

# THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Office: 828-253-6578—Email: [office@covenantreformed.net](mailto:office@covenantreformed.net)—Website: [www.covenantreformed.net](http://www.covenantreformed.net)

## Returning to the Midweek Prayer Meeting

By Rev. Sean McCann

This past Wednesday we had our first church-wide midweek prayer meeting in 777 days – make of that number what you will! It was wonderful to gather again in the Fellowship Hall to break bread and lift up our voices together to the Lord in prayer. Some of you are so accustomed to the regular midweek gathering that you have longed for it to return over the past two years, while others of you are new to this practice and may wonder why we set aside Wednesday evening every week for this gathering. Whether you are used to midweek prayer meetings or not, I hope you will come join us and see for yourself why churches have historically prioritized this meeting. We start at 6:00 pm with a meal prepared by a rotating team of volunteer cooks, then around 6:30 pm we dismiss the babies to nursery and the children to discipleship classes (also led by volunteers). One of our pastors will then lead us through a brief devotion in a Psalm, after which we devote the rest of the time to prayer, with the goal of wrapping up around 7:30 pm with everyone chipping in to clean up the space and set up for Sunday. (We hope this time change will enable our families who work and have children coming home from school to more easily join us.)

That pretty much sums up *what* happens at the midweek gathering, so I want to devote the rest of this article to the question of *why* – why do we make this a priority and ask you to come out every week to gather with your church family? As a good preacher should, I’ll answer that question with three reasons: prayer, community, and discipleship.

### Prayer

The first and main purpose of our midweek gathering is to pray. Charles Spurgeon had a room in the basement of his church where his members gathered to pray, which he called the engine room of the church: “If the engine room is out of action, then the whole mill will grind to a halt.” Spurgeon may have coined the name, but the practice outdated him by centuries. In fact, the first action we hear the church take after the resurrection

is gather for prayer (Acts 1:14), and that practice continued in the early church (Acts 2:42; 3:1; 4:24).

In an article entitled “Recovering the Prayer Meeting,” author Derek Brite writes of this central purpose: “In the midweek prayer meeting we are laying claim to the promise that Christ is with us in power. In Matthew 18:19–20 Jesus tells his disciples that “if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” The word for agree in the Greek is the word *symphōnéō*, which means “in one accord” or “to be in harmony together,” and it is where we get our word “symphony.” The midweek prayer meeting is where the church gathers together, praying in concert over the needs of the church with the promise of Christ’s blessing.

### Community

Within the life of a church, there are fellowship opportunities in large group gatherings, smaller group gatherings, and one-on-one relationships. All of these are important and play different roles to achieve the one goal of building and deepening relationships within the body of Christ. Jerry Bridges has written about this dynamic in his book *True Community*: “We cannot develop a spiritual intimacy with another believer until we have first had communion or spiritual fellowship with him. And we cannot develop a communion until we have first developed a social relationship. The social dimension, then, always provides the larger context within which spiritual fellowship and one-to-one intimacy are developed.”

I can’t begin to count the number of you who have expressed to me how disjointed you have felt these last two years. Though we restarted public worship just a few months into the pandemic, many other opportunities for conversations and community didn’t return until sometime later. We have missed seeing each other

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## May–June

### Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website ([www.covenantreformed.net](http://www.covenantreformed.net)), or the church office: 828-253-6578; [office@covenantreformed.net](mailto:office@covenantreformed.net)

### The Lord’s Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship: May 1 and 15  
During Evening Worship: May 29  
June 5 and 19

### Meals:

May 1, Shepherding Groups following morning worship.  
June 5, Fellowship Meal following morning worship.

### Guest Speaker

On July 3, we will again welcome Dr. Steve Lawson to our pulpit for the morning sermon.

### Weekly Events

#### Sunday:

Sunday School 9:30 am  
Morning Worship 10:45 am  
Evening Worship 6:00 pm

Except for 1st Sundays

#### Wednesday Evenings:

Supper 6:00 pm  
Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm

### Bible Study

#### For Men:

Men’s Prayer Breakfast 8:00 am 2nd & 4th Saturdays  
ROMEOS 8:00 am Every Thursday  
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)

at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road  
Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm 1st & 3rd Thursdays

#### For Women:

Various Homes 9:30 am Every Tuesday

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regularly. We have missed shaking hands, giving hugs, and holding babies. We have missed those quick check-ins in the hall, those brief moments of prayer in the corner, and those reminders to set a coffee date later to meet up and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. On a surface level, the midweek meetings present more opportunities for those small interactions that deepen our bonds of fellowship. On a deeper level, sharing personal human experiences such as a meal and prayer cannot help but stimulate true spiritual fellowship among us.

