



Nipawin Bible College
GE1023 Spiritual Formation & Psalms
Winter 2024
3 Credit Hours
Mr. Jordan Bergen
jbergen@nipawin.org

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will frame the idea of Spiritual Formation within the context of Romans 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Within this context, this class will strive to understand the unique calling of spiritual formation – what challenges present themselves, how our personalities come to bear on our walk with Christ, and how we might include practices in our lives that coordinate with the Holy Spirit’s transforming presence.

The Psalms have been central to the spiritual formation of Christians throughout history. The Psalms contain honest, appropriate expressions of emotion to God. As such, they are valuable passages for study and reflection as we seek to grow in intimate relationship with God. Special emphasis will be placed on the way in which we, as Christians, in light of Christ, ought to read and appropriate the Psalms.

COURSE TEXTBOOKS

The Bible (a translation, not a paraphrase). **80 pages.**

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, revised*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014). **220 pages.**

Longman III, Tremper. *How to Read the Psalms*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988). **110 pages.**

THE BIG QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be conformed to the image of Christ, and what part do I have in that process? How should my relationship with God be informed and transformed by the Psalms?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Appreciate the many ways in which God takes the initiative in drawing them into a transformational relationship with him.

2. Explain who God made them to be and the ways in which they can be conformed to the image of Christ, growing deeper in their relationship with God and the Body of Christ as a result.
3. Confidently integrate their practice of spiritual disciplines into their lives on a weekly basis.
4. Use the appropriate interpretive tools in order to better understand God and meet with him through the Psalms.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Participation in Class and Lab Activities – 5%

- The student will be engaged in class discussion and classroom practical activities throughout the course.

Textbook Reading and Reflection: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* – 20%

- Each student will be required to read **chapters 1-5, 9-11, and 13** from the assigned textbook by Whitney.
- The student will write **3-4 sentences** for **each chapter** about how the principles within the chapter can be applied to *their* life (**not** “one’s life” or “a Christian’s life” or “our lives.” Use personal pronouns [I, me, my]). **2-3 pages total (minimum)**. Be specific with the application. Saying something like, “I plan to read my Bible more” will not reflect well on your grade.

Due: February 16th

Retreat and Reflection – 25%

- After reading chapter 10 in *Spiritual Disciplines* (“Silence and Solitude”), each student will **set apart 4 consecutive hours** in their day (example: 1pm – 5pm) to be alone with God. Spend this time doing things like reading God’s Word or a devotional book, praying, journaling, singing, fasting, and evaluating how God may be speaking to you (not an exhaustive list, and no need to include all suggestions). Avoid all screens and people to the best of your ability. View this time as an example of how we ought to make time in our busy lives for intentional time spent with God. **Using this time to do other homework or projects will have a significant negative impact on the grade.**
- A **2 page** report on insights gained from your retreat will be required. Outline how the retreat was conducted (.5 page) and what you learned as a result of the experience (1.5 pages). Use personal pronouns (I, me, my).

Due: March 1st

Bible Memory – 20%

- The student will memorize **two** of the following Psalms over the course of the semester (most are 5-9 verses long). When making the choice, the student should

not only consider word count, but rather, they should choose Psalms that would be valuable for them to have internalized (longer Psalms will be penalized less per mistake). On each due date the student will write out the Psalm verbatim from memory **indicating the translation** of the version from which they memorized.

- Psalm options: Psalm 1; Psalm 8; Psalm 14; Psalm 15; Psalm 43; Psalm 54; Psalm 61; Psalm 67; Psalm 70; Psalm 93; Psalm 100; Psalm 110; Psalm 113; Psalm 119; Psalm 124; Psalm 127; Psalm 130; Psalm 149.

Psalm Memory 1 Due: February 2nd

Psalm Memory 2 Due: February 9th

Bible Reading – 10%

- The student will read the entirety of the Psalms. On the due date they will indicate how many Psalms they read this semester out of the 150 Psalms in the Bible. In addition, the student will also specifically be asked whether or not they read Psalm 119, if not, ten percent of their grade for this assignment will be lost.

Due: January 26th

Textbook Application: *How to Read the Psalms* – 20%

- The student will read pages 11-122 from *How to Read the Psalms*. **The student will indicate how many pages they read at the top of their report.**
- The student will apply what they learned from the textbook by applying it directly to a Psalm of their choice in a **2-3 page (minimum)** report. The student will use the 32 “Suggestions for Psalm Study” found within the textbook (and in the appendix below) as a checklist/guide to properly interpreting the Psalm (not all suggestions will apply to every Psalm, and several are mutually exclusive with others). The student will make use of commentaries to respond to the 32 suggestions (using proper citations).
- The student will copy the 32 suggestions from the appendix into their paper and then simply respond to the applicable suggestions (if the suggestion is not applicable, respond with N/A (“not applicable”). The suggestions themselves do not contribute to the report length, therefore the responses must make the final paper a **minimum of 5-6 pages.**
- The Psalm chosen **cannot** be Psalms 98, 69, or 30 because these are examples in the textbook that the student can reference for this assignment. However, the Psalm **can** be one that the student chose to memorize.

