

# THE SALTSHAKER

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

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## Formed By Hearing

By Rev. Sean McCann

I am about to have a high school graduate in my house – a reality eighteen years in the making, yet still nearly impossible to believe. The arrival of this biggest of benchmarks has brought with it a good amount of reflection: how has she become the woman she has become? On the physical side, she has been formed by the countless meals we have fed her, the exercise we have encouraged, and the doctor and dentist visits we have funded. But what about the spiritual side: how has her soul been formed? As a people of a word-based faith, we confess that any answer to this question must prioritize the word of God. In this and the next few articles, I want to consider how the word of God forms us, particularly in the context of gathered, public worship. Each article will consider one of the elements of worship (hearing, seeing, praying, and singing the word), and how the Holy Spirit uses that element to convert, convict, and comfort the people of God. Today we begin with hearing the word, for indeed “faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

### Hearing the Word as an Element of Worship

Contemporary evangelicalism wrongly equates worship with singing. The Bible on the other hand paints a richer and fuller picture of worship as an event centered upon and guided by the word of God. Worship is rightly understood as a dialogue in which God speaks, and his people respond. The elements of worship serve this dialogical structure in speaking the words of God to his people (via reading, preaching, and the Sacraments) and by giving words to the people of God to respond to him (via prayer and song). Everything we do in worship can be diagramed with either a downward arrow of God speaking to us, or an upward arrow of us speaking to God. Hearing the word – our first element to consider – is tantamount to hearing the triune God speak his living word to his listening people. The Shorter Catechism sums it up well, “The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, of building them up in holiness and comfort, in faith, unto salvation.” (WSC Q89)

The often-overlooked method of hearing God speak is the public reading of Scripture. Too often the modern churchgoer only hears the scriptures read right before the sermon, and usually just a few verses at that. In contrast, we find examples in the Old Testament of God’s people standing for hours for the reading of the word (Nehemiah 8), and in the New Testament we hear Paul’s instructions to Timothy, “devote yourself to the public reading of scripture.” (1 Timothy 4:13) So in addition to using scripture for the Call to Worship, Confession of Sin, Assurance of Pardon, and Benediction, we also maintain a dedicated time in public worship for reading lengthy passages of scripture; a practice as counter-cultural as it is formative.

But no matter the importance of the reading of scripture, the Catechism reserves a primary place for the preaching of the word: “especially the preaching”. Preaching is not an addition to the word of God, but rather an extension of it. Paul commended the Thessalonians: “That when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of man but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thessalonians 1:13) The Larger Catechism calls us to receive the preached word “with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of man, as the word of God.” And the Second Helvetic Confession confirms, “Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed.” When rightly done, preaching is nothing less than the word of God passing through the lips of the herald of God, and it will always achieve the end of forming God’s people.

### Hearing the Word as a Means of Formation

We confess that hearing the word read and preached is of primary importance in forming us, but how does it work? Again, the Shorter Catechism is helpful, “That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives” (WSC Q90).

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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.

Morning Worship:

May 4, 18

June 1, 15

Evening Worship:

June 29

### Second Breakfast

May 10

June 14

### Shepherding Groups

May 4

### Summer Picnic

June 18

### General Assembly

June 23–27

### Weekly Events

#### Sunday:

Sunday School 9:30 am

Morning Worship 10:45 am

Evening Worship 6:00 pm Except on 1st Sunday

#### Wednesday Evenings (through May 21):

Supper 6:00 pm

Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm

### Bible Study

#### For Men:

ROMEOS 7:30 am

Every Thursday

(Retired Old Men Eating Out)

at Cornerstone Restaurant

Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm

1st & 3rd Thursdays

#### For Women:

Gail Albee’s Home 9:30 am

Every Tuesday

### Watering Seeds Podcast

Be sure to check out our church’s weekly podcast, *Watering Seeds*. Each week our pastors review, discuss, and apply the previous Sunday’s sermon. You can find the podcast on any major podcast platform, such as Anchor, Spotify, or Apple Podcast, by searching for our church name or the title, “Watering Seeds,” or by scanning the following QR code:





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From that answer, we can glean at least three ways the word forms us. First, we are formed by the *attention* that we give to the hearing of the word. In an age of distraction, we cannot overstate the importance of simply paying attention. In his book *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicolas Carr makes the case that our use of the Internet chemically alters our brains in ways that make us less attentive and more forgetful. It is hard enough without the effects of the internet to exert the effort required to attend to the reading and preaching of the word (just ask Eutychus), but our modern moment makes it even more important to attend to God’s word with diligence.

