Abilene Christian University

**College of Biblical Studies**

**Graduate School of Theology**

**Spiritual Formation**

BIBM 648.W1, Spring 2023

Canvas

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The mission of Abilene Christian University is *to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.*

The mission of the College of Biblical Studies is *to provide leadership, preparation, and resources for effective worldwide ministry in the cause of Christ.*

The mission of the Graduate School of Theology is *to equip men and women for effective missional leadership in all its forms and to provide strong academic foundations for theological inquiry.*

**Course Description**

Christian Spiritual Formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. This course identifies how God utilizes Scripture, people, contexts, literature, spiritual disciplines, and events to transform believers into Christ likeness.

**Course Purpose**

This course primarily challenges students to continue prayerfully examining their own personal spirituality, character, and spiritual formation as they seek to imitate Christ. Personal growth toward holy living and spirituality maturity includes inquiry, critical thinking, theological reflection, worship, contemplation, spiritual disciplines, and praxis. The course is a core component for meeting one of the GST’s overarching practices connected to **Spiritual Life**—Pursues life within God, yielding to God's will. Displays transparency and integrity before God and others. Cultivates disciplined habits that enable the godly transformation of thought, character, behavior, and relationship. Welcomes opportunities to grow and works diligently. Attentive to the rhythms of the spiritual life; discerningly exercises active and passive engagement. Seeks the wholeness of a life unified in heart, mind, and action within the life of God.

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| **Student Learning Outcomes** | **Competencies:****Learners must demonstrate the ability to:** | **Assessment:****Learners’ performance will be measured by:** |
| **Identity** (MDiv 4)**Character** (MDiv 5) | Graduate will have clarity in their spiritual identity Graduates will demonstrate growth in Christian character essential for ministerial faithfulness and effectiveness | Journal; Rule of Life; Spiritual Exercises; Journal |
| **Christian Scriptures** (MDiv 1)**Christian Tradition** (MDiv 2)**Theologically Formed** (MAGS 3) | Graduates will have knowledge of the biblical foundations for spirituality and spiritual formationGraduates will have knowledge of the major theological content, structures, and procedures of the Christian tradition connected to spirituality and spiritual formationGraduates will integrate the biblical, historical, and theological perspectives foundational for contemporary Christian practice | Research Paper; Short Report |
| **Leadership** (MDiv 3)**Practice** (MACM 2)**Integration** (MACM 3) | Graduates will have ability to lead and equip the church for its various ministriesGraduates will have knowledge and skills related to a particular aspect of ministerial practiceGraduates will have ability to integrate theological and theoretical concepts with concrete ministry situations | Pastoral Application Report; Rule of Life; Spiritual Exercises |

**Textbooks**

1. Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8028-6265-5.
2. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005. A comprehensive description of over sixty practices and exercises designed to complement spiritual growth. ISBN 978-0-8308-3330-6
3. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3577-7.
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together*. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Fortress, 2005. ISBN 978-0-8006-8325-2.
5. Mark Scandrette. *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*. IVP, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8308-3634-5.
6. *Course Reader* provided in Canvas. Readings are assigned and organized by author’s last name.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance Policy**: Attendance will be required for all sessions. If you have to miss a class due to illness or emergency, you will be responsible for material covered in class and class assignments.

**Participation**: Graduate course work is grounded in active engagement and conversation between students and the instructor. Students are expected to arrive on time for every class session, fully prepared to discuss the topic(s) under consideration that day.

**Inclusive Language**: Every attempt will be made to use inclusive language, as this concern influences not only classroom assignments but also our interpretation of the Bible. Students who persist in utilizing non-gender inclusive language after the instructor’s correction will receive a reduction in grade. While citation from an inclusive language translation of the Bible (NRSV, CEB, TNIV, etc.) is preferred, students will not be penalized for citation from a non-gender inclusive text.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** Violations of academic integrity and other forms of cheating, as defined in ACU’s Academic Integrity Policy, involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying and represent actions contrary to the behavioral norms that flow from the nature of God. Violations will be addressed as described in the Policy. While the university enforces the Policy, the most powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from ones’ desire to imitate God’s nature in our lives. Every member of the faculty, staff, and student body is responsible for protecting the integrity of learning, scholarship, and research. The full Policy is available for review at the [Provost’s office web site](https://cdn01.acu.edu/community/offices/administrative/office-of-the-provost/academic-integrity-policy/overview.html) and the following offices: provost, college deans, dean of campus life, director of student judicial affairs, director of residential life education and academic departments.

