

**Growing God's People:
Teaching Spiritual Formation**

MIN 4350sf—Course Syllabus

Spring 2019

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Course Description and Methodology:

This course provides an introduction to the field and practice of Christian spirituality & discipleship as well as pedagogical strategies for teaching Christian spiritual formation in a congregational/educational context. The course will consist of lectures, readings, discussions, and seminar presentations on readings from the required textbooks and supplemental texts. Additionally, students will practice a single discipline from that various practices of spiritual formation throughout the semester and report on their experience.

Course Content:

The course will begin with a thorough exploration of the current climate of spirituality in the United States with an eye toward the impact of modernity, late-modernity, and post-modernity on spiritual practice and development. We will then focus on defining Christian spiritual formation and factors which lead to lasting spiritual transformation on both personal and corporate levels. We will look at select spiritual disciplines, and we will present means for transmitting spiritual disciplines via teaching and preaching.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the current climate of “spirituality” in the United States in late-modernity/post-modernity, with a working definition of each.
- Students will acquire a familiarity and working understanding of the language, methods, and goals of Christian spiritual formation.
- Students will be capable of describing the key elements of lasting personal change and interpreting their theological significance.
- Students will acquire a theoretical grasp of the role of key spiritual exercises characteristic of historic Christianity while developing a personal, experiential appreciation of a few of these exercises.
- Students will interact with a broad range of seminal texts produced in the late 20th and early 21st century renaissance of evangelical interest in spiritual formation.

Required Reading:

- A Bible

- Hall, Christopher A. *Living Wisely with the Church Fathers*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2017.
- Issler, Klaus. *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.
- Smith, James K.A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Cultural Liturgies vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.
- Various handouts throughout the semester.

Course Assessments:

Spiritual Autobiography: Each student will compose a spiritual autobiography, not to exceed 10 pages.

- A spiritual autobiography is not merely a testimony. The student is asked to reflect on his or her life events that have effected spiritual transformation. Begin with your earliest memories of interaction with God, the turning points—experiences, habits, practices—in that interaction, your journey toward Christ, and your spiritual development to the present.
- Augustine's *Confessions* provide the earliest example (but don't write 9 books!), but there are others, including Lewis Smedes' *My God and I: A Spiritual Memoir*.
- An example will be provided.
- The student may compose this in any format, including a written narrative, poetry, video, etc. Format must be approved by the instructor prior to composition.
- Spend a lot of time with this—it is a *selective* history.

Seminar Presentation: Each student will prepare, compose, and present a paper over one of the seminar readings for the semester.

- The student will prepare discussion questions and provide leadership in guiding the discussion.
- The student will provide enough copies of the paper for the class.

Class participation: While there will be lecture, much of the course will center on discussion of the readings guided by the instructor or by students. Participation in these discussions (and thus actually reading the assigned texts) will be an important means of assessment.

Book Review: Students will compose and submit a book review of 7-10 pages over one of the course's textbooks or an additional book on spiritual formation (with instructor's approval). A bibliography will be provided.

- Attendance: Excessive absences or tardiness will result in a 10% reduction in the final grade. If you are unable to attend a given course meeting, prior notice to instructor is required.
- 30% Spiritual Autobiography

- 25% Seminar Presentation
- 25% Class participation
- 20% Book review

Tentative Class/Reading Schedule:

- Jan 29: Where are we?
 - Smith, Introduction
 - Hall, Introduction
- Feb 5: Who are we?
 - Smith, chapter 1, first part (37–63)
 - Willard, chapter 12 (137–157)
 - Seminar discussion
- Feb 12: The De-centered self: What is spiritual formation and lasting spiritual change (Ideas, Habits, Social Integration)?
 - Issler, chapter 1
 - Willard, chapter 1–2
 - Seminar Discussion
- Feb 19: Concepts and Means of spiritual formation
 - Smith, chapter 2
 - Willard, chapter 6
 - Issler, chapter 2
 - Seminar Discussion
- Feb 26: The Holy Spirit's Role in our Transformation
 - Discussion of Spiritual Autobiography
 - Issler, chapter 3, 5
 - Seminar Discussion
- Mar 5: Transforming our ideas
 - Hall, chapter 8
 - Willard, chapter 15
 - Workshop: Currently available answers to Five Questions
- Mar 12: Spiritual Practices, part 1
 - Willard, chapter 8
 - Issler, chapter 4
 - Seminar Discussion
- Mar 19: Spring Break
- Mar 26: Spiritual Practices, part 2
 - Issler, chapter 6
 - Smith, chapter 4
 - Seminar Discussion
- Apr 2: Spiritual Practices, part 3; Social integration
 - Smith, chapter 5
 - Seminar discussion (2 presenters possible)
- Apr 9: Social Integration
 - Issler, chapter 8

- Seminar discussion (2 presenters possible)
- Apr 16: Social Integration/Practices
 - Hall, chapter 1
 - Willard, chapter 11
 - Seminar Discussion
- Apr 23: Social Integration/Practices
 - Hall, chapter 2
 - Seminar Discussion
- Apr 30: Toward teaching spiritual formation
 - Handouts
 - Seminar Discussion
- May 7: Toward teaching spiritual formation, cont'd.
 - Handouts
 - Seminar discussion
- May 14: Final exam week, no class meeting
 - **Book Review due**
 - **Spiritual Autobiography due**