



Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, Alabama 35243
(205) 776-5650

PT1935: Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life - Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2025

Course: PT1935: Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life

Day & Time: Tuesday, 5:30 – 7:20 PM

Room: VC

Professor: Dr. Robert Davis Smart

Credits: 2

Email: bob@christchurchpca.org

Phone: (309) 287 - 7297

Course Description: This course shows how spiritual disciplines must become fundamental in the Christian's life, and not supplemental. Special attention is given to repeated practice of spiritual disciplines to cultivate Gospel transformation out of one's identity in Christ (e.g., prayer life, devotional habits, etc.) as well as into one's calling, which includes family and ministry relationships.

Course Objectives:

- The student will be able to examine for themselves the internal and external call of God to Christian work, as well as consideration of a biblical theology of work. The qualifications and qualities of a Christian worker will be examined.
- The student will be able to cultivate Gospel transformation through repeated practices as the means of spiritual growth consistent with Scriptural means of grace by communion with God, family and corporate worship, friendship, evangelism, and stewardship.
- The student will be able to development disciplines consistent with evangelical and Christlike service, confronting and overcoming sin, foolish strategies, idolatry, and Evil's lies.
- The students will understand the purpose for, and practice of, spiritual disciplines to cultivate Christlikeness in character through historical examples in the Reformed tradition.
- The students will be able to develop principles in personal and spiritual leadership.
- The students will assess and develop effective and repeated spiritual practices for oneself, one's family, and church.

Required Texts:

Robert Davis Smart, *Embracing Your Identity in Christ: Renouncing Lies and Foolish Strategies*.
Bloomington: Zondervan/Westbow, 2017.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Wheaton: Tyndale, 2014.

Choose one of the following books:

Strobel, Kyle. *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013.

McIntyre, David. *The Hidden Life of Prayer: The Life-Blood of the Christian*. Glasgow: Christian Focus Pubs, 2010.

Recommended Texts:

Bingham, Matthew. *A Heart Aflame for God: A Reformed Approach to Spiritual Formation*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2025.

Clowney, Edmund P. *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises*. Vancouver: Regent College, 1979.

Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023.

Skoog, Greer, Doolittle. *Lead with Prayer: The Spiritual Habits of World-Changing Leaders*. Nashville: FaithWords, 2024.

Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017.

Course Requirements and Assessments:

- Reading assignments should be completed by the assigned class date in preparation for class discussion. Interaction and familiarity with the reading material will factor into the course participation grade.
- Participate in Daily Word and Prayer and 2 Spiritual Exercise Days. The student is to establish a patterned habit of communion with God. Students should utilize one of the required books and practice a repeated rhythm of spiritual disciplines. In addition, two spiritual exercise days are to be observed. On these days, the student will choose four techniques of the spiritual disciplines found in Whitney to try out. On the next spiritual exercise day, the student will choose four different techniques to utilize.
- Living the Spiritual Disciplines Reflection Paper (4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12- point font, 1-inch margins).
- Reflect critically on your experiences with both daily prayer and spiritual exercise days. The paper should encompass the following elements:
 - a. What was your rhythm of daily prayer and reflection?
 - b. What challenges and blessings did you encounter?
 - c. Which spiritual discipline techniques did you practice during your spiritual exercise days?
 - d. Which techniques did you find beneficial, and which were less helpful?
 - e. What practices do you intend to continue in your daily journey?

- Two Book Reviews. One each for *Spiritual Disciplines*, and *Embracing your Identity in Christ* (4-5 pages each, double-spaced, 12- point font, 1-inch margins). The review should include the following components:

a. Introduction (1 paragraph): Briefly introduce the book's purpose and author. Include biographical information (education, training, experience) only as it demonstrates the author's competency to write the book.

b. Summary (1 page): Provide a minimal summary of the book's content. Address the author's primary thesis and summarize the main points or arguments used to defend this thesis.

c. Critical Evaluation (2-3 pages): Weigh the author's claims and the arguments used to support them. Avoid bland endorsements, blanket dismissals, and trivial criticisms (such as typographical errors). Engage with the main points related to the author's thesis and use specific examples. You might consider the following:

i. Are the claims and arguments well supported? What are the strengths and weaknesses in the author's reasoning? Assess the arguments biblically and theologically.

ii. Does the author approach the subject with any overall perspectives or biases that shape their conclusions? These may include theological, experiential, philosophical, denominational, or cultural biases. Do these perspectives limit or enhance the book's value or applicability?

iii. How does the author's presentation compare to similar works? How effective is the book in achieving its stated goals?

d. Conclusion (1-2 paragraphs): Provide your overall evaluation of the book, considering its strengths and weaknesses. How is the book valuable for your research? How could the book be improved?