Course materials prepared by the instructor (including PowerPoint presentations, study guides, and handouts), together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor, are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person.

**Style Guide**: All papers shall follow [Society of Biblical Literature’s student guide available online](https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/SBLHSsupp2015-02.pdf). See also [A Guide for Student Study & Writing](http://blogs.acu.edu/sensingt/cool-stuff/academic-writing-a-beginning/). MFT students are permitted to use APA.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA) protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination. If a student requests accommodations under ADA, please notify the professor one week prior to the course. If needs arise during the course, please notify the professor as soon as possible. The professor will work with the College of Biblical Studies to accommodate the student’s needs.

**Anti-Harassment Policy**: As a professor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus.  I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a professor. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep the information you share private to the greatest extent possible. When I am not able to keep your information confidential, I will only share it with responsible administrators on campus who can provide you with services and resources. I am required to share with the Title IX Coordinator information regarding sexual misconduct or harassment, dating or domestic violence or stalking that you report to me. If you would prefer to share information in a confidential setting, I encourage you to speak with someone in the [**ACU Counseling Center**](https://cdn01.acu.edu/community/offices/health-safety/maccc/overview.html)[**.**](http://./) All of your options are available for review by clicking on the link to ACU's [**policy**](https://www.acu.edu/community/offices/hr-finance/hr/title-ix/anti-harassment-policy.html).”

**The professor reserves the right to make modifications to the calendar.**

**Course Requirements** [All assignments are to be formatted using SBL style guide <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/sblhssupp2015-02.pdf> . MFT students are permitted to use APA.]

