



DYNAMICS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH
CE 323
Spring 2007, TU 6:30-9:45PM BGC 250

Professor: Tom Schwanda, D. Min.
Office: BGC 244
Office Hours: posted on my door ... other times by appointment
Email: Tom.Schwanda@wheaton.edu
Phone: x7958 (school) 871-2941 (home, no calls after 9:00PM please)

About this syllabus This course syllabus is a guide for our learning experience. Therefore, we may modify it as the course progresses depending upon our needs or the greater wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Course Description: This course focuses on the dynamic process of spiritual growth and maturity. Biblical foundations, historical development, and conceptions of the church's role in society are examined as they affect our view of the Christian life. Theology and practice of the spiritual disciplines are also emphasized.

Textbooks:

The Holy Bible, preferably a good modern translation (e.g. TNIV, NIV, NRSV, NASB, NLT, ESV) **without** study notes.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Lifesigns*. Garden City: NY: Doubleday & Co., 1986.

The Pilgrim's Tale. ed. Aleksei Pentkovsky. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.

Thompson, Marjory J. *Soul Feast*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

Course Reader

Course Objectives:

1. To discover the biblical and theological principles of spiritual growth and transformation and to realize that Christian spirituality begins, continues, and ends with God and not us!
2. To cultivate the practice of self-examination and attentiveness to our Triune God.
3. To recognize that spiritual formation is never a program of “doing” but rather a dynamic process of “being” initiated by the gracious invitation of Jesus Christ.
4. To gain an awareness and practical experience of the nature and purpose of spiritual disciplines so that we might become more receptive to the transforming presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
5. To recognize and appreciate the dynamics of both the active and contemplative dimensions of Christian spirituality.

Course Schedule:

- Jan 9: Course Introduction and Biblical Images of the Spiritual Life
- Jan 16: Principles of Spiritual Formation: The Gospel of Grace in Following Christ
Read Thompson, 83-92, Chan, Moore, and Foster (examen), Course Reader
- Jan 23: Living in Union with Christ: Establishing our Identity
Read Thompson, ch. 1-2, Manning, MacDonald (Ordering), and Sheldrake, Course Reader
- Jan 30: Hearing and Discerning God’s Voice
Spiritual Autobiography paper due
- Feb 6: Cultural Dynamics and Challenge/Barriers to Living in Christ
Read MacDonald (persona), Hudson, Course Reader

- Feb 13: Active Spirituality: Compassion/Justice and Service to Our Neighbor
Read McNeill, Course Reader
- Feb 20: The Eight Deadly Thoughts of Sin and Sin Management
Read Thompson, 92-100, Norris, Course Reader
Devotional Classic paper proposal due
- Feb 27: Desolation and Aridity and Spiritual Warfare
Read Foster (forsaken), Chittister, Course Reader
- Mar 6: **NO CLASS Spring Break**
- Mar 13: Growing in Christ: Pilgrimage
Read *The Pilgrim's Tale* (all)
- Mar 20: Growing in Wholeness with Christ
Read Nouwen (all)
- Mar 27: Contemplative Spirituality: Love and Adoration of God
Read Schwanda, Course Reader
Active Spirituality Soul Project due
- Apr 3: Spiritual Disciplines
Read Thompson, ch. 3, 5, Sanny, Course Reader
- Apr 10: Spiritual Disciplines
Read Thompson, ch. 8
Devotional Classic paper due
- Apr 17: Spiritual and Relational Dynamics of Community Life-
Read Thompson, ch. 4, 7
- Apr 24: Communion of Saints: A Brief Tour of the History of Christian Spirituality
Contemplative Spirituality Soul Project due **Read** Thompson, ch. 9

May 1: **Case Study Small Group presentations**
Reading Report Log due

Philosophy of Education and Pedagogy:

Bernard of Clairvaux, the highly influential Christian leader of the twelfth century, captured the challenge of education when he wrote, “For there are some who long to know for the sole purpose of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity; others who long to know in order to become known, and that is shameful vanity. ... There are others still who long for knowledge in order to sell its fruits for money or honors, and this is shameful profiteering; others again who long to know in order to be of service, and this is charity. Finally there are those who long to know in order to benefit themselves, and this is prudence.”

