

# THE SALTSHAKER

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

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## Passing the Baton

By Rev. Sean McCann

The United States Track and Field Team has some of the fastest sprinters in the world. They consistently have runners medal in the 100-meter dash, usually more than one. Yet despite their rich collection of speed and talent, they often do not win the 4x100-meter relay race. Individually no other country (except maybe Jamaica) can place four runners on the track capable of an individual medal, but when Team USA comes together on the track, they are plagued with the same problem: they fumble the passing of the baton. The transition between one runner to the next has become their fatal flaw and has prevented them from gold on multiple occasions.

If we take this metaphor and apply it to the church, we can see many of the same problems. If the church is to survive and thrive from one generation to the next, then she will inevitably pass on the baton of leadership. But it is never easy, and passing the baton from one generation to another is a beautiful-yet-messy process. This year we will experience the largest influx of new officers at Covenant Reformed in well over a decade. This is exciting, encouraging, and an answer to many prayers. But despite the excitement, no transition is ever free of bumps and growing pains. As we prepare for this transition, what can we do – both as members and as leaders – to walk by faith and maintain unity? In this article I want to attempt to answer that by considering a verse that represents the tension that can be felt between the “old” and the “new” at church.

The Apostle Paul planted numerous churches across Asia Minor, including the church in Ephesus. At some point Paul departed and left young Timothy there to oversee the church and to deal with false teachers. While Paul was away he wrote letters of instruction back to Timothy in Ephesus, these letters we have today as First and Second Timothy. One of his instructions stands out particularly for our situation. Writing to Timothy, Paul instructs him: “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Timothy 4:12a). In just a few words, Paul al-

ludes to a world of trouble taking place in a church because of how the members view their leaders. Let’s examine the problem in hopes that we can see solution.

### The Problem

Church members are despising one of their leaders because of his youth, and this was a problem significant enough for Paul to address head on. At first glance the problem might appear to simply be leaders who are too young. We don’t have an exact age for Timothy, but most scholars put him somewhere below forty. So, what is the problem with a 35-year-old elder? Isn’t age “just a number”? Why is it causing such issues?

Age by itself is neutral, but when combined with the need to lead and shepherd, one can see how the inexperience represented by youth could be concerning to some. After all, youth are not known for their wisdom, patience, and experience! Rather they are often described as passionate, impulsive, and naïve. And it is not just youth who are inexperienced: older leaders can be new to a certain position, or to a certain church, and thus lack experience even if they do not lack years. As many can attest, long-time church members can be slow to warm to young and/or inexperienced leaders.

But is the issue here just “slow to warm” to new leaders? Sadly, no. Members of the church in Ephesus are guilty of *despising* their elder due to his young age. Sure, we can see why youth might be a cause for caution, but not despising. Why might the young age of Timothy cause other members to despise him? Could it be that older and more experienced members resent the young, new guy having more of a say than they have? Could it be that other young members resent having a contemporary fill an office they wanted for themselves? Could it be that when someone claims that “we have always done it that way” – the new leader isn’t convinced? Change is never easy, but we see a church here reacting in a sinful way - not in faith - and it is threatening to tear the church apart.

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## January–February

### 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:

January 7, 21

February 4, 18

#### Fellowship Meal:

January 7, following morning worship.

#### Congregational Meeting:

January 21, following morning worship.

#### Shepherding Groups:

February 4, following morning worship.

### 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 6:30 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:

Gail Albee’s Home 9:30 am Every Tuesday

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**The Solution**

Paul's answer is instructive. Even though the problem arises from the sin of the members, he addresses Timothy as the one able to solve it. The verse goes on, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). What is the solution? Young Timothy must lead an exemplary life. This aligns with Paul's earlier instruction that elders must be above reproach. (This means that accusations don't stick to them, and thus there are no grounds to despise them.) If the older members are simply watching and waiting for a youthful mistake or indiscretion, Paul tells Timothy he should not give them what they are looking for. And while the members may initially despise him for his youth, in time and by the help of the Spirit his example will win them over.

What kind of example will win them over? Paul lists five areas in which to model an exemplary life. First, in speech. His words, both in public ministry and private conversation, must be exemplary. Godly speech consists both in what we say (positive) and what we refrain from saying (negative). The young leader's words should be truthful, gracious, kind, and used to build others up. He must also tame his tongue to avoid speech that is dishonest, harsh, unwholesome, or hurtful. The second exemplary trait pairs with the first: conduct. The young leaders must talk the talk and walk the walk. His behavior and manner of life is to be consistent with his speech: holy, blameless, and reflecting the gracious work of God in him.

