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SF 503 The Life of Prayer

Reginald Johnson

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Asbury Theological Seminary
SF 503 ExL "The Life of Prayer"
Summer, 2004

Professor: Reg Johnson, Ph.D.
Telephone (859)858-2219
e-mail address: reg_johnson@asburyseminary.edu

Note

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Welcome

Welcome to ExL and to "The Life of Prayer." I am excited about this course and about using this medium as a way of deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ and growing as prayerful persons. Let's start by walking through the course description, my vision for the course, texts, course objectives and purposes, grading system and course expectations.

Course Description

This computer-mediated course proposes to help you interpret and apply the biblical principle of 'pray without ceasing.' In addition to examining various dimensions of prayer, the course also explores ways that your whole life can be prayerful. We will examine both theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. Part of the power of the course will be the small group experience in which you will be engaged.

My Own Vision for this Course

I can remember the motto of the Christian camp that I attended as a child. "To Know Him and to Make Him Known." Of course, when I first saw it posted high on the wall of the outdoor tabernacle, I thought it referred to us--the campers. I thought that the reason the camp existed was for people to get to know *us*...and to help *us* be known! By the end of the week I had committed my life to Jesus--and had come to understand that the camp motto meant something very different than I had thought. As

time has passed, those words have become a kind of mission statement, framing the very purpose of my existence—"to know Him (Christ) and to make Him known."

Many years have passed since that special summer. I have to admit that I don't know God nearly so deeply as I wish I did. I thirst for more. So, being a "professor of spiritual formation" isn't (for me) "just" a job, and an area of study in which I enjoy working, it is also about a place of longing in my life and a subject of great passion! I long to know God more deeply.

I can't say for sure, but I would guess that this is part of what has brought *you* to this course. You may be here because you want to know God better, to walk more closely with Jesus, and to be led by His Spirit. You may feel a great need for prayer, but know that it is an area where you feel you've got a lot of growing to do. You may even be a little nervous about someone else (me) knowing what a novice you are. If that's how you feel, you've come to the right place. Welcome to our class!

And another thing... For much of my own spiritual journey prayer was something I felt a lot of guilt about--never felt that I spent enough time doing it, or that I was serious or intense enough as I did it. Prayer was often coupled with ideas like "ought," "should," because it was bound up with a sense of duty and obligation. Seen in that way, prayer was just one more thing to do, added to all the other things on my list each day. But more and more I have come to see prayer very differently. Now I see prayer as a way of living in a *personal relationship* with One who knows us more completely and loves us more deeply than we could ever imagine. It is a way of living with One who delights in and accommodates to our uniqueness. Seen in this way prayer is first of all is not about "doing," but a way of being in a profoundly enjoyable and deeply fulfilling relationship with God through Jesus whom we follow and whose mission we embrace.

I hope that as the course moves forward you will create more space in your life for cultivating this friendship. I hope you will be experimental in ways of spending meaningful time with Him. I hope that you will become more attentive to His presence in your life, and more responsive to how he wants to work through you all through the day. Learning how to live prayerfully, not just "saying our prayers," is real objective of our class.

Course Expectations , Due Dates and Grading Scales

I have attempted to design assignments for our class that not only increase our

knowledge about prayer, but also help us to reflect on what it means to live prayerfully through our days. The due dates are important and have been set deliberately so that we can proportion our work-load, give us the best chance for integrating our discoveries into our lives, and (pragmatically) fall at points during the summer that will enable me to respond most efficiently to your work. I will expect your papers on or before the assigned dates, unless you have a medical emergency or a personal crisis (e.g., a death in the family). Otherwise there will be a 2-point deduction for each 24 hour period the assignment is late.

Each element of the course has an assigned point value. There are a total of 325 points. My grading scale is as follows...

- A-range 308-325 points (Exceptional, outstanding)
- B-range 292-307 points (Good work, substantial achievement)
- C-range 260-291 points (Acceptable work, essentials done)
- D-range 227-259 points (marginal, minimal work)
- F 226 and below (Unacceptable work)

There are seven course expectations.

1. Communicate with your e-team (sometimes referred to as your e-group) as specified in each module. These small groups are normally comprised of 4-5 members. In addition to being a group with which you can share ideas, discuss issues, and give prayer support, the group will also be a place where you will interact over specific assignments. Each module you will be assigned a scripture passage in which Jesus gives a teaching about prayer. I will provide questions to guide your reflection. You will post your response to these questions and also respond at least once to each of your e-team members' Bible Study posting. Timing means everything in this part of the class. Pay careful attention to the due date of your assignment so that your team is not inconvenienced by your tardiness. If your posting will be delayed, please inform your team so that they will know what is happening. I'll listen –in on your discussions, sometimes tossing in a comment. This part of our class experience is worth 50 points.