**Discipleship**

This final purpose for the meeting refers to how God uses his word in his church to strengthen, grow, and mature his people. In our midweek schedule we carve out time to disciple both children and adults. We understand from Scripture that God uses a variety of means to disciple our children in the faith: the gathering of the saints for public worship on the Lord’s Day, family devotions in the home, personal Bible reading and prayer, etc. As a church, we seek to aid our parents in raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by providing age-appropriate classes, both on Sunday morning and on Wednesday evening. We have volunteer teachers who prepare diligently to teach and disciple our covenant children, and we are grateful to them for stepping up and enabling us to add back this midweek opportunity to train up our children.

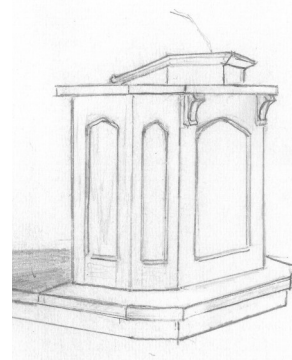
While the children are in their classes, the adults also gather

under the word. (One reason we have started back for prayer meeting in the Fellowship Hall instead of the Sanctuary is so that our cooking volunteers can participate in this time as well.) Our pastors are leading us through a study of the Psalms, and this past week we picked back up with Psalm 101. Not only are the Psalms a wonderful instruction and invitation to pray (see Jim Curtis’ article on Page 3), but they also proclaim Christ to us both as the great high priest who prays these prayers on our behalf, and as the great king who is God’s answer to our prayers for his kingdom to come.

With these three benefits in mind, why wouldn’t you come out on Wednesday night, at least for a few weeks, to give it a try? I am aware of how busy life can get and how many activities we must choose from. The days are long gone when secular activities were often canceled on Wednesday afternoons and evenings so that people could go to church (at least in the south). However, I can’t help but think of how Jesus calls us in the Sermon on the Mount to prioritize the very things that our midweek meeting aims to promote. The basic needs of food and childcare are covered so that we can focus on the spiritual needs of our souls through prayer, fellowship, and discipleship. For as Jesus says, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

**The Sacred Desk**

By Rev. Sean McCann



As we near the end of the Sermon on the Mount in the next few weeks, I thought it might be helpful to review some of the major themes that we have covered. The gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy that establishes the authority of Jesus as the son of David and their heir of the promises made to Abraham. From there it follows the nativity account and the initial steps that Jesus takes (baptism and temptation) before beginning his public ministry. These passages seem to show us that Jesus is following the footsteps of Old Testament Israel, so that when he goes up to a mountain to deliver the law, we are right to understand that he is speaking as a new and better Moses.

With these expectations and with the weight of divine authority, Jesus delivers a powerful sermon on the kingdom of heaven. If I could summarize the message of the sermon, it would be this: The kingdom of God reverses the lives of all who submit to the king. Over the past few months, we are seen these reversals play out in five categories.

First are the beatitudes, or the reversal of the place of blessing (5:3-16). Here Jesus calls his followers to embrace the lowly place of blessings, because that is where we meet him and find the promises of his kingdom. Next comes the reversal in the priority of the law (5:17-48) where Jesus addresses the relaxing of God’s law by restoring it to its proper place, so that he might restore his people by his grace. From there Jesus stays on the theme of righteousness by introducing a third reversal: the reversal of the practice of righteousness (6:1-18). Jim preached a wonderful sermon from this text on how genuine righteousness is the result of an inward change, not the practice of an outward display of religiosity. Fourthly, Jesus reverses the pursuit of man from treasurers on earth to treasures in heaven (6:19-7:12). And finally, he closes with a fifth reversal, the path of life (7:13-27). This concluding passage challenges the hearers – then and now – to decide if we are with Jesus or against him, and if with him, then to commit to follow him by faith as his kingdom disciples.

As we follow these reversals and embrace our place in the kingdom of heaven, we will discover how true it is that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.

**Preaching Schedule**

Date	Morning	Evening
May 1	Matt. 7:7-11	
May 8	Matt. 7:12	2 Sam. 6
May 15	Matt. 7:13-29	2 Sam. 7:1-17
May 22	Matt. 8:1-17	2 Sam. 7:18-29
May 29	Matt. 8:18-22	2 Sam. 8
June 5	Matt. 8:23-9:8	
June 12	Matt. 9:9-17	2 Sam. 9
June 19	Matt. 9:18-34	2 Sam. 10
June 26	Matt. 9:35-38	2 Sam. 11

**Praying the Psalms**

By Rev. Jim Curtis

When I was a child, I went to a friend’s house for the weekend. While there, his parents prayed with their children every night, and they asked me to pray. I recall wanting to pray, but saying to them, “I’m not sure what to say.” I’m confident we’ve all had this experience. I know I need to pray; I’m just not sure what to say! They encouraged me to say anything I wanted, but I remained silent.

