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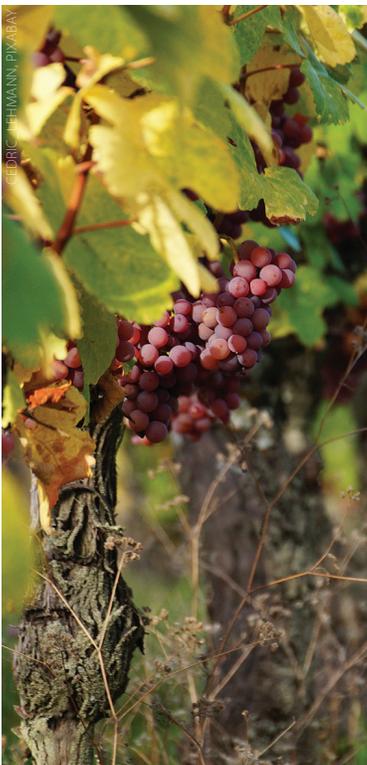
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A Fruitful Christian

Essay by Professor Dan Lioy



In John 15, Jesus teaches that the Christian life flourishes only as believers abide in him. To do so is not merely to imitate Christ from a distance, but to live in continual fellowship with him as he comes to us through his Word and Sacraments. In that living communion, he makes his people fruitful for the glory of the Father (vv. 1-8).

Jesus' imagery would have been familiar to his hearers. Viticulture was a primary agricultural industry of first-century Israel. The Old Testament often portrayed Israel as a vine — sometimes luxuriant, sometimes wild or unfruitful (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15; 19:10; Hosea 10:1).

Against that backdrop, Jesus identifies himself as the “true vine,” his Father as the vine-dresser, and the disciples as branches joined to Christ (John 15:1, 5). The Father removes fruitless branches and lovingly prunes fruitful ones so they may bear more. Here both the Law and the Gospel sound: a sober warning against unbelief and apostasy, and a consoling promise that the Father tends his own for their good.

What, then, is the “fruit” Jesus has in view? Scripture suggests a twofold answer. First, fruit includes the confession of Christ and the spread of his Gospel (Colossians 1:6). Second, it includes the Spirit-given virtues that mark a godly life. Far from competing, these belong together: faith justifies apart from works (Romans 3:28), yet faith is never alone; it is “active in love” (Galatians 5:6). Thus, Jesus connects fruitfulness with prayer (John 15:7), self-giving love (vv. 9-13), obedience (vv. 10, 14), and joy (v. 11).

Paul's description of the “fruit of the Spirit” clarifies how this growth occurs: “fruit” (singular) indicates a unified cluster, not isolated traits (Galatians 5:22–23). Love begins the list, and from it flow joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Importantly, such fruit is not manufactured by sheer willpower. As Jesus says, “apart

from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The Spirit bears this fruit as he keeps us with Christ in the one true faith through the Gospel.

Lutherans therefore speak of sanctification as the fruit of justification. We are declared righteous solely for Christ's sake, received by faith. From that gift flows a new life of love. Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, believers are crucified with the flesh and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–5; Galatians 5:24). This does not erase the struggle with sin, but it does relocate our confidence: not in our progress, but in Christ's promise and the Spirit's power.

Paul frames this beautifully in Philippians. We “work out” our salvation with fear and trembling, precisely because “it is God who works in [us] both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13). Likewise, Paul prays that we be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:11).

Ephesians 2 keeps the order straight: by grace we are saved through faith, not by works. Yet we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:8–10). God both saves and sends; he both redeems and deploys.

To live this “abundant” (John 10:10) life is to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Practically, that means dwelling in Christ's Word, receiving his gifts in the Sacraments, praying with confidence, and serving our neighbors in our everyday vocations. Abiding in Christ, then, is not a burdensome task but a gracious reality. The Savior holds his branches securely, prunes them wisely, and makes them fruitful. In this way the Father is glorified, Jesus' disciples are strengthened, and the world is blessed (John 15:8) 

Dan Lioy, PhD, teaches biblical theology at [ILT Christ School of Theology](http://www.iltchrist.edu).

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 11:1-5

In the Lord I take refuge;
how can you say to my
soul, flee like a bird to
your mountain,
for behold, the wicked
bend the bow; they
have fitted their arrow
to the string to shoot
in the dark at the
upright in heart;
if the foundations are
destroyed, what can
the righteous do?
The Lord is in his holy
temple; the Lord's
throne is in heaven; his
eyes see, his eyelids
test the children of
man.
The Lord tests the
righteous, but his soul
hates the wicked and
the one who loves
violence.

He was working a job that placed so much responsibility on his shoulders that he felt he may buckle. His boss was thankless and his coworkers petty. Every day, he thought about continuing past the exit to work and going to the beach.

