

Prayer and Theology

THEO 650 B/ SP 650 A
 Spring 2024
 Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary¹

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“If you are a theologian, you pray truly; and if you pray truly, you are a theologian.”²

“The discussion of prayer is so great a task that it requires the First Person to reveal it, the Firstborn Word to reach it, and the Spirit to enable us to think and speak rightly of so great a subject. That is why I, who am only a human being and in no way attribute an understanding of prayer to myself, think it right to pray for the Spirit before beginning my treatise on prayer...”³

Theology is –or can be– an act of contemplation. In theology we not only speak *of* God but we also constantly speak *to* God. (A useful guideline is not to say anything *about* God that we wouldn’t say *to* God, directly). In this sense, to do theology points us to the practice of prayer, while conversely, prayer leads us toward theological expression. Theology is sometimes called *mystagogical* for this reason, because it helps “lead us to the mysteries” of God, not in the sense of being mystifying or confusing, but because God is loving and self-revealing and at the same time, is unfathomable mystery. The journey to God, with God and in God never ends, even though in the day-to-day we are at home in God.

In this course our grounding conviction will be that prayer and theology are deeply intertwined. Our prayers reflect our theology and our theology informs our prayers. By living prayerfully and praying as we live, we test out each day the plausibility and veracity of the theology we confront, engage and develop, even as we journey more deeply into the contemplation of the Triune God who is both Mystery and closer to us than we are to ourselves.

¹ **Land Acknowledgement:** Garrett-Evangelical sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires -the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa- as well as of the Menominee, Miami, and Ho-Chunk nations. For a virtual tour exploring the indigenous heritage of our area:

<https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymaps/ebff084d13358a8bea44028ba1a1bc7a/indigenous-tour-of-northwestern/index.html>

² Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer*, 62.

³ Origen, *On Prayer*, II.6.

Course objectives

- to explore and deepen the practice of prayer by the Spirit in the way of Jesus;
- to engage critically with the theological underpinnings of such prayer;
- to connect action and contemplation

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- to articulate the connection between prayer, pneumatology and christology;
- to use Scripture as a source of prayer;
- to embody a range of prayer modalities;
- to synthesize personal prayer habits with a theological habit of mind;
- to practice action in contemplation

Before we start...

Our class will be a contemplative space. We will not depend on screens, save for very specific tasks. Please plan to put up your screens (laptops, cell phones, e-readers, tablets) for most of the time we are together, unless otherwise advised.

Bring a physical Bible with you to class, in whatever language, format, and translation you prefer.

Course delivery

We will move through three weekends together, anchored around three themes or units:

- A theologian is one who prays (February 9-10)
- Only one who prays is a theologian (March 8-9)
- Prayerful theology (April 12-13).

For our weekend blocks, we will meet Fridays 2-7 PM and Saturdays 9AM-2 PM, i.e. in five-hour segments. The rest of the work will be asynchronous, i.e. there will be weekly tasks (contemplative prayer, keeping a prayer journal, completing readings, etc.) related to prayer and theology woven throughout the semester. Beyond the prayer journal, which constitutes the bulk of the work, there will be three short papers: a prayer autobiography (due February

25), a book review of a book on prayer (due April 11), and a concluding reflection and self-assessment (due May 4) . The course is set up with the expectation that the student will dedicate time daily to prayer and reflection.

This is how the work will be **weighted** (in percentage of final grade):

Prayer autobiography	10%
Book review	20%
Concluding reflection and self-assessment	10%
Prayer journal	50%
Class participation	10%
Total	100%

Please pay attention to and use the rubrics in Appendix I, as you plan and carry out your work.

The **grading scale** is as follows:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D	60-69

Required bibliography

Lohfink, Gerhard. *The Our Father. A New Reading*. Trans. Linda Maloney. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019. ISBN-10 : 0814664490. \$ 14.95 on Amazon.com.