- Participate in a Personal Spiritual Retreat (4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12- point font, 1- inch margins). The student will plan and participate in a personal spiritual retreat. The retreat should be done alone, and in a place that is free of distractions. The retreat can be performed any time throughout the course, but the project report must be completed before the end of the course. The student must plan a schedule for the retreat and participate in at least six spiritual practices during that time. The report must include:

a. Your pre-planned schedule of time and location of the retreat.

b. A narrative of your experience.

c. A discussion related to the spiritual practices used. What was good, what was not so good?

d. What would you do differently next time.

COURSE REQUIREMENT	GRADE WEIGHT	COMMENTS
Engaged Participation, Reading, and Spiritual Exercise Days	10% of grade	
<i>Spiritual Disciplines</i> Book Review	25% of grade	Due 10/03
Living the Spiritual Disciplines Reflection Paper	10% of grade	Due 11/07
<i>Identity in Christ</i> Book Review	25% of grade	Due 11/28
Personal Retreat Project	30% of grade	Due 12/12

BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards:

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. All papers are to be #12 font Times New Roman and Double-Spaced. Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Please see the BTS Turabian Style Guide for more information on turning in papers and assignments.

The BTS Turabian Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Writing Center webpage: <https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy

In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

Course Schedule:

DAY	DATE	AGENDA / TOPIC	DUE ON THIS DAY/DATE
Tues	09/02	Syllabus Review / Introduction to Spiritual Disciplines	
Tues	09/09	Reformed Spiritual Formation Foundations	Repeated, daily practice of communion with God in Word and prayer
Tues	09/16	Spiritual Exercise Day 1/Silence-Solitude- Journaling/	

Tues	09/23	Christ in the Bible – Hand Illustration	
Tues	09/30	Adoration and Repentance	Book Review: Spiritual Disciplines
Tues	10/07	Spiritual Warfare	
Tues	10/14	Thanksgiving & Intercession	
Tues	10/21	Fall Break	No Class
Tues	10/28	Friendship	Book Review: Identity in Christ
Tues	11/04	Spiritual Exercise Day 2/Evangelism	Listen to podcast https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/clearly-freely/id1803265002?i=1000709568531
Tues	11/11	Discipleship	Spiritual Discipline Reflection Paper
Tues	11/18	Spiritual Disciplines in the Family	
Tues	11/25	Churchman Spirituality	Book Review: Strobel or McIntyre
Tues	12/02	Self-control: diet, exercise, & fasting	
Tues	12/09	Sexual Freedom as a Christian Lover/ Conclusion	Personal Retreat Project Due

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to three classes with impunity.

[NOTE: Standard BTS Attendance Policy is that students may not miss any more than three classes without a course penalty. Given the reality of distance-based students and video conference options, if students **clearly identify at the beginning of the semester that they will primarily be asynchronous students (depending on the digital recording of class because of a conflict with their schedule)**, then the student may attend without incurring a penalty for their “absences,” providing they are turning in all their work on time. Please see the BTS Faculty Handbook for more information on synchronous and asynchronous video conference students and policies and the commitments a faculty member agrees to when they teach a video conference or a live hybrid class]

Class Policies and Procedures:

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- All assignments must be submitted by email by 11:59 (CDT/CST) on the due date.
- Late assignments will incur a -3 point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.

- Missed tests/exams may only be made up with an excused absence, preferably in advance of class. Excused absence tests/exams must be made up before the final day of the semester.

Video Conference Policies and Procedures:

- Please utilize the BTS “Best VC (Video Conference) Practices” information for the course.
- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.
- In Video Conference, it is preferable for the student to keep their video on (when possible) so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in follow-up and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

Course Bibliography / Extended Bibliography

Anglican Church in North America. *Book of Common Prayer*. Huntington Beach, Anglican Liturgy Press, 2019.