1. **Rule of Life** (10 points): Follow any format that proves most beneficial to your personal walk with God. The 2-3 page paper should outline spiritual principles which the individual seeks to use in future spiritual growth and maturity. Rather than writing “new year’s resolutions” or producing “spiritual laundry lists” the regula provides principles that form a foundation for your future spiritual growth and formation. It is a covenant with God in which you openly declare your future intentions for spiritual growth and formation. For models consult the *Rule of St. Benedict* ([www.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html#toc](http://www.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html#toc)), M. Thompson, *Soul Feast,* or Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook.* The assignment is due Feb 3. Purpose of Project: To experience the spiritual benefits of spiritual disciplines and continue transforming your heart toward living the Christ-life.
2. **Journal** (20 points): Reflect on your practice of your *Rule of Life* from February—April (200 words/week). Format the journal so that it can be uploaded in Canvas. The assignment is due April 28.
3. **Class Participation** (20 points): Throughout the semester there will be ten discussion questions or assignments that will be worth 2 points each. Initial posts on discussion questions are due no later than 11:59 PM Central on Wednesday of the week it is due. Appropriate posts are concise, focused, substantive, well-reasoned, and cite research studies that support arguments or opinions. Each student must respond to the posts of at least two other students prior to the end of the module. Appropriate responses will respectfully engage in dialogue, provide additional insights, and point out areas of agreement or disagreement. Short responses that add minimal value to the discussion such as “I agree” or “nice post” will not fulfill the expectations for participation.
4. **Spiritual Exercises** (20 points). Throughout the semester there will be ten exercises with reflections that will be worth 2 points each. Four of the exercises (solitude, silence, prayer, *lectio divina*) will be given to you in Canvas. The remaining six exercises will be structured as follows: Six sections from Calhoun’s *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* will be assigned. You will write a paragraph on each of the 6 disciplines telling why this discipline has significance in the life of a believer. This invitation to practice the disciplines is just that, an “invitation.” While we talk a great deal about spiritual disciplines, it takes intentionality to actually incorporate spiritual practices into one’s life. Prayerfully plan to develop these habits of the heart that you practice throughout the semester. Sometimes these selections will overlap your practices in your *Rule of Life*. Feel free to copy and paste your reflection. Add a note about the difference between practicing an exercise once versus incorporating this specific discipline routinely in a *Rule of Life.*
5. **Pastoral Application Report**(30 points).As you reflect on Scandrette’s book, implement a multi-part experiment with a small group. Examine Scandrette’s study guide (pgs. 192-194) and select an experiment from Sessions 1-5. Describe the process of discerning and engaging the chosen exercise. How does practice shape the community? Reflect with the group the value of such experiments. Would the group want to do other experiments together? Evaluate Scandrette’s approach as a whole. How does it converge or diverge from other resources on spiritual formation you have read this semester? Could you envision leading a congregation, ministry team or a volunteer group through a season of experiments? Why or why not? The assignment is due April 21.
6. **Short Report** (20 points): 6-page paper (+ an additional appendix described below) that explores one of the people below. The assignment is due March 31. The paper must be double-spaced, 12-pt. font, and SBL or APA formatted.
* Include a short biographical note that describes this person’s context.
* Include a meaningful quote that exemplifies this person’s spirituality.
* If you were to teach an adult class, outline your class presentation (add the class outline as an appendix).
* What is distinctive or characteristic about this person’s spirituality and what is its significance for you and your community of faith?
* Bernard of Clairvaux
* Blaise Pascal
* Brother Lawrence
* Catherine of Siena
* Desmond Tutu
* Ephrem the Syrian
* Francis of Assisi
* Frederick Douglass
* Gregory of Nyssa
* Gregory the Great
* Howard Thurman
* Ignatius Loyola
* James Baldwin
* James Cone
* James Weldon Johnson
* John Cassian
* Julian of Norwich
* Martin Luther King, Jr.
* Phoebe Worral Palmer
* Pope Francis
* Saint Benedict
* Saint Bonaventure
* Simone Weil
* Sojourner Truth
* St. John of the Cross
* Teresa of Avila
* Thomas a Kempis
* Thomas Merton
1. **Theology of Spiritual Formation Research Paper** (30 points). Your research paper should address the most important components of your theology of spiritual formation. Some questions you might consider include (but are not delimited to) the following: What is God’s work in spiritual formation? What is the responsibility or contribution of humans? How do humans grow? What is the evidence of growth? What is the role of community in individual formation? Other topics might include holiness, sanctification, and/or the work of the Holy Spirit. The research paper should engage at least eight primary sources (scholarly journals and books). Limit your writing to no more than 1,500 to 2,000 words. The paper should use 12-point font and be double-spaced. Include a bibliography and follow the SBL Handbook 2nd Edition with a bibliography [or APA]. Your research paper is due on April 14, by midnight (on Canvas). Purpose of Project: Explore personal theology and engage the basic principles of Scripture that inform your own theology of spiritual formation.

**Grading**

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| 1. Rule of Life
 | 10 points | Due Jan 28 |
| 1. Short Report
 | 20 points | Due March 21 |
| 1. Research Paper
 | 30 points | Due April 8 |
| 1. Pastoral Application Report
 | 30 points | Due April 15 |
| 1. Journal
 | 20 points | Due April 22 |
| 1. Class Participation
 | 20 points | Due Periodically |
| 1. Spiritual Exercises
 | 20 points | Due Periodically |
|  | **150 total** |  |

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| --- | --- |
| 100-90 | A |
| 89-80 | B |
| 79-70 | C |
| below 69 | F |

1. If a student drops the course during the semester, a “WP” will be given if the student is current with assignments and is receiving a passing grade. A “WF” will be given if assignments have not been completed or inadequate points have been received to attain a passing grade.
2. Late assignments will be reduced 10% within the first week and another 10% within the second week. No assignments will be accepted after two weeks unless special permission has been granted due to uncontrollable circumstances.