All other readings will be posted on Moodle and will be on reserve at the library. You can access all the materials (including an electronic version of the book) through this link:

[Prayer and Theology](#)

Semester itinerary (units, objectives, readings, dates, assignments):

Unit I: A Theologian is One who Prays

Topics for Unit I

- Scriptural prayers
- Prayer autobiographies
- Prayer journals
- Paying attention
- Praying without ceasing?
- Prayer and God-talk

Objectives for Unit I

- To sketch out the contours of a prayer autobiography
- To practice the Jesus prayer
- To reflect on scriptural prayers
- To begin to explore a contemplative mindset though use of a prayer journal

Learning Outcomes for Unit I.

Upon completing the unit, the student will be able to...

- Practice the Jesus Prayer
- Write a prayer autobiography
- Make use of scriptural prayers
- Articulate the link between prayer and theology

Week I (February 5-11)

This first week your task will be to prepare for our first meeting and of course attend class Friday and Saturday.

Preparatory tasks:

1. Bring a blank journal to class with you on Friday. Try to find one that is not a spiral notebook, that has at least 100 sheets (200 pages), and that will feel good to write in. This will be your prayer journal (it will reflect your work throughout the semester). The journal will be an analog experience, written by hand. Don't worry about whether your handwriting is perfectly legible or not. We'll talk about this in class.
2. Read the following essay (posted on Moodle) and come to class prepared to discuss it:

Gerhard Lohfink, "Each of us has a personal history of prayer," *Prayer Takes Us Home. The Theory and Practice of Christian Prayer*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020), 185-207. What would you write if you were tasked to write a similar article?

3. Find a prayer in the Bible that you want to share with the group (and bring your Bible to class).
4. Class hours will be Friday, February 9, 2-7 PM and Saturday, February 10, 9 AM-2 PM.

Week 2 (February 12-17)

1. Read and annotate⁴ Psalm 139 and Thurman, *The Inward Journey* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, sixth printing, 2007), 140-155 (posted on Moodle). Write notes in your prayer journal.
2. Write your own paraphrase of Psalm 139 in your prayer journal.
3. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 5 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
4. Sketch out some ideas for your theological autobiography in your prayer journal (see rubric in Appendix I).

Week 3 (February 19-23)

1. Read and annotate the selections from Cláudio Carvalhaes, "Introduction. Praying With Every Heart," "Praying Truly, with a Lump in the Throat," and "How to Pray from the Ends of the World," *Praying With Every Heart. Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021), xvii-xxv, 21-38 and 67-72 (posted on Moodle). Write your thoughts about these readings in your prayer journal. What does it mean for you to pray from the end of your world, with a lump in your throat?
2. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 7 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
3. Finish and post your Prayer Autobiography (deadline is February 25, 11:55 PM CT). See Appendix I for the description and the rubric.

Week 4 (February 26-March 2)

1. Read Ashley Cocksworth, "On the integrity of prayer and theology," *Prayer. A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 41-73 (posted on Moodle). Have you

⁴ Always jot down your annotations and observations in your prayer journal. Also: date all your entries.

“detangled” theology from prayer? How might you weave the two back together? Reflect in your journal.

2. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 9 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
3. Ponder the Lord’s Prayer. What comes to mind as you analyze and contemplate each section? Take notes about it in your prayer journal.

Week 5 (March 4-9)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 10 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Joachim Jeremias, “Daily Prayer in the Life of Jesus and the Primitive Church,” *The Prayers of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978), 66-81 (posted on Moodle). What strikes you about the prayer practices of Jesus and the early church? Do you see contrasts or continuities with your own practices or those of your faith community or communities? Reflect about this in your prayer journal.
3. Come to class on with your Bible and your prayer journal. Class will be Friday, March 8, 2-7 PM and Saturday, March 9, 9 AM-2 PM.