Due: April 5th

GRADING

Participation:	5%
Reading/Reflection (Whitney):	20%
Retreat/Reflection:	25%
Bible Memory:	20%
Bible Reading:	10%
Textbook Application:	20%

NOTE: All written assignments are to be typed in accordance with the guidelines in Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018) for papers (See NBC Sample Paper). Assignments will be graded on the basis of content, clarity, grammar, and spelling.

Assignments will be due at the **beginning of the class period** on the day that they are assigned.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Refer to the NBC Handbook 2023-2024.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY: Refer to the NBC Handbook 2023-2024.

Reading: 410 pages.

Writing: 6 pages.

Memory: ~12 verses.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION & PSALMS CLASS SCHEDULE

DATE	SUBJECT	READING	WRITTEN
1/19	Syllabus Review		
	Spiritual Formation		
1/26	Psalms	Psalms: 80p	
	Spiritual Formation		
2/2	Psalms		Psalm Memory 1
	Spiritual Formation		
2/9	Psalms		Psalm Memory 2
	Spiritual Formation		
2/16	Psalms		
	Spiritual Formation	Whitney: 220p	Reflection: 2p
2/23	READING BREAK		
3/1	Psalms		
	Spiritual Formation		Retreat Reflection: 2p
3/8	No Class		
3/15	Psalms		
	Spiritual Formation		
3/22	Psalms		
	Spiritual Formation		
3/29	No Class		
4/5	Psalms	Longman: 110p	Psalm Study: 2-3p
4/5	Spiritual Formation		
4/8	Spiritual Formation		
4/8	Spiritual Formation		

Appendix: Suggestions for Psalm Study Assignment Outline

I have read pages _____ of *How to Read the Psalms* by Tremper Longman III.

- 1. Consciously make a decision about the genre of a passage of Scripture as you read it.**
- 2. Be flexible in your understanding of a text's genre. More than one category may be applicable.**
3. While reading a hymn, look for the word *for* or *because*. Here we usually can find the reasons for praise.
4. As you study a hymn, list the psalmist's reasons for praise.
5. In a lament, identify the object of the psalmist's complaint.
6. Examine the structure of a lament for the presence of the seven "building blocks" (invocation, plea, complaint, expression of confidence, confession of sin or assertion of innocence, imprecation, hymn or blessing) which often occur in laments.
7. Study a lament carefully to determine whether it is the cry of an individual or community.
8. Once you've identified a thanksgiving psalm, try to understand the prayer (usually a quoted lament) which has been answered.
9. In a psalm of confidence, identify the factors which threaten the psalmist's well-being.
10. Identify the images of God which the psalmist uses to communicate his confidence in God as he faces trouble.
11. A psalm of remembrance is one in which the mighty acts of God are recounted. As you read a remembrance psalm, list the mighty acts of God and read about these events in the historical books of the Bible.
12. Since there is a strong connection between the wisdom books and the Psalms, ask yourself if wisdom themes – like creation order, law, the contrast between the righteous and the wicked – are present in the psalm which you are studying.
13. Examine a psalm to see if the king is speaking the prayer or is the object of the prayer.
14. Let the psalm title initially inform the reading of a psalm.
15. Don't bend the interpretation of a psalm unnaturally to make it conform to the title.
16. Examine the last verses of a psalm to see if there is any evidence that the psalm was "updated".

- 17. Study the theological teaching of the psalm. What is the psalm communicating about God and his covenant relationship to his people?**
- 18. After interpreting a psalm according to its Old Testament context, consider how the psalm anticipates the coming of Jesus Christ. Ask how the song may be sung to Jesus.**
19. As you read a psalm, explore the psalmist's emotional expression.
20. Ask yourself: How can I learn from the psalmist's example?
21. Read the psalm slowly. Examine the relationship between the lines for similarities and differences.
22. On the basis of these similarities and differences, divide the lines into phrases (bicola and tricola).
23. When reading a poetic line, ask how the second phrase carries forward the thought of the first.
24. Don't force the similarities. Not every phrase in a poem will be parallel with another. Some will be more parallel than others.
25. The above six categories (synthetic parallelism is excluded) are rough guides to discovering the relationship between the two phrases of a poetic line.
26. Be aware that an image is likely to exist when it is impossible or absurd to interpret a word, sentence or section literally.
27. While reading a psalm, be sensitive to imagery. Imagery compares one thing to another. If the comparison is explicit (like or as), then the image is a simile. If the comparison is implicit, then the image is a metaphor.
28. When interpreting an image, identify the comparison which is being made.
- 29. Think seriously about the comparison. In what ways are the two things alike and in what ways are they different?**
30. Be aware that the imagery of the Psalter comes from the culture of ancient Israel and not the modern West.
31. Images may come from non-Israelite religions. But when they do, they are adapted for a very specific purpose. The use of such images is polemical. That is, they communicated to pagans and probably more directly to apostate Israelites that they were worshiping the wrong god. The power was with Israel's God.
- 32. Have some good commentaries handy. Refer to them *after* having thought about the meaning of psalm.**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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