

# THE SALTSHAKER

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

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## A Short Prayer to End a Long Year

By Rev. Sean McCann

*This past year of 2021 has been the most difficult year of my brief decade in pastoral ministry, and I know it has been hard on you, the church. Despite our deepest wishes, Covid is still with us with no relief on the horizon. In this year alone we have taken three different approaches to our worship gatherings with various times, restrictions, locations, etc., and this has taxed us as individuals seeking consistency in worship, as well as us as a body seeking to deepen in fellowship amidst so much fracturing. We have had five funerals of beloved members: Wes Clapp, Robert Sievert, Anna Dillingham, Terry Elniff, and Linda Eubanks. Their departures have left holes in our fellowship that no one can fill. We lost our Assistant Pastor and his family very suddenly, which has felt like a type of death. We have experienced personal, relational, and physical challenges among our membership. All in all, it has been a hard year in the life of our church.*

*Enduring these sorrows together are what it means to be part of the body of Christ – to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to mourn with those who mourn. As a pastor, I am often tempted to think, “What can I do to fix all of this?” How can I preach the perfect sermon, give the enlightening advice, mediate the long-awaited reconciliation, cultivate the healthy community, design the ideal long-range plan, and on and on it goes. But I can’t do any of these things...or I certainly can’t do them well! So, what hope do we have? Well, the answer is the same it has always been, it is God alone who gives the growth (1 Cor 3:6-7). So instead of trying to write an inspiring article for the new year or to articulate a great ministry strategy to lead us to greener pastures, I have set my sights on humbly offering a prayer of lament and hope, and I invite you to join me in praying it as we close out this year.*

Our Lord and our God,

You are our Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love

and faithfulness. As we close this year, we come to you in the name of our risen savior Jesus Christ to lay our burdens before you. Hear us, as a Father hears his children, as the one who knows how to give good gifts to his children. Hear us, for our older brother sympathizes with us and stands even now at your right-hand making intercession for us. Hear us, for your Spirit helps us in our weakness with groans too deep for words. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – hear our prayer.

We mourn the loss of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We feel their departures deeply and mourn their absence. For those who have died in Christ, we praise and thank you for the precious promise of the resurrection, and call upon you to comfort their loved ones with the peace of Christ. For those who have left our fellowship, we ask your blessings on them, and ask you to heal the wounds that may remain between us and them.

We lament the strife, disagreement, and unkind words that have come from our lips this year. When it comes to the virus, and masks, and vaccines, we feel deeply the divisions that these topics have brought among us, and lament how our sinful thoughts, words, and actions have driven wedges between us and those we are called to love.

We grieve the fractured relationships among us. Whether it be between one church member and another, or between parents and children, or between husband and wife, we grieve how sin has wrought such pain and we petition you to heal us. Send your Spirit to convict the guilty that we might be brought to a place of confession and repentance. Open the hearts of the offended to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Smooth the path of restoration that we all would eagerly leave our offering at the altar and go to be reconciled with our brother, and to speak, like Joseph to his brothers, kind words of comfort.

We long for brighter days and greener pastures, to

## 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; [crpchq@gmail.com](mailto:crpchq@gmail.com)).

#### The Lord’s Supper

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

During Morning Worship: January 2, 16 February 6, 20	During Evening Worship: January 30
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#### Shepherding Groups:

February 6, following morning worship.

Every member is assigned to one of our elders for oversight and care. Each elder gathers his Shepherding Group every few months for fellowship and prayer.

#### Fellowship Meals:

January 2, following morning worship.

We celebrate Fellowship Meals for the whole congregation together in the Fellowship Hall several times a year.

### Weekly Events

#### Sunday:

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

Except for 1st Sundays

### Bible Study

#### For Men:

Men’s Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road		
Norm Bomer’s Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

#### For Women:

Carol Belz’s Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
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throw off the shackles of lament and grief, of melancholy and weariness, that we might embrace with full hearts and open hands the joy you have set before us. With the psalmists we cry, “How long, O Lord?” We yearn for purity of heart, zeal of worship, warmth of fellowship, and fruit of our witness. We ache for days of peace and security, of generous conversations and joyous welcome, of a foretaste of when the lion will lie down with the lamb.

