

# CONNECTIONS

online

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## Preparation

Essay by the Rev. Theresa Jacobson



**W**e are now in a new season in our Church year: the season of Lent. The word Lent originates from an old English word, *lencten*, which means “to lengthen.” It makes sense that this word would be associated with spring, a time when we have more sunlight and our days lengthen. Spring brings about rebirth and renewal as we watch flowers, plants, and trees begin to show signs of life again as they bud and bloom. On the farm, we witness new life coming into the world as cows give birth to calves and ewes to lambs.

Lent is a time of reflection on the rebirth of our baptism. Martin Luther believed that Lent was a time to focus on Christ’s suffering and death — not to show pity on Jesus, but rather as a way to call to mind the price Jesus paid so that we might be forgiven. And so Lent is also a time of preparation for our spiritual renewal in Easter. We are baptized into Christ’s death; we are also baptized into his resurrection.

Lent becomes, for many, a time to set more resolutions, much like we did at the start of the new year. We give up candy, dessert, social media — but why? Do we think that we will earn God’s forgiveness by doing so? Do we expect a pat on the back from our Heavenly Father, accompanied by an “atta boy” or “atta girl”? Luther was against this way of thinking.

It’s not bad to do some sort of fasting. But the question is — why? If I give up dessert throughout all of Lent, so that when I attend our congregation’s Lenten suppers, which always have delicious desserts, and as I muster up all my willpower to avoid said desserts, it allows me to call to mind the price that Jesus paid in his suffering and death, then well and good. If our fasting is intended to draw us closer to God, then our fasting serves a purpose, and one that Luther could accept. It’s not to earn extra credit points with our

Lord; rather, it is to draw us closer to him, to call to mind what he gave up for us. Passing up a chocolate brownie pales in comparison to what Christ did for us.

On the flip side of “giving up” something, we can use Lent as a time to add something extra to our faith lives. When I was 10 years old, I had been suffering from what my parents thought was a severe case of athletes’ foot. After seeing an allergist, a dermatologist, and eventually an infectious disease specialist, it turned out

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*

John 14:3

I was dealing with an immune deficiency. My immune system thought all was fine and dandy with my body, but really, I had this terrible infection on my feet that contained both staph and fungus. My feet had the equivalent of second-degree burns. Walking hurt them. Going to school only to have kids stomp on my feet was beyond painful. But I wouldn’t be diagnosed until I was 12 — another two years! In my suffering, my dad suggested we read together the book of Job during Lent that year. So we did. Did it cure my feet? No. Did it help me to better understand suffering in the life of a Christian? It sure did. And to this day, I’ll never forget that Lent in 1994. Eventually, I was freed from the pain and suffering, but it took time. Adding in a devotional reading of the book of Job drew me closer to Jesus. It reminded me that Christ suffered even worse. It also reminded me that one day, there will be no more suffering.

So whatever you have decided to do this Lent, may you be encouraged to do something that will remind you of your baptism, complete with suffering but also with all of God’s promises. 

**Theresa Jacobson** of Thornville, Ohio, is assistant editor with Sola Publishing.

# Journey Through the Psalms

## Mini Bible Study Installment



### PSALM 3:3-6,8

But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah*

I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people! *Selah*

**K**ing David is in horrible trouble. His son, Amnon, attacked his daughter, leading to devastation in the family. His other son, Absalom — seeking justice for his sister, but mostly seeking to feed his own pride — has started a civil war. As Absalom wages battle on the kingdom, David is forced to flee. Everywhere David looks, men who were once loyal are now enemies, and they have begun to shout that there can be “no salvation for him from God.” Given everything that David knows about his family’s sin and the sin of his own heart, I’m sure he was tempted to believe them.

But Psalm 3 doesn’t stop with the words of David’s enemies: it moves us towards the promise of God’s redemption. David realizes that much of life is outside of his control, and he’s made a mess of the things that are in his control, but nothing is outside of God’s protection, redemption, and justice. In the end, salvation will not be found in David or in his enemies or in any earthly victory. Salvation will be found in the Lord who provides for us the blessing of his unwarranted grace.

### FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

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

1. David’s enemies say “there is no salvation for him in God” (v. 2). In what moments of our lives are we tempted to doubt God or our salvation?
2. David describes the Lord as a “Shield about [him]” and the “Lifter of [his] head” (v. 3). How does God protect and encourage you?
3. In this Psalm, David is praying even as he is suffering and fearful. Why is it important to pray even when things aren’t going our way?
4. The Psalm ends with a proclamation that “Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people!” How do you think these words gave David hope? How do these words comfort us when we fall short?

### PRAYER

O Lord, the consequences of our sin and the sin of our neighbors rise against us. But you have shielded us from condemnation, and lifted us from the grave of despair. Sustain us as we face the troubles of this life, and help us to keep our eyes always fixed upon the salvation and blessing you provide your people. 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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# LCBI High School



Students With a Serving Heart — Ministry Partner Focus by Kari Alford

## LEARN MORE

LCBI High School, a Christian boarding school in Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada, offers a unique environment for academic, social, and spiritual growth. Since 1915 LCBI has combined rigorous academics with Christian values to prepare students for their future. Daily chapel, devotions, and faith courses encourage spiritual development; the motto "We Would See Jesus" guides all aspects of school life. The leadership development program and service opportunities, like Mission Trips, nurture leaders and disciples. LCBI equips students with academic knowledge and a purpose-driven, faith-centered life. Visit [lcbi.sk.ca](http://lcbi.sk.ca) or contact [admissions@lcbi.sk.ca](mailto:admissions@lcbi.sk.ca) to learn more.