She came home each evening after a long day in the officer to bickering children and a snippy husband. Her kitchen table was piled high with bills and her schedule consumed by commitments. Each evening as she cooked dinner, she thought about booking a flight to anywhere else.

We've all had moments we feel crushed under the weights of work or bludgeoned in our relationships. We feel like the foundations of our world, our country, our homes are crumbling. Fleeing seems like the best option.

The psalmist of Psalm 11 wrestles with the same escapist fantasies, but as he wonders about fleeing to the mountains, he acknowledges an ugly truth. Wickedness follows us like an arrow fired straight towards our heart. If we flee, we will never stop running, and so the psalmist encourages us to return to the one true God, who rules over the places of our trouble and the places of our escape. In the words of Scripture, we do not receive the promise that life will always be easy, but the promise that even in suffering, the Lord is sovereign. He shoulders our responsibilities with us. He offers us rest and respite in worship and his word. He has shown us his face, and baptized us with fire and the Holy Spirit, and promised that all wickedness

— even that of our own hearts — will be put to rest.

Read the Psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for personal devotions or in a short Bible study session with group discussion.

1. The psalmist speaks of “foundations” being shaken. This word “תְּהוֹמָטָה” appears only in this psalm, and seems to refer to common life and shared morals. Does it ever feel like the foundations of our common life are being shaken? How?
2. How are we tempted to flee from public or personal responsibilities? How does God's word redirect us to remain present in these spaces? (Consider Matthew 5:13-16.)
3. Think about the ways that God offers us relief from our shaken foundations (ex. Jeremiah 31:31-34, Luke 1:46-55, Romans 8:18-39). What is the promise in these texts, and why is that good news?
4. How does God's word and promise offer you a refuge in the midst of shaking foundations and wounds inflicted by wickedness?

PRAYER

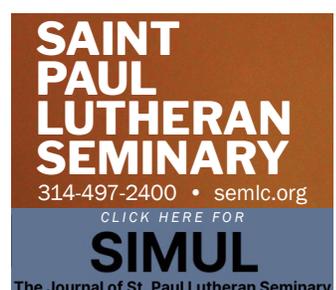
Holy Father, you are more steadfast than even the mountains you formed by hand. When we are tempted to flee from one moment of brokenness into another, help us to instead return to the unwavering promise of your love and redemption. Amen.

The author of this installment, **Rev. Taylor Rister-Stempniak** of Fresno, California, is pastor of [Immanuel Lutheran Church in the community of Easton](#).

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ABOUT

Luther House of Study forms pastors and leaders who are grounded in Scripture and centered in Christ. Through its affordable, online Master of Divinity program and free digital resources, LHOS makes faithful Lutheran education accessible around the world. Partnering with Kairos University, LHOS offers an ATS-accredited seminary experience rooted in the Lutheran confessions.

MISSION

Strengthening Lutheran leadership and ministries for the proclamation of the Gospel.

CONTACT

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info@lutherhouseofstudy.org

Since its founding in 2006, Luther House of Study has worked to provide accessible and solid Lutheran theological education to strengthen Lutheran leadership and ministries. From its earliest days, LHOS has remained focused on meeting the needs of congregations and the people who serve them.

What began as a small group of students with limited structure has grown into a thriving, global ministry that continues to teach people to preach and hear the Gospel.

Sarah Stenson, CEO of LHOS, said, “The heart of LHOS has always been for the people and congregations, the pastors in the pulpits of those congregations. We bend over backwards to do everything we can to put solid Lutheran pastors in the pulpit and help nurture those pastors once they’re there, for the sake of pastoral care.”

In partnership with Kairos University, LHOS offers an ATS-accredited Master of Divinity program that is affordable, flexible, and deeply rooted in Lutheran theology. Students pay only \$300 per month and complete their studies fully online while remaining in their own ministry contexts. Each student works with a three-member mentor team that provides academic guidance, professional insight, and personal support.

The program welcomes students from across the world and from multiple Lutheran bodies. By combining rigorous education with relational mentorship, LHOS continues to prepare pastors and leaders

“This [LHOS] education provides you with a lifetime of their care and a lifetime commitment to what you’re doing. They aren’t just pumping out graduates and letting them flounder in this crazy life.”

Erica Varcoe, LHOS graduate

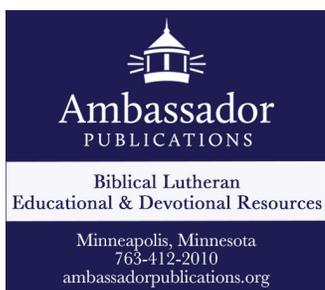
who are grounded in Scripture and equipped to serve their communities with clarity and confidence.