“Of all these categories, only the last two avoid the abuse of knowledge, because they desire to know for the purpose of doing good.... Food that is badly cooked and indigestible induces physical disorders and damages the body instead of nourishing it. In the same way if a glut of knowledge stuffed in the memory, that stomach of the mind, has not been cooked on the fire of love, and transfused and digested by certain skills of the soul, its habits and actions---since, as life and conduct bear witness, the mind is rendered good through its knowledge of good---will not that knowledge be reckoned sinful, like the food that produces irregular and harmful humors?” (Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* 2. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976, (SC 36:3-4), 176-77).

Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664), a Puritan pastor from England, reflects a similar approach to Bernard. He reminded his listeners, “Study therefore, and study more, but be sure thy study and thy knowledge, be rather practical than speculative; do not merely beat thy brains to learn the history of Christ’s death, but the efficacy, virtue and merit of it: know what thou knowest in reference to thyself” (Isaac Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*, Sprinkle ed., 375). And St. Francis cautions us not to drive a wedge between our theology and spirituality, “It pleases me that you teach sacred theology to the brothers, as long as –in the word of the Rule—you ‘do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion’ with study of this kind” St. Francis of Assisi. *The Complete Works*. Paulist Press, p. 79.

Further, one of the best ways to learn is through asking questions. John Cassian (c. 365-c.435), a key Christian leader who collected the wisdom of Christianity from the East and brought it back to the West once wrote, “One is very close to knowledge when one clearly recognizes the questions to be asked” (John Cassian, *Conferences*, 10.9).

Learning Covenant:

As professor of this course, I covenant with each student that I will model Christ-like behavior, value and respect each student as a person in Christ, come to class prepared, begin and end class on time, make appropriate assignments and grade them fairly, and be available for consultation outside of class. In return, I expect each student to model Christ-like behavior, show proper respect to me as the professor and

your classmates, come to class prepared, arrive and leave class on time, and submit assignments and participate in ways that demonstrate your integrity and desire to learn.

Requirements and Assignments:

Spiritual Autobiography

Students will write a 5-6 page paper that captures and presents some of the key components of their spiritual journey. These papers will be treated confidentially and no one will see them except the professor. In preparation read Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography*, Course Reader. Use his format and principles to shape the development of your own spiritual story. You can present this in any way that best depicts and reflects your spiritual autobiography. The primary purpose of this assignment is to guide you in reviewing and reflecting upon your life and becoming more aware of what has helped and hindered your spiritual growth. This self-assessment should guide you in selecting many of the other assignments for this course. **20% of grade, due Jan 30**

Soul Projects, Active Spirituality:

Select one of the following “active” spiritual disciplines to practice during the course of the semester. **20% of grade, due Mar 27**

There are numerous possibilities for engaging in this soul project. Two specific options are provided in detail. However, they are merely examples to give you an idea of what could be practiced. Feel free to create your own soul project with the additional ideas provided below, but not to be limited by them. It might be very beneficial to draw upon the insights that you uncovered in your spiritual autobiography.

Fasting. Read Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (ch 4). Fasting as Foster indicates does not have to be limited to food. If you select this soul project you must fast from both food and also some other item (e.g. internet surfing, email, video games, cell phone, using make up, etc.). As you practice this discipline be especially aware of those things, people, activities that exert control over your life. What impact do they have upon your relationship with God and others? Practice this discipline for a period of at least three weeks, three times a week. Women are reminded that fasting may be difficult since our culture places such a strong emphasis on eating and body self-image.

Service. Read Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (ch 9). Serving others is at the core of the gospel. Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve others. If you select this discipline you must begin some new form of significant volunteer service. This can be through your church, a local ministry in town or some other means agreed upon between yourself and the professor. As you practice this discipline be especially aware of your attitude as you help others and the relationship between serving others and being aware of God. Practice this discipline for a period of at least three weeks, three times a week.

Other possible options could include: some expression of hospitality, leading worship, Sabbath keeping, a group spiritual discipline on some specific task or need, etc.

While journaling is not a required component for these soul projects it could greatly assist you in your reflection and processing your experiences.

