

# THE SALTSHAKER

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

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## GRACE at Covenant Reformed

*Our church was blessed to host a conference in June led by a guest speaker from GRACE. Last month Joel and Carol Esther Belz and Dennis and Rebecca Ponder sat down to reflect on the conference and what application it might have in our church.*

### What is the meaning of GRACE?

Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment.

### Why is this an important topic?

A conservative estimate is that one in four women and one in six men have been sexually abused before they are 18 years old. Abuse hides in the darkness but God is the God of light (John 3:19). Leaders – as undershepherds of Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10) - are called to protect the sheep, in contrast to the false shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34). Because God is a refuge for the most vulnerable, the purpose of the conference was to enable our church family to better recognize, prevent, and respond to abuse in a godly manner.

### What then do our leaders need to know to put that culture of protection in place?

Leaders have the responsibility and the power from God to shape nine main areas in terms of the church's system—God, Power, Mission, Denial, Education, Victims, Offenders, Policy, and Reporting.

Abusers know how to recognize a weak system. Because God is a refuge for the vulnerable, church leaders are called to use their power to intervene for the oppressed (Psalm 72:12-14). God is a God of justice and he cares. Jesus came to bring light and justice. God loves mercy and serves the weak through justice (Psalm 82:1-4).

### What about Mission? Isn't the mission of the church 'the gospel'?

What is the gospel? Isn't it the good news of the coming of the Kingdom? The Kingdom includes the protection

of the "least of these." (Matthew 18:6; 25:40-46; Mark 10:13-16). Abuse is devastating to faith.

### What about Denial? How does it undermine Mission? How do we overcome it?

The attitude that this is sin "out there in the world" creates a perfect environment for abuse. Christians are easy prey. Preaching and teaching needs to make clear that abusers are people we know and live with who know how to diffuse the appearance of evil and how to get away with what they plan. Jesus talked more than once about wolves in sheep's clothing. Children cannot face this alone. For example, leaders need to publicly pray the Psalms for the vulnerable and survivors and speak against abuse and domestic violence. The most common type of Psalm is lament.

### But are the statistics offered by the speaker a bit sensational? Do we really have evidence that this is a problem in a stable congregations like CRPC?

Remember that this isn't just about catching perpetrators but about providing safety, help, comfort, and security for the victims/survivors. How many victims? We don't know for sure, of course. We do know that the word "few" no longer applies. Remember the words of Rachel Denhollender, "What is a little girl worth?"

### What about Education?

Leaders within the church need to take ownership to educate and equip adults and in an age appropriate way inform the children. "Be wise as serpents, innocent as doves," is an exhortation not to be naive.

Children who are most at risk are those surrounded by adults who cannot stomach learning about abuse. Yes, we are to teach respect and obedience, but speaking up about abuse is not gossip. The Bible is replete with concern for the vulnerable and oppressed (for example, 2 Samuel 13). Pastors and elders need to speak and pray openly and make sure children know when it is

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## November and December

### 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:	During Evening Worship:
November 4, 18	December 30
December 2, 16,	

#### Elder Groups:

November 4, following morning worship.

#### Thanksgiving Service:

November 21, 6:30 pm.

#### Fellowship Meal:

December 2, following morning worship.

#### Veterans' Restoration Quarters Meals:

November 7, lunch; November 15, dinner  
December 5, lunch; December 22, dinner

#### Ladies' Christmas Brunch:

December 15, 10:00 am.

#### Christmas Eve Service:

December 24, 5:30 pm.

### Weekly Events

#### Sunday:

Opening Exercises	9:30 am	
Sunday School	9:45 am	
Morning Worship	11:00 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except for 1st Sundays

#### Wednesday Evenings:

**(Except November 21 and December 19 and 26)**

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
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

#### For Women:

Carol Belz's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday
Fellowship Hall	10:30 am	Every Wednesday
Debbie Cate's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays

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appropriate to say “no” to authority. The congregation needs to be reminded that God hates violence, including emotional abuse.