Bennett, Arthur. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975.

Bridges, Jerry. *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2006.

Clowney, Edmund P. *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches about Meditation and Spiritual Exercises*. Vancouver: Regent College, 1979.

Earley, Justin Whitmel. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019

Forward Movement. *Hour by Hour*. Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 2002.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York: HarperOne, 1998.

Gibson, Jonathan. *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021.

McKelvey, Douglas Kaine. *Every Moment Holy, Vol 1: New Liturgy for Daily Life*. Nashville: Rabbit Room, 2021.

McKelvey, Douglas Kaine. *Every Moment Holy, Vol 2: Death, Grief, and Hope*. Nashville: Rabbit Room, 2021.

Ortlund, Dane C. *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*. Wheaton, Crossway, 2021.

Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It’s Impossible to be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017.

Smith, James Bryan and Lunda Graybeal. *A Spiritual Formation Workbook: Small Group Resources for Nurturing Christian Growth*. New York: HarperOne, 1993.

GRADING CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A to A-	B to B-	C to C-	D to D-
Correct spelling and grammar/punctuation	Minor errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation	Multiple errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation per page	Difficult to read due to English writing errors
Smooth writing that provides for effective and efficient reading	Writing is acceptable, but not as organized and coherent	Writing is not smooth, sometimes confusing and inconsistent	Writing lacks clarity, focus, structure, and is incoherent
Person and format are proper for assignment	Person and format are inconsistent	Person and format are not appropriate	Person and format are totally inappropriate
Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriately used, cited, and clearly supports main argument	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriate but need more depth and use of critical thinking	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are inadequate for main argument and do not reflect understanding	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are improperly used, over used, under used, or cited in error
Paper completely conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper generally conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper somewhat conforms to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>	Paper does not conform to <i>Turabian's Manual for Writers</i>

BTS Outcomes Evaluation

Please rank each outcome on a scale of 1-5

1: This outcome is not covered in this class

2: This outcome is only touched on in this class

3: This outcome is discussed in conjunction with class material

4: This outcome lightly assessed as part of course assessment (one assignment)

5: This outcome is fully integrated into the assessment of this course (multiple assignments)

1. Scripture: Students will effectively articulate the truth of Scripture and Scripture as truth, engaged with learning biblical knowledge and reformed principles of the supremacy of Scripture as God's word.
2. Reformed Theology: Students will be able to engage and reproduce the primary and essential elements of Reformed Theology.
3. Local Church: Students will be engaged in applied ministry projects in the local church
4. Wisdom: Students will grow in character, increasing in their demonstration of wisdom and its fruits.
5. Discipleship: Students will be able to understand and articulate the nature and importance of discipleship, both ordinary (means of grace) and extraordinary (biblical counseling).
6. Communication: Students will grow in the efficacy of their communication (articulation, teaching/speaking, and preaching—respective to various departments) both in content knowledge and rhetorical strategies.
7. Worldview: Students will demonstrate a growing ability to apply God's word to all spheres of life, evidenced through class discussion and other assigned assessments.
8. Leadership: Students will grow in their understanding of godly leadership and ability to lead others in service of the local church.

Outcome	Rank	Rationale (one sentence)
Scripture	5	This course grounds each discipline in Scripture and calls students to engage with Scripture as God's Word.
Reformed Theology	4	The course connects disciplines to the means of grace and draws from a Reformed understanding of sanctification.
Local Church	3	While primarily personal in focus, students are encouraged to contextualize spiritual disciplines within the life of the Church.
Wisdom	5	Growth in wisdom is a central goal, cultivated through reflection and practice of spiritual disciplines.
Discipleship	5	This course is deeply rooted in both ordinary and personal discipleship practices as a means of growth.
Communication	3	Students engage in written reflection and discussion to articulate their understanding and practice of disciplines.
Worldview	3	Students are encouraged to connect disciplines to their whole-life obedience and habits across life contexts.
Leadership	2	Leadership is lightly touched on through modeling and mentoring others in spiritual growth, but it is not a core focus.