Unit II: Only One Who Prays is a Theologian

1. Topics

- What does it really mean to be a theologian?
- Prayer in the Hebrew Bible
- Jesus as a Person of Prayer
- The Lord’s Prayer as a Summary of Theology

2. Objectives for Unit II

- To clarify the meaning of the “theology-hood” of all believers
- To deepen knowledge of prayer in the Hebrew Bible
- To link prayer with Christology
- To interpret the Lord’s Prayer theologically

3. Learning Outcomes for Unit II

Upon completing the unit, the student will be able to...

- Define theology in the context of prayer
- Relate the Lord's Prayer to theology and ethics
- Complete a book review on the topic of prayer
- Practice contemplative prayer for 15 minutes a day

Week 6 (March 11-16)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 10 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Gerhard Lohfink, *The Our Father. A New Reading*, trans. Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN, 2019), 1-74. What does the Lord's Prayer teach you about God? Reflect about this in your prayer journal.
3. Choose and obtain (if you have not yet) the book you will read for your book review.

Week 7 (March 18-23)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 12 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Gerhard Lohfink, *The Our Father. A New Reading*, 75-112. How does the Lord's Prayer focus your theology and ethics? Write about this in your prayer journal.
3. Start reading your book review book if you have not done so yet. Take notes on it in your prayer journal.

Week 8 (March 25-30) – Spring Break. No assignments. However, don't neglect your practice of contemplative prayer as you move through Easter week! I will count any journaling you might do this week as extra credit.

Week 9 (April 1 is Easter Monday; this short week runs April 2-6)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 14 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Finish reading your book review book. Take notes on your insights in your prayer journal.

Week 10 (April 8-13)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 15 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Finish your book review and upload it by Thursday, April 11, 11:55 PM CT on Moodle. See the rubric in Appendix I. Be ready to share your insights with the group when we meet.
4. Come to class with your Bible and your prayer journal. Class will be Friday, April 12, 2-7 PM and Saturday, April 13, 9 AM-2 PM.

Unit III: Prayerful Theology (April 12-13)

1. Topics for Unit III

- Prayer and intersectionality
- Contemplative practices
- Prayer apps
- Discussion of book reviews
- Doing theology prayerfully

2. Objectives for Unit III

- Describe one's prayer genealogies
- Articulate expectations for future growth in prayer
- Explicate the constructive mutuality between prayer and theology
- Contextualize action in contemplation and contemplation in action

3. Learning Outcomes for Unit III

Upon completing the Unit, the student will be able to...

- Confidently practice and teach contemplative prayer to others
- Pray with theological awareness
- Do theology prayerfully
- Relate action and contemplation in fruitful ways

Week 11 (April 15-20)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 16 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Barbara A. Holmes, “Introduction: An Unlikely Legacy” and “Contemplation: A Cultural and Spiritual History,” *Joy Unspeakable. Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), xix-xxxix and 1-22 (posted on Moodle). What thoughts on prayer and theology does this reading evoke? What are the prayer traditions that have shaped you and what traditions would you like to be shaped by? Reflect in your prayer journal.

Week 12 (April 22-27)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 18 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Wendy Farley, “Contemplative practices,” *Beguiled by Beauty. Cultivating a Life of Contemplation and Compassion* (Louisville: WJK, 2020), 139-158. Which of these practices attracts you? Why? Do any of them repel you? Why? Write about these matters in your prayer journal.

Week 13 (April 29-May 4)

1. Practice contemplative prayer for at least 20 minutes a day, using the Jesus Prayer or another Prayer Word (you may want to use the Centering Prayer app for that). Write about the experience in your prayer journal.
2. Read Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Conclusion. Orienting Our Hearts to Live Better,” *Praying with Every Heart*, 245-248. Think about how you want to build your prayer nest. Write about it in your prayer journal.
3. Write and upload your Concluding Reflection and Self-Evaluation by May 4, 11:55 PM CT on Moodle. See description and rubric in Appendix I.

