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## SF 501 Introduction to Spiritual Formation

Reginald Johnson

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**SF 501 Introduction to Spiritual Formation**  
**Fall, 2003**                      **1:00-2:15**    **Tu/Tr**  
**Dr. Reg Johnson**

**I. Course Description:** A survey that examines the theological and practical dimensions of the spiritual life. Lectures, class discussions and small-group disciplines are used. Students are encouraged to enrich their own personal spiritual life and are given guidelines for engaging in a ministry of spiritual formation in the local church.

**II. Course Objectives:**

- A. Participants are expected to acquire knowledge about the...
- means by which we open our lives to God's love;
  - seasons through which we grow;
  - community in which we live; and
  - approaches to spirituality by which we can be nourished.
- B. Participants are expected to develop skills in...
- identifying growth points in the spiritual life;
  - discovering their own "inner story";
  - furnishing resources, and
  - designing strategies for intentional spiritual formation in a congregation.
- C. Participants are encouraged to deepen their relationship with Christ by...
- living in a covenant community;
  - using the means of grace;
  - engaging in formative ("spiritual") reading;
  - keeping a record of their experiences with the Lord in a spiritual journal;
  - exploring additional material on themes or resources dealt with in class;
  - participating in formative discussions in their small groups;
  - appreciating the stories of faith which are part of their classmates' journeys; and
  - continuing to formulate a personal theology for spiritual formation.

**III. Texts**

- Richard Foster, *A Celebration of Discipline*
- Reginald Johnson, *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life* & *Learning to Pray Again* Compact Discs
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*
- Joyce Huggett, *Listening to God*

*Participants will also purchase a class packet at Cokesbury Book store. This material consists of "handouts" and worksheets for use in class.*

#### **IV. Class Structure**

SF 501 will be structured as a "covenant community". This is an acknowledgment that spiritual formation takes place within the context of the Christian community. Each covenant group shall utilize common disciplines and weekly meetings. In the initial meetings, group members will share from their own spiritual journeys. In phase two, they will share from reflective exercises from the "Learning to Pray Again" CDs, and in the latter part of the semester the small groups will share from their journal entries of the previous week. Some or all of the following questions of "examen" will guide those meetings in the final phase of the course.

- How did I meet God in scripture this week?
- How did I meet God in daily life this week? (joys, sorrows, anxieties, celebrations)
- How did I meet God in other people this week? (spiritual gifts, disagreements, etc.)
- How did I close off to God this week? When was I most open?

Each of these group sessions will end in prayer. Depending upon the time available, it may be a period of silent prayer, sometimes one member may be invited to pray for the group as a whole, and at other times there may be time for group "conversational prayer."

#### **V. Grading System**

Grading will be on the basis of a "contract". Participants will decide, in the light of present commitments, which grade will be their goal. Grades are not awarded on the basis of the contract made, but upon the quality of work done at the performance level chosen. For the purpose of assessment, there will be graded elements in the course.

#### **VI. Grade Expectations**

For the "C-Level" contract...

- read course texts (20 points)
- work through the course CDs (25 points)
- write a spiritual autobiography (30 points)
- attend class sessions (2 points deducted for unexcused absences)
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 67 out of 75 points

For the "B-Level" contract...

- fulfill C-Level expectations
- write two essays (worth 30 points each).
- keep a spiritual journal 4 out of 7 days a week. (30 points) and
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 150 out of 165 points.

For the "A-Level" contract...

- fulfill C and B-level expectations
- present an approved project to the class and project report to the prof (45 points)
- achieve a minimum cumulative total of 180 out of 200 points.

## VII. Course Components

*Spiritual Autobiography.* This 10 - 15 page paper (double-spaced, typed) will relate stories from your life which enable the reader to see the formative experiences which have brought you to this point. The stories are to trace early influences, significant persons, and important "passages" of your life. Not only will you recount the "outer facts" but you will use these pages to also reflect upon their inner meaning as well. **Due on September 30.**

Essays. These papers will be 3-5 pages in length (double-spaced, typed).

In the *first essay (due on October 21)* you will write about how your personality influences your spirituality (how your own unique temperament is evident in your spiritual "style" and the pattern of your life of prayer and devotion). You will also address and how your spirituality is impacting your personality (how your faithful following of Jesus is leading you to move beyond the comfort zone of your "personality preferences" and to balance in areas where you may have been one-dimensional). Your essay will draw from the appropriate course texts, classroom presentations, as well as other resources that will be library reserve.

In the *second essay (due on November 18)* you will choose some course-related theme (e.g., fasting, contemplation, etc.); issue or idea (e.g., busyness, inner healing, asceticism, etc.); person (e.g., Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, Henry Nouwen); or "spiritual classic" (e.g., The Practice of the Presence of God, The Sacrament of the Present Moment, A Serious Call, etc.) for further research. Footnotes (or endnotes) and bibliography will evidence that you have gone beyond class texts in your exploration. If your essay focuses upon a spiritual classic, you will read the classic and use the essay as a place to distil discoveries, insights, and reflections that have resulted from your thoughtful reading of the source. Write cogently and present your material in a concise and well-organized fashion.

Or,

The second essay may take the form of *a report on a one day, personal retreat* that you take during the semester. By "one day" is meant a morning and afternoon, or an afternoon and evening, or an evening and the following morning. The purpose of your retreat is simply to be alone with God. Be open to whatever gifts God wants to give--insights, perspective, direction, or simply refreshment and rest. The report is to be no more than two or three pages in length. Organize your report into three parts:

- (a) What was going on in your life just prior to taking the retreat? In other words, what was the "context" of your retreat?

- (b) Where you go and how did you spend your time? What scriptures, readings or experiences did you process? What surfaced as you prayed?
- (c) Reflect on the meaning of the retreat with regard to "re-entry" into your relationships and responsibilities.

Two points will be deducted for each 24 hour period that a paper is late. Allowances will, of course, be made for medical emergencies or personal crises (e.g., death in the family).

*Spiritual Journal.* Journal entries shall be made 4 out of 7 days a week. They will be kept in a separate notebook and handed in for review on **September 30, October 30, and December 4.**

*Creative Project.* This assignment may take one of two forms.

*You may choose an artistic mode* (painting, sculpture, poetry, creative writing, photo meditation, original musical composition, etc.) in order to give expression to some aspect of your own spiritual journey. It is expected that the project will be a fresh work.

Or,

*You may choose a project that communicates course-related ideas* (e.g., lesson plans, sermon manuscript, newsletter articles, overhead transparencies, set of retreat talks, etc.). Your work should not only reflect your personal reflections, but also include appropriate connections with our course content (texts and/or teaching modules).

*Important information about the Creative Projects:*

- The Project represents a significant course assignment. Those who work at this level are expected to invest *a minimum of ten hours* in the preparation of their project. Some will spend much more time than that.
- Each project will be shared in class at the end of the semester.
- You are to receive approval of your idea before presenting it in class. This idea is due in a written form on *October 14<sup>th</sup>*. This is to include a clear and succinct statement of the purpose of your project as well as the objectives for your presentation to the class.
- In addition to your presentation to the class, you will also submit a report that includes:
  - A log of your time investment.
  - For art-based projects: submit a detailed discussion of the connection between your project and your own spiritual journey;
  - For text-based projects (including power-point presentations) submit a detailed interpretation and or information of how your theme fits with a ministry for spiritual formation.