We praise you that even in the darkest of days, you are with us. You will not leave us or forsake us. No one can snatch us out of your hand. The good work you began in us will not be abandoned, but you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. We praise you that you will dawn on us like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

O God, we have just sung this advent season how the “weary world rejoices.” So we remember that in our trails, we are always rejoicing. We rejoice that you have come to dwell among us as the fulfillment of all your promises. We rejoice that you were born of the virgin Mary and took on human flesh, the “Lord of lords, in human vesture.” You stooped so low in order that you might raise us up so high, and in that we rejoice.

We thank you, O God, for though we are afflicted, we are not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but

not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. In all things we give thanks, for you are the Lord and giver of life.

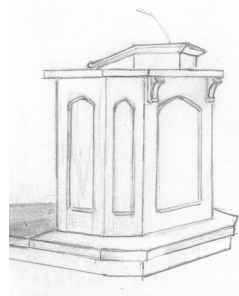
We rest now in the finished work of Christ and under his everlasting reign. You have risen from the grave, appeared before many, and ascended on high. You sit now as king, ruling and defending us as we await your return and praying for your kingdom to come. We wait upon your glorious return, and the day when you will dwell with us, and we will be your people, and you will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, no pain anymore, for the former things will pass away.

And so we close, asking that you would restore us as your church. A bruised reed you will not break, and a faintly burning wick you will not quench. Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Revive us with the breath of life. Renew our faith and cause us to remember our first love. Refresh our vision of Christ and settle our hearts at peace with him.

Now him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

## The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



After a year in the book of Genesis, we closed 2021 starting a new sermon series through the book of Matthew. Instead of preaching an advent sermon series, I jumped right into Matthew and let those first two chapters on the birth of Christ serve as our preparation to celebrate the arrival of the Messiah.

However, switching gears from the lengthy Genesis to the lengthy Matthew may be a bit jarring for some. Since I started at Covenant Reformed five and a half years ago, I have been building towards longer sermon series. Genesis was the longest series up to this point, and Matthew promises to be even longer.

At times I find it helpful to cover shorter studies between longer books, but I was persuaded to jump right into Matthew for two reasons. I have already mentioned the first reason, that the opening chapters lined up nicely for an advent focus, but the second was even more persuasive: the opening pages of Matthew’s Gospel reach all the way back to the pages of Genesis, such that there is no better guide on the path from the Old Testament to Christ than Matthew.

Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, tracing it back to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Tamar. He records how Gabriel announced to Mary that “they shall call his name Immanuel (which means God with us),” an echo of the same promise repeated throughout Genesis to the patriarchs. In his second chapter, Matthew notes five different times how events happened in Jesus’ life to fulfill what was written about him in the Old Testament, including that he would come from the tribe of Judah, a promise that dates to Genesis 49.

In line with his many connections to the Old Testament, the audience of Matthew’s gospel is identified by Dr. Reggie Kidd as a “Greek-speaking Jewish Christian community, one that is grappling with Israel’s mission to the nations through Jesus the Messiah.” The long-expected Messiah has arrived, and now Matthew wants to show the people what to believe and how to live in light of this truth.

How is this relevant to us? Again Dr. Kidd is helpful here, “It is in this instruction, showing Jewish and non-Jewish believers how to live together, through lives transformed from the inside out, that the Gospel of Matthew provides deep, rich, preaching material for the pastor who desires to help a congregation develop an authentic and loving witness to a skeptical world.”

I am looking forward to this series, and I hope you can join us as we explore the person and work of Christ on the pages of Matthew’s gospel.

### Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Jan. 2	Matt. 2	
Jan. 9	Matt. 3:1-12	1 Cor. 15:35-49
Jan. 16	Matt. 3:13-17	1 Cor. 15:50-58
Jan. 23	Matt. 4:1-11	1 Cor. 16:1-12
Jan. 30	Matt. 4:12-17	1 Cor. 16:13-24
Feb. 6	Matt. 4:18-25	
Feb. 13	Matt. 5:1-12	2 Sam. 1
Feb. 20	Matt. 5:13-16	2 Sam. 2
Feb. 27	Matt. 5:17-20	2 Sam. 3

## The Wisdom Pyramid

By Rev. Sean McCann

I ended last year reading an enlightening book entitled *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World* by Brett McCracken. The book is an explanation of the author’s wrestling with how to gain wisdom in a world flooded with endless sources of information. He takes the idea of a food pyramid that displays a balanced diet for consuming food and uses that concept to design a wisdom pyramid that displays a balanced diet for consuming information.

Before he gets to the pyramid itself, McCracken identifies three problems with our information diet, each of which parallel three problems that many of us have in our nutrition diet. The first problem is *too much* information – we live in the information age and anything we want to know can be answered with just a few swipes of our fingers. When we eat too much food we grow unhealthy, and the same can be said for too much information. Second, we consume information *too fast*. Just as eating too fast can cause problems with digestion; scrolling through newsfeeds, homepages, and cable news channels on a daily (if not hourly) basis also leads to problems of digesting information. And thirdly, we tend to only consume information from sources that we like, so that the types of information in our diet are *too similar*. The more we tailor the news to our own interest, the more we live in an echo chamber and are unable to empathize with those around us who have different information diets. Like deficiencies in our food intake, these three deficiencies do not produce healthy and wise Christians.

So, if our wisdom problem lies with the sources and methods of our intake of information, what is the solution? Here is where the wisdom pyramid comes in. McCracken writes, “In our current epistemological crisis, where we are bombarded by a glut of content and information but have so little wisdom, I think we need guidance on healthier habits of knowledge intake. We need a wisdom pyramid. We need to think about what sorts of “knowledge groups,” and in what proportion, feed a healthy life of true wisdom and true joy.” Like the food pyramid, McCracken’s wisdom pyramid has layers, each sized according to importance and foundational to the layers that will be stacked above it.

The “knowledge group” that is by far the most important and foundational to the rest is the Bible, our daily bread. There is no other place to start or foundation that will hold than God’s living and active Word. The next category up is the local church. This includes both the daily and weekly experience of life together in worship and community, as well as the time-tested theology and practice of the historic church. These first two categories are non-negotiable for the Christian, and we cannot find wisdom without them as our first and primary avenues of intake. Moving up are a few categories through which God reveals himself in lesser ways: Nature, Beauty, and Books. The top of the pyramid, and thus the category of least importance in gaining wisdom, is the Internet and Social Media. It is a sad irony that for many of us who proclaim the importance of God’s word and his church, this “knowledge group” tends to dominate our diet, and we are suffering because of it.

McCracken summarizes his pyramid thus: “One thing you’ll notice about this wisdom pyramid is that it goes from the most enduring up to the most fleeting. God is eternal, so he should be the base of wisdom. The church has been around for 2,000 years and will outlive the universe. Nature and beauty have been around and will be for a long time. Books are more of a recent invention in history, but many of them have lasted for centuries. The Internet and social media? Well they are fickle things, changing everyday. So orient your knowledge diet around the things that endure. This will help you find wisdom and joy in a fake news, post-truth, alternative facts world”

As you look to the new year and aim to return to healthy rhythms and routines in your life, I think you will find this book both helpful and challenging.



### THE WISDOM PYRAMID

In a post-truth, fake news world, we don't know what to trust. The overwhelming glut, reckless speed, and personalized orientation of information in the digital age is making us sick. We need, for our mental and spiritual health, what the Food Pyramid is for our physical health: guidance for what to consume and not to consume, and in what proportions, so that we can become healthy and wise.