Note: If you are a graduating senior, the completed journal is due by May 4; otherwise, the deadline is Monday, May 6, 11:55 PM CT. Put the journal in an envelope and leave it c/o Dr. Bedford at the Garrett front desk, or mail it to her at Garrett (make sure it arrives by the deadline). See Appendix I for the rubric.

Appendix I: Descriptions, rubrics, checklists

1. Prayer autobiography

Your prayer autobiography should be 5-7 pp, double-spaced. It should include a discussion of what influences have shaped your approach to prayer, what has been meaningful about your practice, how you'd like to grow and change with regard to prayer practices, what your persistent questions about prayer have been, and a discussion of how you think your prayer practices shed light on your theology AND how you see your emerging theology affecting your prayer life. The prayer autobiography is due on Moodle by February 25, 11:55 PM CT.

Prayer autobiography rubric

On time, clear and careful writing (10 points)	_____
Discussion of influences (20 points)	_____
Reflection on what has been meaningful (10 points)	_____
Description of how you'd like to grow and change (10 points)	_____
Analysis of persistent questions (10 points)	_____
How your prayer practices shed light on your theology (20 points)	_____
How your emerging theology affects your prayer life (20 points)	_____
Total (100 points)	_____

2. Book review

Each student will choose a book on prayer (beyond our syllabus) and provide a five-page book review. Run the title of the book by Dr. Bedford to make sure it is adequate. Use your own words to describe the argument of the book (about 75% of the paper) and then evaluate the book (about 25% of paper). Do not rely on published reviews of this book; what is interesting is your own perspective about what you are learning about prayer from the book. Follow the rubric closely for guidance. The book review is due in Moodle by April 11, 11:55 PM CT.

Book review rubric

Presentation (20 points) _____

(writing style, clarity of prose, grammatical and spelling competence, sentence and paragraph flow, correct use of footnotes).

Suitability of the chosen book (10 points) _____

Summary of Text (30 points) _____

(fair depiction in your own words of the arguments, themes, and/or position of the book; do not use reviews by other people in this book review).

Balance between Summary and Critique (10 points) _____

(approximately 75-80% summary and 20-25% critical and appreciative evaluation of the book).

Critical Engagement with the Text (30 points) _____

(evaluation of the book, addressing its assumptions, implications, omissions, and coherence).

Total (100 points): _____

3. Concluding Reflection and Self-Assessment

Our course objectives were:

- to explore and deepen the practice of prayer by the Spirit in the way of Jesus;
- to engage critically with the theological underpinnings of such prayer;
- to connect action and contemplation

Please write 5 pages, double-spaced, reflecting on the extent to which you've been able to achieve this objectives this semester. How do you evaluate your own engagement with the material? Which readings and/or activities were most helpful to you? Why? What have you learned about God and about yourself through this process? Where would you like to "go from here" in your prayer life, in your theology, in your ethical engagement in the world? The concluding reflection and assessment is due on Moodle by May 4, 11:55 PM CT.

Rubric for concluding reflection and self-assessment

On time (10 points)	_____
Clear and careful writing (10 points)	_____
Reflection on the three course objectives (30 points)	_____
Self-evaluation on engagement with materials (10 points)	_____
Explanation of most helpful readings/activities (10 points)	_____
What student has learned about God (10 points)	_____
What student has learned about self (10 points)	_____
Projection toward the future (10 points)	_____
TOTAL (100 points)	_____

4. Prayer Journal

As you write in your prayer journal, always include the date and the assignment name. What will be evaluated is whether you have engaged in thoughtful reflection on each of the assignments (not the particular content or conclusions, which are up to you). The journal must be completed “as we go.” If you don’t complete a particular assignment, make a note to that effect in the journal. If you are a graduating senior, the completed journal is due by May 4; otherwise, the deadline is Monday, May 6, 11:55 PM CT. Put the journal in an envelope and leave it c/o Dr. Bedford at the Garrett front desk, or mail it to her at Garrett (make sure it arrives by the deadline). You will find the rubric for the prayer journal on the next page. You can use it to measure your progress through the course and to make sure you are doing all the work.