Second, we are formed by the *reception* that we extend to the hearing of the word. It is one thing to pay attention to reading and preaching, it is quite another thing to receive the reading and preaching of the word. We receive different types of messages differently. For example, you receive the words of a doctor in a TV commercial differently than the words of your oncologist after he has studied your test results. The former is mere information that you are inclined to ignore without a passing thought, while the latter is life-changing information, and you hang on every word. Preaching is the latter – do you receive it as such? May we be like the noble Bereans who “received the word with all eagerness.” (Acts 17:11).

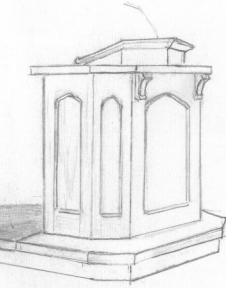
Third, we are formed by the *application* that we take from the hearing of the word. God tells us what to believe and teaches us

how to live, therefore we are to take the word that we hear, “lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.” Jesus highlights the importance of application in the Parable of the Sower: “As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15) While Jesus commends application, James condemns the lack of it: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22) A great resource for application is the booklet *Listen Up! A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* by Christopher Ash. The author outlines some suggestions for application: consider how the passage urges you to trust Christ, write down specific applications (e.g., things to stop/start doing), and share your applications with others.

A final encouragement: whether you are good at paying attention, receiving the word in love, and applying it to your life weekly...or not so good at these things, God still promises to work. You may not see it week-by-week, or month-by-month, or even year-by-year, but when you look back over a lifetime you will confess and testify that God’s word went forth and it did not return void. Do you want to be formed by God to be more like Jesus? Show up every week, sit under the word read and preached, and watch what God will do.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



I know many of you like to watch and/or read historical dramas. These “Period Pieces” glimpse into the past and captivate with various cultural differences, such that we often place ourselves back in time. What would life have been like? What wonderful things would you have seen or done that are unavailable to us today? I doubt many feel this urge in our evening sermons in 1 Kings. Though there are many similarities—court intrigue and hopeful expectation (chs. 1–2); divine intervention and wise justice (chs. 3–4)—it certainly begins to “slow down,” if you will, around chapter 5. This huge architectural project begins to come into focus: Solomon’s Temple.

Why is the history of 1 Kings in all its minute detail not as appealing as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *War and Peace*, and *The Great Gatsby*? Minute detail of Egyptian archaeology, among other things, tends to captivate. So, what gives? I suggest it is a matter of expectations. 1–2 Samuel has a great dynamic range. David’s life and ascendancy to the throne of Israel is easily some of the Old Testament’s “Greatest Hits.” To be met with the granular descriptions of furniture in the Temple defies what we have come to expect in this history of David’s dynasty. In short, we have traded David’s Sling for Solomon’s Sketchpad; mighty men for secretaries and scribes.

Compared to battle history, or nearly anything else, divine worship just is not very interesting. Minds wander as the Pastor goes on. Sighs are expelled as hymnals open to an unfavored selection. Internal pleading for the Associate Pastor to end his explanation of the Scripture reading is nearly audible. Stomachs growl for a tastier lunch than the Lord’s Supper.

Yet, David *wanted* to trade his sling for the sketchpad. God expressly forbade David from building the house of the Lord precisely because of the excitement in 1–2 Samuel (yet, see 2 Chron 28:9–21). What does David’s desire for theless-action-packed life his son Solomon enjoyed pouring over drawings, invoices, and inventories tell us? Perhaps that we should focus more on where the Ark is than the actions of David—in other words, we should be less like Michal (2 Sam 6).

1 Kings helps us do that; how? *By slowing down*, forcing us to focus on God’s “Immense Presence” (1 Ki 8:1–21), in details about worship, God’s plan of redemption, and most of all how David, Solomon, the Ark, the Temple, basins, bowls, lampstands—everything down to even the bread on the table points us to Jesus. So join us Sunday evenings to slow down and learn to appreciate the unexciting and unappealing. Then we might be prepared to experience joy when the Savior appears, even if there “is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2).

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
May 4	1 Peter 4:7-11	
May 11	1 Peter 4:12-19	1 Kings 8:54-66
May 18	1 Peter 5:1-5	1 Kings 9:1-9
May 25	1 Peter 5:6-14	1 Kings 9:10-28
June 1	Ecclesiastes	
June 8	Ecclesiastes	1 Kings 10:1-29
June 15	Ecclesiastes	1 Kings 11:1-13
June 22	Ecclesiastes	1 Kings 11:14-43
June 29	Ecclesiastes	1 Kings 12:1-24

Youth Ministry Update

By Micaiah Liner

It is a great encouragement to see the way God has blessed our church with a growing youth ministry. Aside from our own regular-attending students, we are seeing new faces, as our youth bring friends along to youth events and even our midweek gatherings.