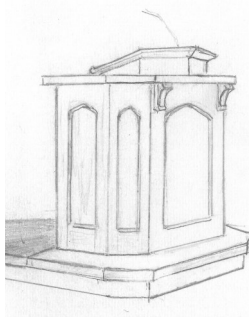
While the first two categories are broad and general, for the remaining three Paul moves towards specific traits. Third on the list is love, an overarching character trait in the Bible that comes to define all Christians. As Paul says elsewhere, "Let all

that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). Next comes faith, with an emphasis here less on *faithfulness* and more on *trust*. Speaking from experience, the temptation of the young leader is to show and prove how much he knows and how he knows exactly what he is doing. But what does this prove? That we trust ourselves? The trusting leader is not the one who comes to God's people with a well-developed plan, but the one who comes to God himself with desperate prayer. And finally, the young leader is to set an example in purity. The idea of *blameless* and *above reproach* resurfaces here. When applied to the young this word usually emphasizes sexual purity, but it can also have a broader application to all of life.

As Pastor George Knight summarizes: "By having these qualities, Timothy will be an example for believers and will demonstrate thereby that he is spiritually mature and warranted to lead and to 'command and teach these things.'" We must pass the baton of leadership, but it is a tricky process. Old leaders can be resistant to letting go, and new leaders may grab too soon and make rookie mistakes. But refusing to pass the baton is not an option. So, as we step into the new year let us do so together with humility and patience. May our leaders – both new and experienced – humble themselves to listen and learn from those who have gone before and bear patiently through the transition process. And may our members deepen their humility by following their new leaders and bear patiently with them. For while the baton of our human leadership is passed from one generation to another, God is the same yesterday, today, and forever; he is our Good Shepherd, and he will never leave us or forsake us. So, trust in him, for we are in good hands!

**The Sacred Desk**

By Rev. Sean McCann



The new year brings us to a new morning sermon series, and after eighty-seven sermons in Matthew, it may feel long overdue for some of you! After our short advent series through the great incarnation passages found in Paul's letters, I am thrilled to jump back into a long book series as we begin preaching through Isaiah this January in a series entitled, "Isaiah: Holiness by Grace." Have you ever heard a sermon series through Isaiah? If so, let me know, because I have not and I would love to learn from those who have gone before!

As you can imagine, preparing to preach through one of the longest books in the Bible can be daunting, and pair that with the challenge of exegeting and interpreting biblical prophecy, this is going to make for a fun year! When you think about Isaiah, what first comes to mind? For me I first think of the advent prophecies in chapters 7, 9, and 11, that we read and sing at Christmas. Next, I think of the

suffering servant poems – particularly 52:13-53:12 – that we read at Good Friday. And of course, I am drawn to Isaiah's vision in chapter six of the Lord of Hosts, from which we get one of our favorite hymns, *Holy, Holy, Holy*. But do you know what I rarely think of? The message of the book as a whole. I can't seem to wrap my mind around themes that carry through sixty six chapters and three distinct sections. And when I read through the book devotionally, I get bogged down in all the judgment sections in the middle – what do these have to do with the great promises of the New Heavens and the New Earth at the end of the book? Stick around and we will find out together!

It is my prayer that the words that we confess as we begin this book will ring ever truer in our ears at the conclusion: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid" (12:2).

**Preaching Schedule**

Date	Morning	Evening
Jan. 07	Isaiah 1:1-9	
Jan. 14	Isaiah 1:10-20	Hebrews 1:1-4
Jan. 21	Isaiah 1:21-31	Hebrews 1:5-1-2:4
Jan. 28	Isaiah 2:1-5	Hebrews 2:5-18
Feb. 04	Isaiah 2:6-4:1	
Feb. 11	Isaiah 4:2-6	Hebrews 3:1-6
Feb. 18	Isaiah 5:1-30	Hebrews 3:7-4:13
Feb. 25	Isaiah 6:1-13	Hebrews 4:14-5:10

**Advice on Prayer Meetings**

By Rev. Jim Curtis

Recently, I was reading a book about the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish pastor, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and the author made a side comment about M'Cheyne's ministry: he started a Thursday evening prayer meeting attended by *800 members* of his church. I was astonished, but as I dug around other sources it became clear that was simply the tip of the iceberg.

At the height of the St. Peter's (M'Cheyne's church) Revival of 1839–40, there were 39 weekly prayer meetings in connection with St. Peter's, and at least five of them were attended *entirely by little children*. To be sure, the Revival in Scotland was in full-swing, and yet I found myself wondering aloud: which came first? The prayer meeting or the revival? As it happens, M'Cheyne began the prayer meeting almost 3 years prior.

