

MENNONITE BRETHREN BIBLICAL SEMINARY, FRESNO CALIFORNIA

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE PRAYER OF THE HEART—
AN ADVANCED COURSE IN PRAYER

PM790AP (3 units)
Spring 2009
Wednesdays, 6:30-9:30pm
Jan 28-May 13, 2008

Professor: Dr. Chris Erdman, O.S.B. Cam. Obl.
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

At the center of human life is the longing of the heart for God. But in these days of turbulence and distraction, so many other things too often overwhelm this deep, inner longing. The busyness of life, even for those in active ministry, can bully the life of prayer out of us. This course seeks to provide resources and establish time-tested practices for a sustainable life of prayer in the midst of a busy life. The course surveys the fountainhead of New Testament spirituality as it flows through the early church and beyond into the experience and practice of the “prayer of the heart,” “interior prayer,” or “contemplative prayer.” The contemplative stream, as one form of Christian spirituality among many, provides students with historic resources and practices for a durable spirituality; it sustains a vibrant active life, nourished by the eternal spring which is unceasing, interior prayer.

Note: *This is an advanced course, and expects the learner to develop toward a habit of **daily private prayer** (from a minimum of 15 minutes/day beginning the first week to 60 minutes/day by week 9, and which is included as a homework assignment. This, of course, is for students taking the course for credit; **audit students** may set their own goals), and includes in-class prayer practices. It may build on a disciple’s existing prayer practice or it might require a total renovation. This course should not to be taken without genuine openness to a bold new invitation from the Holy Spirit to enter deeply into a life of prayer.*

MBBS DESIRED OUTCOMES MET BY THIS COURSE

PM790 addresses the following M.Div. related outcomes—

1. Practice such personal disciplines as journaling, dialing prayer, Bible reading, silence, solitude, fasting (1.1.1)
2. Establish habits of physical and emotional self-care (1.2.1)
3. Give and receive spiritual counsel in cohort (1.4.2)
4. Communicate in word and deed that God’s love is expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ and invite proper human response to God’s love (1.5.1)
5. Explain the central themes/doctrines of the Christian faith (2.2.2)
6. Model the values, beliefs, and convictions of a Christ-follower (4.3.1)
7. Handle high conflict situations in a clam, non-anxious manner, using conflict as an opportunity for change (4.3.2)

8. Exhibit the courage to do the right thing even when it is not comfortable (4.3.3)
9. Live out a sense of calling (4.3.4)

SCHEDULE

Date	Topics/Assignments
Jan 28	Awakening to the Heart's Longing for God Practice Syllabus Review Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 1; Foster: Chapter 1 (first half) Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 15 min/day); Paper 1
Feb 4	Types of Prayer QuickWrite Practice Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 2; Foster: Chapter 1 (second half); article from Reader Paper 1 due: "My History with Prayer" Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 15 min/day); <u>Speaking of Faith</u> podcast: "Play, Spirit, and Character" with Dr. Stuart Brown. http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/play/index.shtml
Feb 11	Where Prayer Leads QuickWrite Practice Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 3; Foster: Chapter 2 (first half); article from Reader Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 30 min/day)
Feb 18	The Freedom of Detachment QuickWrite Practice Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 4; Foster: Chapter 2 (second half); article from Reader Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 30 min/day); <u>Speaking of Faith</u> podcast: "The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi" with Dr. Fatemeh Keshavarz. http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/rumi/
Feb 25	To Purify the Heart QuickWrite Practice Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 5; Foster: Chapter 3 (first half); article from Reader Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 30 min/day)
Mar 4	Module Week
Mar 11	Humility and Contrition QuickWrite Practice Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 6; Foster: Chapter 3 (second half); article from Reader Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 45 min/day); <u>Speaking of Faith</u>

podcast: “*Obedience and Action*” with Sister Joan Chittister.

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/obedienceandaction/index.shtml>

Mar 18 **Faith and Perseverance**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 7; Foster: Chapter 4 (first half);
article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 45 min/day)

Mar 25 **The Unseen Warfare**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 8; Foster: Chapter 4 (second half);
article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 45 min/day); Speaking of Faith
podcast: “*Quarks and Creation*” with the Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne Phd.

