can be transformed instantly into a plane, a dog, a banana, or a shooting star. This is the age span in which

# I THINK I'M READY TO BE BAPTIZED



you might purchase a \$50 toy and be amazed that the child spends more time playing with the box the toy came in. Chances are, the expensive toy limits the child's creativity, but the simple box requires a vivid imagination to transpose it into whatever the child's thoughts might be.

Not surprisingly, the child's thinking is quite inaccurate. Space relationships aren't fully understood—tall is big, and large is valuable. A child in stage 2 is likely to think a tall, slender glass will hold more water than a short, broad glass, even though their volume might be identical or the volume of the short glass even greater. If asked to choose between a nickel and a dime, the stage-2 child will pick a nickel because it's bigger, assuming therefore that it's more valuable.

Gullibility also characterizes a child in stage 2. Santa Claus is a real person. So is the tooth fairy. Singing animals at pizza parlors or on television are real, too.<sup>2</sup> Imaginary playmates and guardian angels are easily understood and entertained. Stage 2 thinkers find the Bible story of Balaam's donkey and the great fish that swallowed Jonah to be completely appropriate ways for God to communicate to selfish, disobedient prophets. Miracles are entirely credible to these minds, in contrast to some "learned adults" who react with skepticism. Daniel and John saw some strange beasts in vision; stage 2 children can *draw* them. Would you like to know what heaven really looks like? A stage 2 child can tell you in detail and with confidence. Certainly no problem is too big for God to handle; just pray about it.

Many Sabbath School teachers in the children's division tap into these creative, imaginative minds and build faith in God as a result. Some parents, especially mothers, almost instinctively seem to know that this wild imagination is appropriate—and temporary. But most would not consider such childlike faith to include adequate mental assent or personal accountability to be baptized.