**How do we recognize a Victim, an Offender, and a Proper Response?**

False accusations are rare. Children do not have the development to be able to explain or even understand the shame they feel. Wolves are practiced in wearing sheep’s clothing and often threaten victims not to tell anyone, silencing them in order to maintain control. It is hard for a victim to come forward because he/she has experienced broken trust. To come to an authority to report is not only re-traumatizing but also requires putting himself/herself in a position of trusting someone else. The trauma of abuse is “soul murder” that overwhelms even the body’s normal mechanisms, often leading to other health and mental issues due to smoking, drinking, and other behaviors they use to cope. Leaders need to believe any disclosure, report to civil authorities, and create an environment of support for the victim.

**Isn’t it an abdication of responsibility to report outside the church? What about Matthew 18?**

Abuse is a crime. It is intentional and God puts the blame on the abuser, not the abused (Psalm 10:6-11). God-ordained civil authorities are trained to ask the right questions in the right way

(Romans 13). If abuse has occurred, the people of the church have already been groomed to trust the offender. It is a legal obligation in North Carolina to report. It is also a moral obligation, commanded throughout Scripture.

Matthew 18 is about peers—sheep to sheep. Abuse is about wolf to sheep. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul says, that the guilty person should “be removed from among you.” In Ephesians 5 he says such a person “has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words... do not associate with them...walk as children of light...Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” There is forgiveness, but there are also consequences that must be accepted with humility and without blame-shifting or avoidance.

**How does creating and sticking with a policy help a church? If I don’t work with children do I really need to know the policy?**

Experts need to be consulted in establishing the best protection policy that gives clarity so the WHOLE congregation is enabled to support enforcement of any boundary violation. Abusers plan ahead and arrange for getting their victims isolated. They are intentional and manipulative of both the victims and others around them and are practiced in using Biblical language to get what they want. The more everyone is aware that we are seriously paying attention and holding offenders accountable, the safer our church will be.

**The Sacred Desk**

By Rev. Sean McCann



Last month I preached on the early years of Saul’s ministry after his conversion, and we considered together what Old Testament passages he might have used to confound “the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:22). This got me thinking more about how the early church understood the fulfillment of the Old Testament, which led to sketching out a full-blown sermon series on this topic! It is this theme that I plan to pursue in our upcoming advent sermon series. This December we will study the Old Testament passages that are fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, looking specifically at those texts referenced in the opening pages of the Gospel of Matthew.

Many scholars have identified the strong Jewish element in Matthew’s gospel as seen in his focus on Jewish issues, an audience that seems to be Jewish, and Matthew’s intentionality in talking about Christian issues that address Judaism. Dr. Reggie Kidd understands these elements as lending to Matthew’s purpose “to demonstrate that the Hebrew Scriptures have all along been pointing to Jesus as Messiah and inaugurator of God’s kingdom.”

While the whole book shows this emphasis, it is most notable in the opening chapters. Matthew approaches the birth narrative of Jesus through the structure of prophecy and fulfillment by referencing five passages from the Old Testament in the first two chapters of his gospel. Matthew wants his readers to see how the advent of Jesus fulfills the prophecies of God and accomplishes his plan for the fullness of time. In this series – entitled “Speaking of Jesus” – we will take the first four Sundays of December, as well as Christmas Eve, to study these passages in their original context, as well as how Matthew understands their fulfillment in the arrival of Jesus, the Christ.

May God use this Advent series to grow our understanding of the incarnation and deepen our love for the Savior who was given for us and our salvation.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
November 4	Acts 11:19-30	
November 11	Acts 12:1-25	1 Samuel 5:1-12
November 18	Acts 13:1-12	1 Samuel 6:1-21
November 25	Acts 13:13-52	1 Samuel 7:1-17
December 2	Isaiah 7:14	
December 9	Micah 5:2	1 Samuel 8:1-22
December 16	Hosea 11:1	1 Samuel 9:1-27
December 23	Jeremiah 31:15	Psalms 22:6
December 30	Acts 14:1-28	1 Samuel 10:1-27

**Mentorship**

By Rev. Chris Brown

Recently I preached on 2 Timothy 4. The message was about how we need to be training and trainable, to preach, promote, and practice the Word of God. I gave some practical suggestions about how to make that happen. But it is also appropriate to codify some ideas in writing here in *The Saltshaker*.