**Course Calendar**

**CANVAS:** I will open each week's unit on Monday morning. Since the Canvas site is already built, you may see units published early. Your assignments for the week are due on Wednesday/Friday (varies). I will respond/grade your assignments on the following Monday. My responses typically will be either private (through the Speed Grader] or as a single group response. While I might respond in the general chat of a discussion board, most often I find my comments within the larger chat are not read.

I will monitor the Canvas site throughout the week and interject comments or respond to questions as needed; however, to give all classmates the opportunity to interact with the assignments, I will not preempt or short-circuit the discussions or group exercises before the following Monday.

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| **Week** | **Topics** | **Assignments** (due prior to class) |
| **1 Jan 17** | Introduction: Being Breathless | * Read Highland’s “Formed into the Image”
* Read Lescher
* Read Brown
* Discussion Question 1
 |
| **2 Jan 23** | Definitions of Spirituality | * Read Gallagher
* Read McGrath
* Read Carson
* Read Feldmeier
* Discussion Question 2
 |
| **3 Jan 30** | Spiritual Types* Exercise 1: *Lectio Divina*
 | * *Rule of Life* due Feb 3
* Read Sager
* Read Thompson
* Discussion Question 3
 |
| **4Feb 6** | * *Desiring the Kingdom*
* Exercise 2: Solitude
 | * Read Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*
* Discussion Question 4
 |
| **5 Feb 13** | Well BeingPraying the Psalms* Exercise 3: Prayer
 | * Explore <https://wellbeing.nd.edu/>
* Read Davis
* Read all sections in Calhoun related to prayer
* Read Luke/Acts and systematize common themes you see related to prayer
 |
| **6 Feb 20** | Biblical Foundations* Exercise 4: Silence
 | * Read Gorman
* Discussion Question 5
 |
| **7 Feb 27** | Biblical Foundations* Exercise 5: Calhoun
 | * Read Barbarick
* Read Dawn
* Discussion Question 6
 |
| **8 Mar 6** | Six TraditionsFour PrinciplesFaith as a Way of Life* Exercise 6: Calhoun
 | * Discussion Question 7
* Read Knight-Slater
 |
| **9 Mar 13** | Spring Break |  |
| **10 Mar 20** | Theological Foundations* Exercise 7: Calhoun
 | * Reading Sensing
* Discussion Question 8
 |
| **11 Mar 27** | Short Report Discussion Groups* Exercise 8: Calhoun
 | * Short Report due March 31
 |
| **12 Ap 3** | Spiritual Direction & Mentoring* Exercise 9: Calhoun
 | * Read Bonhoeffer
* Discussion Question 9
 |
| **13 Ap 10** | Communal Practices: Worship, Catechesis, and Sacraments* Exercise 10: Calhoun
 | * Read Blevins
* Read Osmer
* Read Sensing
* Read Highland’s “Sacramental Living”
* Research paper due April 14
* Discussion Question 10
 |
| **14 Ap 17** | Spiritual Formation Practices | * Pastoral Application Report due April 21
* Read Smith
* Read Highland’s “Disciplines of Transformation”
* Review Reflection Question A
 |
| **15 Ap 24** | Hindrances to developing our spiritual life | * Journal due April 28
* Review Reflection Question B
 |

**Classroom Virtues**

The GST invites students to participate in a process of theological and spiritual formation.Knowing how to think theologically comes by habit and by imitation, not simply by acquiring isolated facts. The assumption here is that books alone are insufficient for addressing difficulties of life and forming people into the image and likeness of God. Ultimately, we strive to form communities of inquiry, inviting you to inhabit a shared world of learning. Within such an environment, the goal is to cultivate critical skills of reflection, spiritual disciplines, interact authentically with one another, and learn to function as a community of inquiry. A large part of this involves connecting areas of life rather than pitting them against one another. Prayer, study, and other dimensions of life are all integral to the process of formation. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices; nurtured within this context, you pursue “intellectual, moral, spiritual excellence” the result of which is the formation of the whole person.