Beyond its academic offerings, LHOS provides a growing library of free digital resources that bring Lutheran theology to everyday life. Its Scripture First podcast has surpassed 300 episodes and 200,000 downloads, and the interactive confirmation curriculum provides congregations with a complete two-year program freely available online.

Supported entirely by donor generosity, LHOS continues its mission to form pastors, strengthen congregations, and proclaim Christ throughout the world. 

Max Stenson is the Director of Communications and Digital Content at LHOS. Contact him at max@lhos.org.

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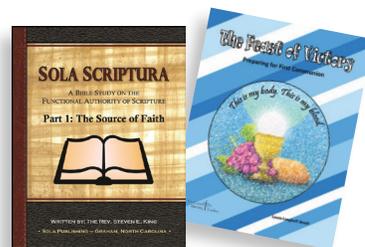


THIS MONTH'S UNEXPECTEDLY AWESOME RESOURCE

Many Sola Publishing products have sample chapters or introductory material for people who are looking for their next women's or men's group Bible study; daily devotional for adults, kids or families; curriculums for Wednesday nights, vacation Bible school, confirmation and Sunday school; and more.

If you're not sure whether you're ready for a deep dive into Sola Scriptura, there's [a sample chapter for that](#).

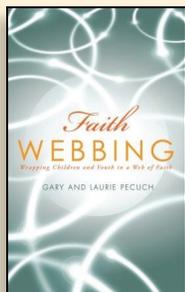
If you're not sure whether the discussion in a First Communion preparation guide is fitted to the age group you're working with, there's [a](#)



[video and sample pages for that](#), too.

And any time you're not quite sure what you're looking for, simply call 888-887-9840 for more information.

YOUTH AND KIDS



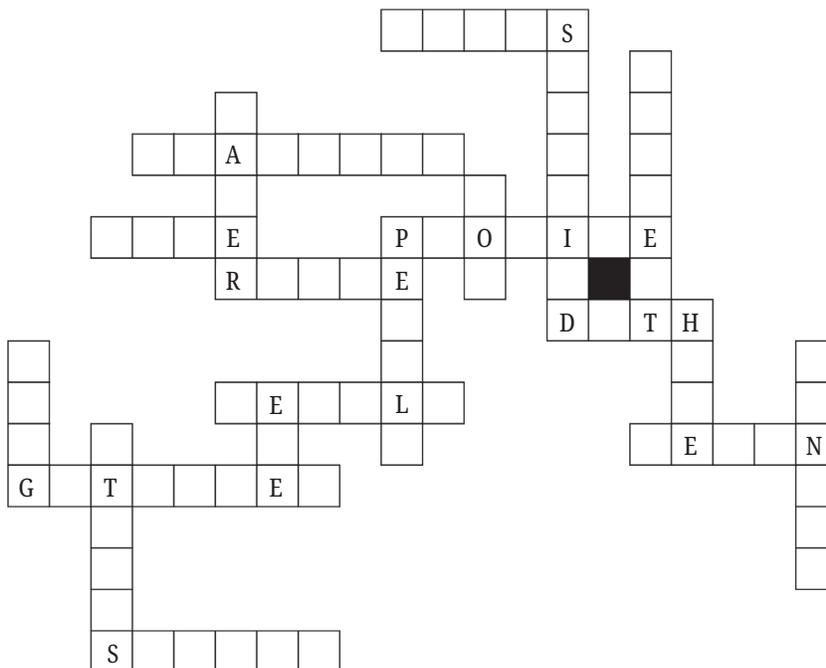
Faith Webbing: Wrapping Children and Youth in a Web of Faith by Gary and Laurie Pecuch is a deep, purposeful intergenerational approach to connecting youth to faith through a congregation. Soft cover, 70 pages. [Item Y-P120, \\$10.99, solapublishing.com](#)

... AND A GAME

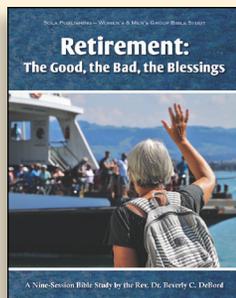
Reading in print? Try to fill in this clueless crossword with the words in bold from the first verse of "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come." Reading Connections Online through your browser? Try this [jigsaw puzzle](#) from Rev. Mark Ryman.

**Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.**

**God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.**



GROUP STUDY



Retirement: The Good, the Bad, the Blessings takes a look at the good, the bad, and the blessings of retirement, reflecting on biblical themes that speak to this season of life. Written by Rev. Dr. Beverly C. DeBord. Leader guide available. [Item W-1910, \\$9.99, solapublishing.com](#)