

Classics of Personal Devotion

Reformed Theological Seminary – Atlanta (1 credit)

Spring 2021

Instructor: Jason Edwin Dees, PhD

jason@christcovenant.com

404-414-1520

The Christian life is essentially one of devotion to Christ. The Puritans talked about having a “pure flame of devotion to Christ.” Throughout Christian history Christians have sought to know the Lord better through prayer, meditating on scripture, and studying other books written by men and women who were seeking the knowledge of God.

This course seeks to help its students grow in their understanding of prayer and knowledge of God’s word as it relates to Christian devotion, and to expose them to well know works that have regularly fed the fire of Christian devotion.

Course Requirements:

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| Attend all scheduled meetings, participate in class discussion, and turn in a 1-2 page reflection on all assigned readings. | 50% |
| Reading Report: | 20% |
| Final Paper and Presentation: | 30% |

Reformed Theological Seminary determines grades on a graduated scale (97-100, A; 94-96, A-; 91-93, B+; 88-90, B; 86-87, B-; 83-85, C+; 80-82, C; 78-79, C-; 75-77, D+; 72-74, D; 70-71, D-). See Catalogue, p. 45.

Required Texts:

Richard J. Foster & James Bryan Smith, eds., ***Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups***. A Renovare Resource for Spiritual Renewal. Revised edition. (HarperOne, 2005).

Saint Augustine, ***Confessions*** (Penguin, 1961).

Tim Keller, ***The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness*** (10 Publishing, 2012).

John Owen, ***Communion with God*** (Puritan Paperbacks, Banner of Truth, 1991).

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (InterVarsity Press, 2000).

Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Crossway, 2015).

Hymns of Grace (Master's Seminary Press, 2015).

Recommended Texts for Further Study:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (MacMillan, 1963).

Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (NavPress, 2004).

John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (Penguin, 2009).

Jonathan Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World" in John Piper's, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Crossway, 1998).

Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline* (HarperCollins, 1998).

Thomas A Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Penguin, 2013).

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (HarperCollins, 2015).

John Piper, *Desiring God* (Multnomah, 2003).

Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale, 2003).

Course Schedule and Agenda:

The course will run through eight units. Readings must be done beforehand, and your reflection and reading report will be due at the beginning of each class unit.

The Final Paper is due May 3, 2021, and the topic must be agreed upon with the professor by March 29, 2021.

Throughout the course each student will write a 1 page reflection on their bible reading and prayer for the week.

February 1, 2021

Unit 1 – Introduction and Spiritual Journey

We will begin class by reviewing the syllabus but will quickly jump into your spiritual journey. Come into class able to share your spiritual journey this far. Prepare a 1-page obituary to include what you would desire to be said of you after you die.

February 8, 2021

Unit 2 - Spiritual Formation and Prayer

We will be talking about the importance of prayer in devotional life. We will also practice Whitney's method of praying through scripture.

Read:

Praying the Bible

“Martin Luther: Praying in Faith” ***Devotional Classics***, 115-120

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

February 15, 2021

Unit 3 - Devotional Reading for Communion with God A

In this unit we will discuss Owen’s classic *Communion with God* and talk about how we are to rightly know the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We will talk about the importance of communion with God for Christian life and ministry.

Read: ***Communion with God*** – Part 1

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

February 22, 2021

Unit 4 - Devotional Reading for Communion with God B

In this unit we will discuss Owen’s classic *Communion with God* and talk about how we are to rightly know the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We will talk about the importance of communion with God for Christian life and ministry.

Read: ***Communion with God*** – Part 2

March 1, 2021

Unit 5 – Devotional Reading Christian Worship

In this unit we will talk about the importance of preaching and singing for a Christian’s devotional life and may even discuss Christian sacrament.

Read:

Selected hymns from ***Hymns of Grace***:

Holy, Holy, Holy – 48; *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* – 53; *What’er My God Ordains Is Right* – 66; *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go* – 75; *All Glory Be To Christ* – 133; *O The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus* – 159; *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded* – 271; *How Rich a Treasure We Possess* – 292; *O Church, Arise* – 353; *Christ, the Sure and Steady Anchor* – 406

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

March 8, 2021

Unit 6 – Devotional Reading for Christian Behavior

In this unit we will talk about how the Christian behaves and what is the behavioral result of communion with God.