Soul Projects, Contemplative Spirituality:

Select one of the following “contemplative” spiritual disciplines to practice during the course of the semester. **20% of grade, due Apr 24**

There are numerous possibilities for engaging in this soul project. Two specific options are provided in detail. However, they are merely examples to give you an idea of what could be practiced. Feel free to create your own soul project with the additional ideas provided below, but not to be limited by them. It might be very beneficial to draw upon the insights that you uncovered in your spiritual autobiography.

Solitude and silence. Read Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (ch 7). Solitude does not require you to retreat from your normal activities and interactions with others though at times it can be both necessary and helpful. If you select this discipline you must get away at least twice for extended periods of silence (at least four or more hours) during a three-week period and practice being silent. In addition you must seek to hold your tongue while in regular interactions with others at least three times for each of the three weeks. As you practice this discipline be especially aware how solitude and silence guides your relationship with God and others.

Praying the Psalms. Read Richard J. Foster, *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home* (ch 8- The Prayer of Adoration). The Psalms are the ancient prayer book of the Church. They are also our best means towards learning how God relates to us and how we should relate to God. There are many ways to read the Psalms, this way invites you to lovingly read and reflect on and savor God's word to you and to notice how you respond to God's desire to draw you into deeper intimacy. As you pray the Psalms, notice what they say about God and humanity. There will often be a double message regarding humanity (e.g. those who seek to follow and love God and those who reject and ignore God). If you select this discipline pray the Psalms at least three days a week for three weeks. You might want to read the Psalms in order (e.g. lectio continua) or select them according to specific categories (e.g. praise, thanksgiving, trust, confession, lament, etc.).

Other possible options could include: regular attendance at Taize services, walking the labyrinth, creating some expression of art (e.g. visual, poetry, music, etc.), Sabbath keeping, gazing at God/meditating on God's attributes, a group spiritual discipline on some contemplative practice, etc.

While journaling is not a required component for these soul projects it could greatly assist you in your reflection and processing your experiences.

Devotional Classic Research/Reflection paper:

The purpose of this assignment is to help you to become better acquainted with some of God's friends from earlier centuries. Our contemporary church suffers from a lack of historical awareness of earlier Christians and the significant movements that have shaped Christian spirituality. To guide your selection first consider the needs that you became aware of from your spiritual autobiography. Is there a spiritual practice that you feel you would like to understand better? Or perhaps you are curious about some specific theme of spiritual transformation. You might find it helpful to consult any of the following items on the Reserve Shelf in the Wheaton College Library: Richard J. Foster and James B. Smith, *Devotional Classics*; Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics*, Frank N. McGrill and Ian P. McGreal, *Christian Spirituality* (another copy of this book is in the reference section of the library). Also the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org) maintained by Harry Plantinga at Calvin College provides an extensive list of possible devotional classics.

You must submit your book choice in writing along with the copy of the book for approval. In addition you must indicate what source(s) you will use to provide the background and context of your person. You must use at least one library (non internet) source. Selection requests with book title and background source material must be typed and submitted by **Feb 20**

This 6 page paper consists of three parts. Clearly mark the three parts. Part I sketches the background and context of your devotional figure (1 1/2 pages). Part II summarizes the major themes explored in your devotional writing (3 1/2 pages). Part III applies this devotional classic to your own life and the contemporary church (1 page). **25% of grade, due Apr 10**

Case Study Small Group Project

Students will form in small groups of 4-5 people to present a response to a specific spiritual challenge or problem of the Christian life. The purpose of this assignment is to guide your integration of the themes of this course as well as developing your ability to analyze and offer a response to a real life issue with a group of your peers. You will present your response to the class on the night of our final exam. **15% of grade, due May 1**

Reading Report Log. Students will submit a Reading Log listing what percentage of each book they have read and what percentage they have skimmed. To receive full credit it is essential to read all of the books, and not just merely skim them. (Subjective grade) **Due May 1**

Policy for Writing and Grading Papers:

Grading in Christian Spirituality is tricky and often misunderstood. It is only natural for students to associate their grades with their self-worth. However, grades are not intended to reflect your value or importance to God or others. Further, the discipline of Christian Formation and Ministry often intersects with our experience of God or other personal issues. You will never be graded on your experience of God or lack of experience. But you will often be challenged to reflect upon those experiences to assist you in deepening your awareness as well as guiding others in engaging similar self-examination to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore any papers or projects that evaluate you will never be based on your experience but how you have understood or interpreted it.