Fostering a life of discipleship and a life of service is one of the important focuses at LCBI High School in Outlook, Saskatchewan. We provide many opportunities for our students to serve one another and serve others, both locally and around the world.

Being a tight knit, Christ-centered community we learn to live, work and serve each other through our daily tasks both at school and in the dorms. Studying together, playing sports together, singing and acting together, doing dorm duties together — all create and develop giving hearts and a supportive community.

Our Leadership and Discipleship Program provides opportunities for every student to help plan and carry out evening activities and chapel services for the student body. And as a student body we go out and serve our community each month, assisting in the local daycare, schools, long term care homes, churches and anywhere there is a need. We serve in the inner city area of Saskatoon by providing meals for a Kids' Club run by a local charity. And we go out into the world to assist and encourage those who work in overseas ministries.

Last year we were able to connect with the young girls attending Kuwala Christian School



*Living in the dorms at LCBI, discipleship becomes a daily journey. We grow in faith together, supporting each other while learning to follow Christ's example in both our studies and friendships.*

in Malawi. We provided classes and activities at the school, donated supplies, and had our eyes opened to the needs in that part of the world.

This February, a team of 25 students, staff and alumni participated in our Mexico Mission trip where we helped out at the Foundation for His Ministry home for children, men's rehab center and seniors' home, providing help with renovations, working in the orchard, cleaning and playing with the kids.

Servant hearts come in all shapes and sizes and show through all kinds of activities. Seeing the expression of beautiful servant hearts in our students is a wonderful thing! 

Kari Alford of Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada, is the Dean of Campus Life at LCBI High School.

**Cost to attend LCBI High School in Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada, starts at \$16,000 USD.**

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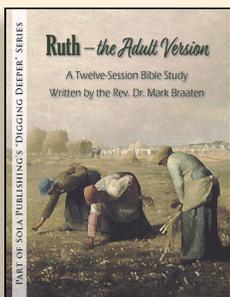
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## STUDY SAMPLE

[Read a sample](#) of the 12-week study "**Ruth – the Adult Version**" by **Rev. Dr. Mark Braaten**. Part of Digging Deeper from Sola, which is more intensive than the Women's and Men's studies, this study goes beyond the "Cinderella story" of Ruth to look at wordplay and innuendo meant for adult readers. [Item A-4040 \(leader guide A-4045\), \\$14.99, solapublishing.com](#)

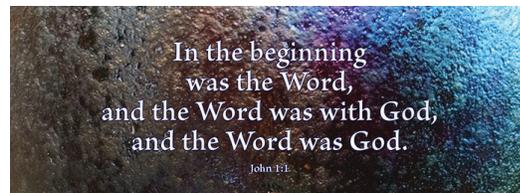
## THIS MONTH'S UNEXPECTEDLY AWESOME RESOURCE

Sola Publishing is the distributor of a free daily devotion written by Rev. Mark Ryman.

[This devotion series](#) explores sections from the Lutheran Confessions with a reading, Scripture, and reflection for each day.

Thousands of devotion resources exist, but this particular one has some features that are helpful specifically for Lutheran congregations — features that many other devotion series do not have.

The devotions can be read daily in a browser or via RSS feed by subscribing through software such as Feedly or Newsboat. They can also be embedded in your church website for visitors to read. Installments update automatically for a hands-off way to



keep your personal reading or website up to date.

Each one also has a unique image that is part of an [extensive archive](#). These are available for use in bulletins or elsewhere at no charge.

Visit [solapublishing.com](http://solapublishing.com) and click on the link to Sola Devotions just below the pageheader to read devotions and see images. 

## ... AND A GAME

Playing in print? See if you can find these forgiveness synonyms and related words in the word search. Reading Connections Online though your browser? Try this [jigsaw puzzle](#) from Rev. Mark Ryman.

ABSOLVE	E	G	S	G	J								
ACQUIT	V	R	S	N	E								
ASK	L	A	O	I	S								
BAPTISM	O	C	R	V	U								
BLESSING	S	E	C	R	S								
CLEAR	Y	L	O	H	B	B	L	E	S	S	I	N	G
COMMUNION	K	S	A	B	A	E	E	S	U	C	X	E	Q
CROSS	S	E	S	S	A	P	S	E	R	T	Y	N	H
EXCUSE	B	A	P	T	I	S	M	D	R	A	E	L	C
FORGIVE	C	N	C	O	M	M	U	N	I	O	N	L	V
GRACE	M	E	E	U	R								
HOLY	A	S	V	N	R								
JESUS	C	A	I	W	E								
RECEIVE	Q	E	G	O	C								
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SIN	I	E	O	T	I								
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