Read:

“Bernard of Clairvaux: Four Degrees of Love” – *Devotional Classics*, 41-47

The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness – Tim Keller

“John Calvin: The Joy of Self Denial” – *Devotional Classics*, 136-142

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

March 22, 2020

Unit 7 – Devotional Reading for the Christian Life

In this unit we will discuss the life of Saint Augustine and have some time to share about our own spiritual journeys.

Read:

Confessions of Saint Augustine

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

March 29, 2021

Unit 8 – Devotional Reading for Christian Life

In this unit we will consider the spiritual journey’s of several authors in different times and places.

Blaise Pascal: Falling into Presumption” – *Devotional Classics*, 143-149

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Christ in Community” – *Devotional Classics*, 271-278

“G.K. Chesterton: A Magical Universe” – *Devotional Classics*, 333-338

“Brother Lawrence: An Habitual Sense of God’s Presence” – *Devotional Classics*, 369-376

We will begin this class by reviewing the student’s devotional reflections.

April 19, 2021

Unit 9 – Devotional Reading for Christian Endurance

In this unit we will look through Peterson’s book and talk about what Christian endurance means in life and ministry and talk about what is necessary for such endurance.

Read:

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

We will begin this class by reviewing the student's devotional reflections.

May 3, 2021

Unit 10 – Student Paper Presentation

In this unit each student will present their papers aloud, and we should have some time for short commentary from the class.

Teaching Philosophy:

This course is a reading course at the master's level. I put my confidence in the readings and in the importance of learning to read material that comes to us throughout church history. You will grow in your understanding of a devoted life in Christ.

Assignment Details:

Responses, Reading Report, and Participation:

Each student will turn in seven 1-2 page (double spaced) responses on each day of class including the first day. The responses should give a very short overview of the content of the reading but should mostly review how the particular book or essay was helpful for the student particularly relating it to the heading of the day's unit. The student should interact with the material citing page numbers and particular passages. At the bottom of the response, the student should write how much of the book they actually read for the reading report. For example: I read 85% of Donald Whitney's *Praying the Bible*.

Final Paper:

The final paper should be 8-10 pages in length, double spaced, and on a topic agreed upon beforehand with the professor. I have listed examples below, and students may choose from the examples, but there is only one topic per student. An 'A' paper will focus on the primary source material, draw outside material from the student's own research, and interact with secondary source material referenced in this syllabus. It should be footnoted with a minimum of five separate references. Pay particular attention to the Bible and its use in the argument.

Example Topics:

- (1) What is conversion? What does Augustine's conversion demonstrate about the power of God?
- (2) Is Augustine trying to 'prove' his faith? What methods is he using?

(3) What is Eugene Peterson's view of Christian discipleship? Peterson demonstrates regular exposition of Scripture in this book. What role does that play in Christian spiritual development?

Jason Edwin Dees

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Classics in Personal Devotion

Professor: Jason Edwin Dees

Campus: RTS ATL

Date: Spring 2021

| <u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> | | <u>Rubric</u> | <u>Mini-Justification</u> |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None | |
| Articulation (oral & written) | Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm. | Strong | In this course we will be covering a broad look at Church History in a devotional way and the students will have to present a paper which will test their ability to deliver a biblical message. |
| Scripture | Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.) | Moderate | This isn't a biblical studies course per se but it is largely the study of devotional material deeply grounded in scripture. |
| Reformed Theology | Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards. | Moderate | This course will take a broader view of Christianity but will be taught through a Reformed lens. |
| Sanctification | Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification. | Strong | The point of this course is that the student would have more tools for the sake of his or her sanctification. |
| Desire for Worldview | Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. | Strong | One course goal is that the student would fix their eyes on Jesus for all of life. |
| Winsomely Reformed | Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.) | Strong | This course from a Reformed perspective interacts with a multitude of Christian traditions. |
| Pastoral Ministry | Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Xns. | Strong | The goal of this course is that these students would be equipped as men and women of God but also as pastors and church leaders. |