Rubric for prayer journal

	Missing D	Perfunctory C	Adequate B	Engaged A
Week 2 (February 12-17)				
1. Annotations on Thurman and Psalm 139				
2. Paraphrase of Psalm 139				
3. Notes on contemplative prayer				
4. Ideas for theological autobiography				
Week 3 (February 19-23)				
5. Annotations on Carvalhaes				
6. Notes on contemplative prayer				
Week 4 (February 26-March 2)				
7. Reflection on “detangling”/“weaving”				
8. Notes on contemplative prayer				
9. Notes on the Lord’s Prayer				
Week 5 (March 4-9)				
10. Notes on contemplative prayer				
11. Reflection on early church prayers				
Week 6 (March 11-16)				
12. Notes on contemplative prayer				
13. Reflection on God in Lord’s Prayer				
Week 7 (March 18-23)				
14. Notes on contemplative prayer				
15. Reflection on theology/ethics in LP				
16. Annotations on book for review				
Week 8 (March 25-30) – Spring Break. No assignments. Opportunity for extra credit.				
Notes on contemplative prayer				
Reflections in light of Holy Week				
Week 9 (April 2-6)				
17. Notes on contemplative prayer				
18. Final annotations on book for review				
Week 10 (April 8-13)				
19. Notes on contemplative prayer				
Week 11 (April 15-20)				
20. Notes on contemplative prayer				
21. Reflections on Holmes reading				
Week 12 (April 22-27)				
22. Notes on contemplative prayer				
23. Reflections on Farley reading				
Week 13 (April 29-May 4)				
24. Notes on contemplative prayer				
25. Reflections on Carvalhaes				

Appendix II: Various and Sundry Policies

1. Academic Policies

All students are required to abide by the academic policies detailed in the [Academic Handbook](#) for the current academic year. The following policies are of particular importance to the successful completion of one's coursework:

2. Writing

Academic integrity and [plagiarism](#): (See 19-20 Handbook, 12, 78-83) All professors are required to respond to all suspected incidents of academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism. Repeated incidents of plagiarism or academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from the school. Note: the unacknowledged use of AI (such as ChatGPT) is also a form of plagiarism. If you have used any form of AI (be it Google Translate or be it Bard) in writing your papers, include an explanatory footnote. We are interested in your reflections, not in an aggregate of ideas created by AI.

Writing and citations: The *Turabian Manual for Writers* and the *Chicago Manual of Style* footnote/bibliography format provide the standard formats for all introductory courses. Basic information on these formats is available online [here](#). In advanced courses an instructor may require another style guide appropriate to the discipline (such as APA). (19-20 Handbook, 84)

Writing Support: The Writing Center at Garrett-Evangelical offers programs to support all students' theological research and writing. See <https://www.garrett.edu/student-life/student-services> "Writing Center" for more detailed information.

3. Attendance and Class Participation

Attendance and lateness policies: Attendance is required. Students who miss more than 20% of the class sessions should not expect to pass the class. This is especially crucial, given our weekend format (19-20 Handbook, 19).

Please observe the limits on the use of electronic devices such as cell phones and other screens during class.

4. Academic Accommodations

Student accommodations for documented conditions should be developed and requested before the beginning of the semester. See the *Accessibility, Special Needs, and Disabilities*

policy and process set out in the Academic Handbook (19-20 Handbook, 12). Such accommodations are developed in consultation with the Registrar.

Extensions: For Masters students, extensions, if granted, are normally for four weeks following the last day of class in spring semester (19-20 Handbook, 20).

5. Email Policy

The instructor is committed to responding to emails from students within 24 hours, save on weekends. I do not check or answer emails on Sundays and only rarely on Saturdays. If you prefer to leave a voicemail message, Dr. Bedford's office number is 847-866-3931.