Already we have had a busy Spring semester, with a couple of game nights, a movie night and bowling night; and in March, our high school students went on a weekend retreat to Bonclarken in Hendersonville (middle school students will be going on a similar retreat this November). Although things do slow down a bit over the summer months, we will continue to host events, giving our students opportunities to stay connected and grow in their friendships.

With all the activities surrounding our youth ministry, it is good to briefly reflect on a couple of convictions that are central to all we do.

First is the conviction that a growing knowledge and love for the Word of God is foundational to a healthy youth ministry. In addition to parents who faithfully teach the wonderful truths of the Bible to their children (which is irreplaceable), our youth are blessed with opportunities to regularly hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ: The Sunday School hour is a place for both high school and middle school students to learn to study the Bible alongside their peers; Sunday morning and evening worship, our youth get to hear the Gospel preached; Wednesday nights they get to sing a Psalm together, hear a brief Bible lesson, and pray for one another. Each of these elements in the life of our church helps keep us centered on the Word of God.

Second is the conviction that having fun together is good and necessary for our students, as it is for us all. In Proverbs 17:22, we are told that, “...a joyful heart is good medicine”. Something that I am often struck by is how quickly joy and laughter result from our youth being together. I love it, and I find my own soul is uplifted. One way we seek to encourage this is by regularly organizing events where our students can play some games, share experiences, and make great memories. It is important for them to know that the God who graciously saves sinners is also the God who makes it possible for any of us to have joy in this life!

**How You Can Pray**

Pray that our students would clearly associate the joy that they experience in youth ministry with the God who is the giver of “every good and perfect gift.” Pray that they would know these good and desirable parts of the human experience are only possible because of the one true God “who gives life to everything”. Pray that those who have faith in Jesus Christ would continue to grow strong and confident in that faith. Pray that those who do not would see the immeasurable worth of knowing Christ Jesus, and that they would believe.

Thank you for your ongoing love for the youth of our church and for all the ways our members support this ministry!

Daily Doctrine —Book Review

By David Livernois

I began reading Kevin DeYoung’s book *Daily Doctrine: A One-Year Guide to Systematic Theology* on January 1 of this year, and I began reading it on my Kindle; my hardcopy would not arrive until February. Apparently, the demand for this title (published October 22, 2024) was greater than the publisher anticipated. One has to appreciate the irony of this, being that I had just firmly planted my flag as a “paper and ink person” in my article for the January/February edition of the Saltshaker. Irony aside, I mention this to highlight the overwhelming reception this title immediately received, and rightly so. Notably, it won the 2024 “Theology for the Christian Life” book award by *Credo Magazine*, as well as the 2024 book of the year in *The Gospel Coalition’s* “Popular Theology” category.

I believe this is in part due to the book’s one-of-a-kind achievement (to my knowledge) which lies largely in the successful merger between the doctrine espoused in a systematic theology textbook (“systematic theology” as defined in this book “organizes doctrine logically around topics and questions”), and the digestible brevity of a daily devotional. As “*Daily Doctrine*” demonstrates, when these two concepts are combined and produced by a skilled writer and incisive theologian, the outcome makes for a wonderfully insightful, edifying, and readable work; one which I am glad to recommend.

That said, while this book can be read devotionally, it is not written in a devotional style, other than the format. What I mean is, while indeed, we “dig deeper in doctrine that we might soar higher in worship,” the style in which DeYoung writes is not what we might typically associate with a daily devotional; that is, something written less to inform and more to enflame, usually purposed to encourage us in daily “Christian living.” No doubt, this book can certainly do that, but personally I recommend it as an addition to one’s already daily digest of “outside of the Bible” reading purposed towards growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). How might that look? In his introduction, DeYoung offers a few suggestions. Divided into 52 weeks, each comprised of 5 days (or readings), the book can be approached in at least 3 ways. It can be read over the course of one year’s time as part of a daily routine. It can be read straight through (for example, treating each “week” as a chapter). Or, it can be used as a reference tool to look up specific topics such as “Providence” or “Hypostatic Union” and get a five-hundred-word synopsis of the term or idea.

While the third option presented above is by itself a “stand alone” option, my desire for anyone adding this volume to their library (digital or otherwise) and intending to read it cover-to-cover, is that afterwards it will also continue to be returned to for reference time and again. Why? Because all of us are forgetful. And when we forget truths we already know, we need to be reminded afresh in ways that, as another commendation of this volume says, “work with our limited bandwidth to... replenish and nurture our souls and bring us into intimate fellowship with the bread of life.” DeYoung has given us an excellent tool to that end.