All papers must be typed and double-spaced in 12 point size. Papers will be graded according to the following three criteria: content, clarity, and structure and style. (1) Content relates to the development of the major themes of your assignment. How clearly have you understood the topic and nature of your presentation or assignment? (2) Clarity relates to your ability to express yourself clearly with consistent sentences that develop your thoughts and present them in a logical and flowing manner. (3) Structure and style relates to grammar and spelling. All papers should be carefully spell checked and proofed.

Grades on unstapled papers will be reduced by 3 points. Since technology is not a respecter of spiritual dynamics and transformation it is strongly suggested that you back up all work on a separate computer disk and keep an extra hard copy.

Please use the following format when writing your papers. Place your name, class (CE 323 Dynamics of Spiritual Growth), box number, and date in the upper left hand corner of the paper. Do not use a title page. Your name should appear only on the first page. This process allows your papers to be read anonymously. **PLEASE NOTE:** email attachments of your papers are not acceptable.

Expectations and Guidelines:

Attendance:

Attendance and engaged participation are expected of all students. It is difficult for you to learn if you are absent. However there may be unexpected emergencies or crises that might prevent your attendance. Unexcused absences will lower the “subjective assessment” portion of your grade. Gross disregard for class attendance and participation could result in failure of the course.

Grades:

Satisfactorily fulfilling the expectations and assignments for this course as outlined in the syllabus will earn the student a B+ grade. It is possible to achieve an A- or A only by going beyond expectations—not necessarily in length, but in depth and integration of thinking, in creative development, and in level of involvement.

Late Papers: Late papers will be reduced by 5 points of a letter grade for each day late. After one week a late paper becomes a zero.

Grading Scale:

94-100 = A	74 - 76 = C
90-93 = A-	70 - 73 = C-
87-89 = B+	67 - 69 = D+
84-86 = B	64 - 66 = D
80-83 = B-	60 - 63 = D -
77-79 = C+	below 60 = F

Subjective Assessment: 10% of final grade

Attendance, preparedness, diligent work and engaged participation are important to me for this to be a collaborative and effective learning experience. I reserve a percentage of your final grade for my subjective assessment of these and other factors related to your coursework.

Academic Honesty:

As students and faculty of Wheaton College, we are members of an academic community with high scholarly standards, a commitment to pursuing truth, a recognition that our actions affect others in the community and a desire to follow Jesus' example of integrity and truthfulness. Academic honesty is essential for establishing and maintaining the trust that is fundamental to the educational process. Examples of academic dishonesty, which will result in disciplinary action, include, but are not limited to ...

cheating – using unauthorized material or unauthorized help from another person in any work or examination submitted for academic credit

fabrication – inventing information, citations, reporting participation in activities never done, or inflating the effort put in and/or the effect of various self-reported activities

facilitating academic dishonesty – providing unauthorized material or information to another person

plagiarism – representing the work of another as one's own without acknowledging the source

misrepresentation – giving the impression of having done more significant work than you actually did (e.g., padding references with works not consulted, doing less than your fair share of a group project, or recycling one's own work)

Disciplinary responses will be individualized to reflect the maturity of the student, the severity of the infraction and any evolving patterns.

Academic Support:

College can be a challenging experience. While not intending to limit the possible resources students often find it helpful to visit the Writing Center to assist them in the preparation of their papers. Additionally the Counseling Center may be of assistance in resolving relational, emotional, and other issues that often can impact learning. For further assistance please visit the Writing Center:

<http://www.wheaton.edu/learnres/writectr/> or Counseling Center: <http://www.wheaton.edu/Counseling/>

A Selective Bibliography:

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Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated and introduction by R.S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin Books, 1961.

Baile, John. *A Diary of Private Prayer*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Beasley-Topliffe, Keith. ed. *Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation*. Nashville: Upper Room, 2003.

Bernard of Clairvaux. *The Love of God*. Edited by James M. Houston. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983.

Bloom, Anthony. *Beginning to Pray*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1975.

Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954.

Bunyan, John. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Edited and intro by W. R. Owens. London: Penguin Books, 1987.

- Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill and Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
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