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/quarks/index.shtml>

Apr 1 **Bridling the Mind**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 9; Foster: Chapter 5 (first half);
article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day)

Apr 8 **Hesychia: Holy Silence**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 10; Foster: Chapter 5 (second
half); article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day); Speaking of Faith
podcast: “*The Inner Landscape of Beauty*” with Irish poet John O’Donahue

http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/john_odonahue/

Apr 15 **Unceasing Prayer**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 11; Foster: Chapter 6 (first half);
article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day)

Apr 22 **Tears and Fasting**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapters 12-13; Foster: Chapter 6 (second
half); article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day); Speaking of Faith
podcast: “*Brother Thay*” with Thich Nhat Hanh

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/thichnhathanh/index.shtml>

Apr 29 **Aridity, Languor, Loss of Purpose**

QuickWrite

Practice

Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Chapter 14-16; Foster: Chapter 7 (first
half); article from Reader

Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day); Paper 2

May 6 No class; instructor on silent retreat
 Assignments: Daily prayer (minimum of 1 hr/day); Speaking of Faith podcast: “*Listening Generously*” with Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen M.D.
<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/listeninggenerously/index.shtml>

May 13 **The Fruits of a Life of Prayer**
 QuickWrite
 Practice
 Reading Due: Matthew the Poor: Conclusion and Epilogue; Foster: Chapter 7 (second half); article from Reader
 Paper 2 due: “Prayer: My Journey Forward”
 Assignments: A life of prayer in the years to come

ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are due IN CLASS. I DO NOT download emailed assignments. If you miss class you may drop your assignment at my church office on its due date, or may mail it to me (however, *it is not on my church office desk by 4pm on the due date it is considered late*).

1. Weekly Reading. Books form the backbone of our reflection. You are expected to change the way you read for this course. You are to read spiritually, that is, for the sake of prayer and encounter with God, and with an eye of enriching your practice not merely to master the field. Most of these books are available used through amazon.com at reduced prices. You can buy these books for as little as \$45 total, including shipping.

1. *Streams of Living Water*, Richard Foster, (408 pages). ISBN-10: 0060628227, \$5 used.
2. *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way*, Matthew the Poor, (292 pages), ISBN-10: 0881412503, \$9 used.
3. *Course Reader in Christian Spirituality*. A packet of photocopied articles; available first day of class. \$10 paid to MBBS.

The reading for this course is intentionally light, not only in the number of pages but in content. The material is to be read spiritually—that is, with a listening ear, drawing the material into the heart prayerfully, inviting God to address you, guide you, change you. When you finish reading the assignment you might ask three questions: 1. What in the reading arrests my attention? 2. Lord, how does that which draws my attention intersect with my life today? and 3. Lord, what are you asking of me now?

2. Weekly Reading Essays (QuickWrites). At the beginning of each class you will write a simple essay (a Quick Write) based on *one* of two questions drawn from any of the day’s readings. Both questions are worth 12 points. These questions require you to engage in analytic/synthetic reflection and writing. You will be graded on evidence, not just of having read the material, but on how you are able to explore the significance of the material for your life of prayer.

3. Daily Prayer. The most important assignment is your daily practice of prayer. Beginning with at least 15 minutes/day of prayer and gradually increasing to 1 hour/day

of prayer, six days a week (Sunday is a day of shared prayer in worship with your community), you are to build a habit of daily private prayer. It is by praying that you learn to pray. The course materials are only suggestive; the Triune God is your teacher, and to learn, you must meet with God, wrestle with God and with yourself, experience stunning defeats, frightening challenges, and astonishing glimpses of God’s glory. You may practice this in any way you choose: a single period of prayer, or break it up into daily “offices”—e.g. half hour in the morning and another at night, or several periods broken up during the day. ***You will sign an accountability covenant each week testifying to your weekly discipline.***

4. Paper 1: “My History with Prayer.” In a 3-4 page reflection paper, double spaced, examine your inherited assumptions and practices of prayer. This should include persons and experiences that have influenced you, and well as what you consider your successes and failures in prayer, your joys and your frustrations. Include a paragraph that suggests why you are taking this class and what your hopes are for participating in it.