**Desire for truth in the context of love**—the aptitude to discern whether belief-forming processes, practices, and people yield true beliefs over false ones. People motivated by this desire will be more likely to conduct thorough inquiries, scrutinize evidence carefully, investigate numerous fields of study, consider alternative explanations, while respecting and caring for others.

**Humility**—the capacity to recognize reliable sources of informed judgment while recognizing the limits of our knowledge and the fallibility of our judgments. This is not created in isolation but takes into account feedback and correction from other sources of informed judgment.

**Honesty**—the capacity to tackle difficult questions without seeking simple answers. Ignoring complex and difficult questions only solidifies vices such as intellectual dishonesty, close-mindedness, and rash judgments. These vices preclude the possibility of refining our thinking and of participating in conversations with others.

**Openness**—the desire to engage in an open-ended search for knowledge of God, including receptivity to different ideas, experiences, and people. Listening becomes a discipline that acknowledges the other and respects diversity. The art of being a student and a teacher is an ongoing process that necessitates hospitality, patience, and love.

**Courage**—the ability to articulate one’s position while considering other perspectives. The aptitude to express convictions involves risk yet fosters opportunities for meaningful dialog. Responding to objections entails tenacity but should not be confused with close-mindedness.

**Wisdom**—the capacity to offer a synthetic discernment of knowledge on behalf of the community. The aim is not merely the dissemination of information but a pastoral implementation of faith for the building up of the community. It solidifies various pieces of data, practices, and experiences and aptly applies knowledge and faith to particular situations.

**Stewardship**—the commitment to one’s accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that one brings to the classroom. Classroom engagement includes proactively participating in the course goals, seeking mastery of course competencies, and collaborating with faculty and fellow students in the developing of a learning environment. Committing oneself to spiritual and intellectual well-being and growth is a faithful response to the opportunities graduate education affords.

**Hopefulness—**thereceptivity to the future possibilities of God. The cultivation of thankfulness for our heritages and expectation for our future ministries engenders a guard against cynicism and a spirit of perseverance during times of stress and disorientation.

**Prayerfulness**—the making of space to commune with God. The task of learning and teaching so that we are formed into the image of Christ through the Spirit involves our consistent reliance on God’s sanctifying work.

**GST *Regula***

Written and adopted by the GST Faculty

The GST faculty yearns to develop and embody a robust spirituality grounded in the Christian story. Its *regula* is formulated with this goal in mind. The aim is not to be burdensome or oppressive. Rather, it is to free the community to order its life, foster healthy practices of the Christian life, and attend to the presence of God within a seminary setting. Such a commitment translates into recognizing the presence of God in our study, our work, our worship, and our leisure. Consequently, we invite you to participate in a set of practices that enable the transformation of thought, character, behavior, and relationship. In attending to the rhythms of the spiritual life, we seek the integration of heart, mind, and action. Out of this commitment, we will engage in the following practices:

**Sabbath**

A time for rest, relaxation, and reflection (e.g. solitude, silence, prayer) in order to discern what matters most and therefore regulate our lives accordingly. The aim is to set aside time in regular cycles (weekly, monthly, yearly) to keep things in perspective.

**Obedience**

To think of our activities as forms of obedience to God and one another. To exercise respect and appropriate submission towards one another. This involves learning to listen to what others say and responding appropriately.

**Simplicity**

To pursue an uncluttered, integrated, and focused life. The keep the interior and exterior aspects of the Christian life in correspondence, resulting in honesty, sincerity, selflessness, integration.

**Discipline**

To master complex practices and ideas within a variety of fields (e.g. church history, theology, ministry), thereby achieving the requisite goals in each of these areas. To exercise a mature level of self-control, take responsibility for oneself, and pursue habits of growth.

**Community**

Taking time to engage in communal activities with one another and others (including worship, meals, outreach, corporate ministry).

**Prayer**

Attentiveness to the ways on which God is present in all we do; to practice consistent habits of devotion that will help us discern distractions and temptation and will enable us to redirect our focus.

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