First, it’s best to forget what lies behind, and strain forward toward what lies ahead. Many of you have seen disciples, children, and friends leave the faith. You wonder if you have done something wrong, and even have regrets about the way you handled things. Some of you may be younger. You might doubt that you have a chance of becoming a mature believer because of the things you’ve done in your past. But Paul tells us to forget what lies behind, and consider what lies ahead.

So, second, think about which people or person you want to mentor or have as a mentor. Who can you mentor? Who do you want to have as your mentor? You choose a mentee because you see promise in them. You choose a mentor because you believe you have reason to respect them, and can learn from them. Whoever you choose will be your concern and care for years to come. So, sometimes it is worth being wary of a person who says they want to learn or to teach, but displays that they do not care. This was Paul’s concern with John Mark in Acts 15:38. You choose a mentee because you see promise in them. You choose a mentor because you think you can respect them and learn from them.

Third, make a plan for mentorship and carry it out. Paul heard about Timothy, and sought him out after hearing a good report about him (Acts 16). He brought him with him on his travels with Silas. He introduced him to responsibilities after this. Then, he passed the baton of church leadership over to him and his fellow elders. It is ideal for the older to seek out the younger. But in some special circumstances the younger need to seek out the older. What if the person you want to mentor you is busy? What if they don’t know your interest in learning and growing? In this case, if a young person wants a mentor, then they should ask!

Fourth, consider the best ways to mentor someone. Paul immersed Timothy in church-planting and evangelistic experiences. We may not be able to follow Paul’s model in a perfect way today. We may not be able to visit someone at their work place or school, or have them visit us at ours. But the foundation of a biblical mentorship, in my understanding at least, is prayer. Pray for and with the person or people with whom you establish a mentor-like relationship. Verbally commit to prayer with and for them. Then, actually meet and pray together. This is where all biblical mentorship begins. After this, develop a time of Scripture reading together. Discuss the passage. Bring in commentaries. If you have time, get involved in an outreach ministry together. This is how God has designed the Church to grow together in Christ.

**Somebody Else’s House**

by Cathy O’Brien

I live in somebody else’s house. It is a beautiful house, but my time here is temporary and this house is not mine.

I want my home. I want to live in the home I chose, the home that is shaped and built and filled for me. That’s the home where I can find all my things—where the bookshelves I bought are filled with my books, where the cabinets are filled with my dishes, where the closets are stuffed with my off-season detritus.

My art decorates this house that does not belong to me. My throw pillows adorn somebody else’s couch. It is a strange hybrid of familiar and homey, and confusing and frustrating. I remind myself that one day the minor inconveniences that so annoy me now will be replaced by my house which will be ready for me. One day the light switches will make sense to my dim eyes and questioning hands.

Until that glorious day, I take care of somebody else’s house. I admire its beauty, enjoy its setting, get acquainted with its neighborhood, take advantage of its location, and am thankful for it. I love somebody else’s house, but it’s not mine and it never will be. My heart longs for the house that is mine, that I must wait for, that is being worked on diligently and joyfully.

So in my longing for my own house, I can’t lose sight of my work now—keeping somebody else’s house in good repair, taking care of it as if it were my own, and loving its owners. I meet the neighbors and explore the neighborhood.

At the same time, I make friends with the neighbors near my new house. I explore my new-and-not-yet neighborhood. It’s hard to live in two places at once. My eagerness to be home grows; my satisfaction in this temporary setting lessens.

Embracing this season of tenuous balance challenges me daily. I have made deliberate choices to reduce my connection to my current location. I get mail only at my new address, but not ever at the house I do not own. I try to visit my new home frequently to remind my faint heart of where I will be eventually. This challenge is where I am for now, living in somebody else’s house, and longing for my true home—one I own by virtue of down payment but do not yet possess fully. Soon.

SOON!

*It was good for me to ponder so many ways that my unsettled feelings parallel spiritual longing for my true home and how the Holy Spirit is my pledge—my down payment—on my eternal home. On a less metaphorical note, we O’Briens hope to move into 308 Northeast Avenue, Swannanoa, sometime near Christmas. Soon!*