2. Read the course texts listed below. The order in which you are to read these books is indicated in the "course calendar" that is outlined later in this syllabus. At the end of the semester I will ask you to report on whether you have read these books in their entirety. (50 points)

- *Dimensions of Prayer*, Douglas Steere
- *The God Who Hears*, Bingham Hunter
- *Prayer, The Heart's True Home*, Richard Foster
- *Churches that Pray*, Peter Wagner
- *Windows of the Soul*, Ken Gire

3. Write and follow a Rule of Prayer. A "Rule of Prayer" is simply a plan to which you commit yourself as a deliberate way of cultivating your conscious relationship with God and growing in your relationship with Him. Be experimental and

imaginative. Don't think you have to fit into some predetermined mold. Remember that we create space for God in a variety of ways. Be realistic, but specific as you lay out your daily/weekly plan. Realize that it will not be "perfect" but that your "Rule" will probably undergo revisions as you move through the summer. Keep me posted on any revisions that you make. You will prepare this assignment by the end of our first module in June and at the end of August I will ask you to send me a brief report about your use of the Rule over the summer. (25 points)

4. Keep a Prayer Journal. Journal entries shall be made approximately 4 out of 7 days a week (a total of 50 entries, each for a separate day during the summer). You may keep your journal in whatever form or format you wish. I will not read this material, *but will ask you to report monthly on your faithfulness to this assignment*. The journal is an instrument that can encourage you to be attentive to God in everyday life. Sometimes you will use it to pray over a life experience, practice the prayer of "examen" (I'll explain that term in the weeks ahead), record whatever is in your spirit after praying over a psalm, or capture the fruit of a period of meditation on a scripture. Here you will also track your "prayer experiment." Your journal will serve as a kind of continuing "lab report" for the course. As I stated above, I do not plan to read this private material. However, if you would ever like to share an entry or discuss something that you are thinking about, I welcome your communication. The best way is through the "office" icon in our course, rather than through my general e-mail address. (50 points)

5. Prayer Problem Essay: This is your first major assignment and is due July 7. Your paper will be 4 - 6 pages in length, double-spaced, and typed. You will also prepare a one-page precis of this paper for the members of your group. Your assignment is to address some problem with prayer with which you struggle. Footnotes and bibliography will evidence that you have gone beyond class texts in your exploration. Write cogently and present your material in a concise and well-organized fashion. In our second module you will score an inventory to help you think about the problem about which you will write, and I will provide you with a format for writing the paper. Part of the assignment for this essay is to send a one-page summary of your work to the members of your e-group, and then to read and respond to each of the essay summaries from your e-group.

This assignment will be scored on the basis of:

- (1) clarity of the prayer-problem focus (5 points);
- (2) evidence of research and use of sources (15 points);
- (3) cogency of your writing and organization of your thoughts (15 points);
- (4) bibliography (5 points)
- (5) précis for your e-group (5 points)
- (6) your responses to the précis submitted by others in your e-team (5 points)

Total points for the Prayer Essay, 50 points.

6. Conduct a Prayer Experiment during the last three weeks of July. arising out of your response to God's call in some concrete area of life. Your experiment

may be connected to some area of personal need (e.g., learning about and practicing quiet or contemplative prayer, praying through the Psalms, etc.). Your experiment could relate to some area of responsibility you carry, some opportunity you have, some challenge you face, some situation of hurt or need which exists around you, or some discipline that you are trying to establish. Your paper should be between 4 - 6 pages in length (double-spaced, typed), and include the following three components:

- Theoretical/theological section that explicates what you learned and sought to apply in your experiment from research that you did from articles or books, and ideas that have been covered in this course through the semester. I will not specify the number of sources beyond the required texts or the materials that I have provided in my presentations. However, I will expect you to show evidence of researching for material related to your experiment beyond what we have done as a part of those class resources. (20 points)

- Summary of each of your dated log of entries (taken from your Prayer Journal) tracking your "experiment" from inception, up to the date of your summary paper. What I am looking for in this section is that you have experimented with this prayer focus over the span of at least three weeks. (10 points)

- Narrative section where you reflect on what you learned from the experience of implementing ideas into action/integrating theory with life. For example, how God sensitized your heart, prompted your responses, reshaped the thrust of your praying, or has been changing your perceptions, attitudes, or actions in some observable ways. In other words, crystallize what God has shown you about prayer as you have engaged in prayer. You are encouraged to share what you perceive to be your "failures" as well as your successes. Sometimes the questions (or lessons) that arise from our struggles are just as important to our growth in faith as any of our "successes" may be! (20 points)

The total point value for the Prayer Experiment paper is 50 points.

7. Design a School of Prayer. Throughout the summer you will be gathering ideas and resources for this final, integrative project. It will be due on August 25. There is a basic spiritual law that, having received so much from God, we must share it or we will lose it. It is often in the process of teaching, or in preparing to teach, that the lessons that God has been showing us are distilled. It will give you the opportunity to capture Christ's gifts to you in your local setting. I call it a "School for Prayer." Not many people in our churches have ever been taught to pray. The need is great. Reflect on what God has been trying to teach you about prayer over the years--through your ups and downs, and through the insights that have come from readings and classes. What have you received that you could teach others in a short course? Use a notebook with seven tabbed sections to organize your project. Plan for 5 teaching sessions.