Predictably, I began to think about our own prayer meetings here at Covenant Reformed—not how I could get them to 800 people or start a revival! My hope for our prayer meetings is much more modest. It was then that I came across the advice M'Cheyne gave to others who inquired as to his "success." Rather than laying down a formula, he instead simply pointed out what they did at St. Peter's:

First, M'Cheyne advised to "pray in secret before going," and to "be in regular attendance; let nothing keep you away from your meeting." Clearly, M'Cheyne understood the prayer meeting of such importance that he encouraged the members to prepare for it. Often, I find myself wandering into our prayer meeting without having read the Psalm beforehand, or even pausing to pray for the time of prayer to be fruitful. I begin scribbling down prayer requests that come to my head on the spot, instead. What would it look like to approach prayer meeting prepared?

Second, he advised to "let your prayers in the meeting be formed as much as possible upon what you have read in the Bible." While at the prayer meeting, M'Cheyne was zealous to ensure that God's Word was primary in shaping our words in prayer. If we do this, then his latter advice naturally follows; we pray to God in the form he has taught us in the Bible, rather than seeking the acclaim of others or even refusing to pray from self-consciousness. What would it look like to earnestly pray to God in God's way?

Finally, he says: "Above all, abide in Christ, and he will abide in you." Prayer vitally connects the believer with their savior. To abide in Christ is to pray to Christ, and as Christ's church gathers for prayer we trust he will hear us as we pray together. What would it look like to connect deeply with our Savior in prayer once a week; how might he soothe our sorrows and heal our wounds?

I have asked a few questions throughout this short article. I confess I do not have answers for them quite yet. But I do know that we cannot answer them unless we gather for prayer. Will you, therefore, do two simple things in following M'Cheyne's advice? (1) Pray for the Prayer Meetings at CRPC, and (2) Join with us to pray to God as we return to meeting for prayer this month.

**Bible Reading Plans**

By Mr. Wilson Goins

A recent statistic reports that only 9% of Americans keep resolutions for the new year. It is my guess that the most common resolution for Christians is to finally read through the whole Bible, but because of the life's busyness they never complete their goal. However, I am not sure that the difficulty is found so much in busyness, but rather in selecting a reading plan that is right for you. For this reason, I want to introduce you to several plans ranked in levels of speed, in order that those of you who like plans can find the right one for the new year.

First, is the Robert Murray M'Cheyne plan. In one year, this plan takes you through the Old Testament once, along with the New Testament and Psalms twice. It includes four chapters per day, each chapter being from a different book of the Bible. This plan will fit best for those with more time on their hands, who are voracious readers, with great comprehension. It can even be split in half for two chapters in the morning, and two at night. Or two by yourself, and two with your family around the table. The M'Cheyne Bible reading calendar can be found online at [mcheyne.info](http://mcheyne.info).

Second, is Stephen Witmer's two-year reading plan. This one takes readers through the whole Bible once, with the Psalms and Proverbs four times. In total, it includes reading two or three chapters of the Bible per day. This plan would fit nicely for slower readers, as it offers less of a chance to fall behind. This plan is a sort of middle option. Both those with busy schedules and with reasonable free time may find this to be the plan for them. This plan can be found by searching "Stephen Witmer's Two Year Reading Plan."

Last, is PCA Pastor Matthew Everhard's "Guilt Free" reading plan. This plan enables you to read at your own pace, thus being "guilt free." Since it is not based on a calendar, it is good for those extremely busy, who may be more likely to fall behind. I would, however, recommend setting a goal for the speed you plan on reading with, whether it's three years, less or more. This plan takes you through the Bible one time. With that said, this plan is also good for those who have completed one of the faster plans and who want to slow down and meditate on the verses they're reading. If you have never read through the whole Bible before, this is not the one to start with, as the plans with stricter parameters will help hold you accountable to meet your goal. This plan can be found by searching "Matthew Everhard's Guilt Free Bible Reading Plan."

As we know, there are no biblical parameters set on reading through the scriptures. Nevertheless, we should be reading them because they make known to us the way of salvation and equip us for all of life! To neglect them would be to neglect our spiritual sustenance. John Knox famously said, "Let no day slip over without some comfort received from the mouth of God." My prayer is that we would seek to read the scriptures daily not just to meet a goal, but because we take delight in God's word. If you miss a day, don't be discouraged, but ask the Lord to help you start up again!