Lacking words in prayer is an understandable, if not all too familiar, predicament. Yet, the Lord has provided for us in our weakness, and in this case he has provided an entire prayer book: *The Psalms*.

Now, we often consider Psalms to be a book of songs. After all, Paul tell us to address one another in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in Ephesians 5:19. Indeed, we sing Psalms weekly here at Covenant Reformed. How then should we view the book of Psalms as a *prayer* book? Well, because the Psalms call themselves prayers!

Consider Psalm 4:1 – *Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!*

Or Psalm 17:1 – *Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!*

As we read the Psalms, we see the Psalmist refer to his Psalm as a prayer over 25 times! Even Psalm 72:20 (the end of Book Three of the Psalms) indicates that the Psalms of David should be seen as prayers: *The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.*

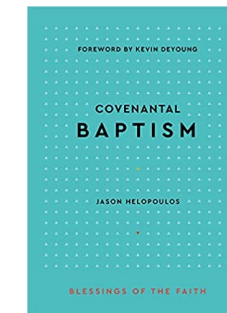
Back at my friend’s house that one weekend, I recall being silent. More than being silent, though, I recall listening intently to the words and prayers my friend and his parents used in their prayers. The next time I stayed the weekend there, I also recall praying myself for the first time.

The Psalms can (and should!) function in much the same way: encouraging and instilling in us words to pray, in such a way as to encourage us to do the life-long work of prayer. Yet, the Psalms teach us significantly more than just words to pray; they also teach us postures to take in prayer. As Richard Pratt says in his book *Praying With Your Eyes Open*, “[The Psalms] project the full range of human emotions, from exuberant joy to frantic despair.” The Psalms teach us to pray, and how to pray in specific situations.

Are you asking how you can pray more, more deeply, or more reverently? Are you hoping, longing for more in your prayer life? Are you unsure what to say? Friend, turn to the Psalms and pray!

**Covenantal Baptism**

By Rev. Jim Curtis



As we study Covenant Theology in our Sunday School curriculum, I felt it was appropriate to review a new and exceedingly helpful work by Jason Helopoulos on covenantal baptism. In this work, Helopoulos works through the biblical logic of baptism and answers many questions (and objections!) to covenantal baptism.

He begins his book with a helpful chapter explaining the nature of the sacraments as *signs and seals*, explaining that baptism functions both as a visible reality intended to point us back to the promises of the Gospel and a guarantee of that righteousness received by faith in Christ (cf. Rom 4:11). In this way, “God graciously continues to prop up our faith” through baptism (p. 31).

Having worked through circumcision, Helopoulos next guides us through the “fourfold testimony” to covenant baptism through the testimonies of: covenant continuity, the New Testament Scriptures, theology, and the Church. He rightly points out that a “monumental shift” would have needed to take place were baptism (the sign and seal of the New Covenant) to be restricted to those who profess faith only. Reformed believers, he says, have “drawn on the covenant to argue for infant baptism” (p. 38). The reason for this is simple: all other covenant signs contain some applicability to believers and their children—God’s covenants are deeply familial. Yet, when we search the New Testament Scriptures, we do not see this shift even mentioned!

From there, he points out what covenantal baptism specifically *does*. Quoting Ligon Duncan, he says, “nowhere in the Bible will you find a covenant sign which *effects* a relationship. A covenant sign always *reflects* a relationship” (p.59). In other words, covenantal baptism does not hold that all who are baptized are automatically saved! Having dealt with what it *doesn’t do*, we then see that covenantal baptism *does* bless the children by “bringing them near” to Jesus (Lk 18:15-17). Additionally, covenantal baptism blesses parents by giving them both rest in the Lord’s promise of the Gospel and direction in how to raise and disciple their children—as Christians!

Finally, Helopoulos deals with the blessing of baptism upon the congregation. This is a far too often overlooked aspect of *covenantal* baptism, which should be made more obvious. Thankfully, this little resource brings back to the fore the effects and benefits of covenantal baptism upon a congregation. We are reminded of the vow the congregation takes in the baptism of the children of believers, and how this practically works out; namely, we are to *work with parents* in the discipleship of their children. We are “these children’s family. Our godly example before them matters... They benefit from our love.”

At the end of the book, he answers a long list of common questions/objections to this practice of covenantal baptism, which is worth the price of the book alone. I am glad, however, to recommend it not just for that portion, but the whole kit and caboodle.