- In the introductory section, describe your "imaginary setting" (e.g., five consecutive evenings, four consecutive Wednesday nights, or a nightly event beginning Sunday morning, continuing Sunday evening, and nightly through Wednesday night, etc.). List your goals--what you want your people to learn and to experience. And a brief description of the group with which you will be

working: socio-economic, educational, cultural, age range, gender distribution, etc. (5 points)

- In tabbed sections 2-5 of your notebook, you will develop each of the five teaching sessions. In each one there needs to be at least a two-page teaching outline, handout(s) and visual aids. Each session should have both informative and experiential dimensions. Wherever possible, provide a "homework" assignment of some prayer exercise which you would ask the people to use in order to continue practicing what they have learned. (40 points)

- In the 6th tabbed section, list a bibliography of sources that you have used to develop your notebook (5 points) and, on a separate page, a brief bibliography on prayer you would distribute to those who attended the school. (5 points)

As I indicated, this final project is due in my office in hard copy on or before August 24th. That means that you'll need to calculate the days needed for it to arrive by the due date. This will give me the week of August 24th to review and grade these projects and return them to you. Total Points for School of Prayer, 50 points.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

The course is generally designed in two-week "modules." However, the last week of class will consist of a shortened, final module. The first three are mainly an introduction to the Life of Prayer. The middle three modules examine essential "disciplines" for living prayerfully. The last specifically addresses how God uses our prayers in communicating His love to others.

June 1-13, Module 1: Our Journey in Prayer

Rule of Prayer due (via "Office" on or by June 14th.

Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on June 7, responses to teammates by midnight on June 13.

June 14-27, Module 2: Why We Pray

- Complete your reading of *The God Who Hears*, by Bingham Hunter by the end of this module.

- Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on June 21, responses to team by midnight on June 27.

June 28-July 11, Module 3: Ways We Pray

- Complete reading Dimensions of Prayer, by Douglas Steere, by the end of this module.

- Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on July 5, responses to team by midnight on July 11.

- Prayer Problem Essay (to me via "Office" by midnight on July 11

July 12-25, Module 4: Resting in God

- Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on July 19, responses to team by midnight on July 25.

July 26-August 8, Module 5: Walking With God

- Complete reading Prayer, the Hearts True Home, by Foster by the end of this module

- Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on August 2, responses to team by midnight on August 8.

- Prayer Experiment due August 8 (to me via "Office").

August 9-22, Module 6: Receiving Bread from God

- Complete reading Windows of the Soul, by Ken Gire, by the end of this module.

- Scripture Reflections posted to your e-team by noon on August 1, responses to team by midnight on August 22.

August 23-29, Module 7: Caring Prayer

- Complete reading Churches That Pray, by C. Peter Wagner by the end of this week.

- School of Prayer Project due by August 24th (hard copy).

Some "Bits and Pieces"

1. Whenever you have prayer requests which you would like our class to pray with you about, let us know by sending it through the "discussion center." That will enable us to respond to you there as well.
2. It is better to email me through the "Office" location in this system, rather than through my seminary email address.
3. My Summer "Office Hours" will vary from week to week. I will try to have responded to your Bible Study Circle material within a week of your posting it, and (usually) to any email sent to me during the same week you send it. However, there will be some times when I'll be away. I'll try to keep you posted as to when those weeks will be since my responses to your material will be delayed during those periods.
4. I will be away from June 28 – July 7. I'll have the material you need posted in our Classroom before I leave.
5. I have divided this class into four-member teams. When you open up Discussion Center your team will be indicated. Send an initial greeting to your team. When you receive these greetings from one another, you can double-click on the name of each and read the resume that is attached. That will help you get

to know a little about your team.

CLASS STRUCTURE

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules.

The Discussion Center will be used for all public communications. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else which would be of interest to your classmates and me, you should post to the Discussion Center. Anytime I have special information or announcements, I will put them under this icon.

The SF503X Office is for private correspondence between you and me. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates or items that you think may embarrass me if they were to appear publicly.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the Discussion Center from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask questions, or to explore topics. None of the conversations carried on in this location are ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, the Services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a Powerpoint Viewer as well as a Real Audio player. I encourage you to take advantage of all these resources, and particularly to utilize the chapel access in order to connect with the seminary's on-campus opportunities for spiritual growth.

SUPPORT

The following individuals can provide important help to you should the need arise:

Jared Porter (ExL_Support@asburyseminary.edu) can provide technical support should you encounter any difficulties.

Kevin Osborn, the ExL Director (ExL_Director@asburyseminary.edu) can handle any number of questions or concerns you might have relating to the ExL program.

Hannah Kirsch (Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu) is the ExL reference librarian.

Dorothy (“Dot”) James (Dorothy_James@asburyseminary.edu) is the ExL contact for inter-library loans.