5. Paper 2: “Prayer: My Journey Forward.” This 6-7 page paper, doubled spaced, reflects on your spiritual journey in prayer during the course. Drawing upon the readings, your practice of prayer, and class exercises and conversations your paper is to address these three questions (each should be a clear heading in your paper): 1. How have my ideas and practices of prayer changed, and what or who has influenced these changes? 2. How is my experience of God different from the past? 3. How do I foresee these changes working their way into my life and future ministry? The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with a critical assessment of your journey and to help you put in place some structure for ongoing practice of interior prayer.

6. Speaking of Faith Podcasts. For enrichment only. These exception world-class interviews are excellent to download and listen to while exercising or commuting. I highly recommend them. They will expose you to discoveries, values, and experiences from a wide array of disciplines and religious traditions that enrich your understanding of the practice of prayer.

GRADING

Class participation	20%	200 points
Weekly QuickWrite	20%	200 points
Daily Prayer	30%	300 points
Paper 1	10%	100 points
Paper 2	20%	200 points
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	100%	1000 points

Note: According to the MBBS grading policies, “A ‘B’ is the baseline . . .” AN A IS RESERVED FOR ONLY OUTSTANDING WORK; YOU WILL RECEIVE A C OR F FOR WORK THAT IS NOT MASTER’S LEVEL QUALITY.

LATE WORK

Late work will be accepted up to one week late for 60% maximum credit (after one week late, nothing is accepted). Sermons are to be preached on the assigned date unless major circumstances prohibit the preacher from preaching (prior approval required from the professor).

ACADEMIC POLICIES

MBBS policies are described in the *Academic Handbook*, which is updated annually. The *Handbook* includes policies on extensions for incomplete work, academic integrity, non-discriminatory language, academic appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with MBBS academic policies and to follow them. The Academic Handbook is available on our website at www.mbseminary.com or through the offices of the Registrar and Academic Dean.

MBBS/PM790: "Advanced Prayer"

**Daily Prayer
Accountability Covenant**

WEEK	NAME:
1	I have practiced at least 15 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
2	I have practiced at least 15 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
3	I have practiced at least 30 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
4	I have practiced at least 30 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
5	I have practiced at least 30 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
6	I have practiced at least 45 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
7	I have practiced at least 45 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
8	I have practiced at least 45 minutes of prayer ___ days this last week
9	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week
10	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week
11	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week
12	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week
13	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week
14	I have practiced at least one hour of prayer ___ days this last week

ADVANCED PRAYER: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Way of the Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Journey, Shambala Classics (19th century, Russian Orthodox).

Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith, Thomas Merton (20th Century, American Catholic).

Clinging: The Experience of Prayer. Emilie Griffin (20th century, American Catholic).

Unseen Warfare. Edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse (16th century, Italian Catholic, edited by Eastern Orthodox).

Writings from the Philokalia on the Prayer of the Heart. Translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E. H. Palmer (Middle Ages, Eastern Orthodox).

The Mixed Life, Walter Hilton (14th century, English Catholic).

How to Pray: The Chapters on Prayer from The School of Jesus Christ, Jean-Nicolas Grou (18th Century, French Catholic).

The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry, Henry Nouwen (20th century, American Catholic).

Wonderful and Dark is this Road: Discovering the Mystic Path, Emilie Griffin (20-21st century, American Catholic).

The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross, Rowan Williams (20-21st century, English Anglican).

The Cloud of Unknowing (14th century, English Catholic).

Mystics of the Church, Evelyn Underhill (19th-20th century, English non-Christian, then Anglican with Orthodox leanings).

The Silent Life, Thomas Merton (20th century, American Catholic).

The Sabbath, Abraham Joshua Heschel (20th century, American Jew).

The Last Battle, C.S. Lewis (20th century, English Anglican).

In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, John Chryssavgis (20th-21st century, American, Greek Orthodox).

On Prayer, Acchimandrite Sophrony (20th century, Russian Orthodox).

The Wisdom of the Desert, Thomas Merton (20th century, American Catholic).