

RTS

O R L A N D O



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HYBRID COURSE SYLLABUS

## 02PT5400 CLASSICS OF PERSONAL DEVOTION

John Muether

Winter Term 2026

## PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

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**NAME:** John Muether

**EMAIL:** [jmuether@rts.edu](mailto:jmuether@rts.edu)

## COURSE DATES

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**COURSE DATES:** December 1, 2025 – February 13, 2026

**IN CLASS DATES:** January 14 – January 16, 2026

**COURSE COMPLETION DATE:** February 13, 2026

### SUMMARY OF DUE DATES:

- December 6 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 1 (Thomas À Kempis)
- December 10 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 2 (Martin Luther)
- December 13 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit Discussion Post 1
- December 17 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 3 (John Calvin)
- December 24 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 4 (Jeremiah Burroughs)
- December 27 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit Discussion Post 2
- December 31 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 5 (Thomas Brooks)
- January 7 at 9 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 6 (Jonathan Edwards)
- January 10 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit Discussion Post 3
- January 14
  - Readings 1—6 are to be completed
- January 21 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 6 (Geerhardus Vos)
- January 28 at 12 noon EST:
  - Submit response 8 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- February 4 at 12 noon EST:
  - Confession/Catechism reflection summary due
- February 13 at 12 noon EST:
  - Book review due and hybrid semester ends

## OVERVIEW:

Devotional writings from different periods of the history of the church are read and discussed to deepen the student's knowledge of and love for God.

## PURPOSE:

Herman Bavinck once wrote: "[In current literature] the spiritual understanding of the soul is missing. It seems that we no longer know what sin and grace, guilt and forgiveness, regeneration and conversion are. In theory we know them well, but we no longer know them in the majestic reality of life. For this reason, the devotional literature of previous times always leaves a different impression than that of the present. Because, although we stand at some distance from it and its form is antiquated, it is and remains natural, in the true sense of the word, while that of the present, when it deals with the soul, seems unnatural and artificial. We feel, when we read the old writers, that we are offered a piece of life; it is reality itself, that we are privileged to view."

This class offers student the privilege to view the perspective of older writers on the devotional life, with the hope of developing habits of experiencing what C.S. Lewis called "the fresh breezes of the past."

## GOALS:

This course exposes students to some of the most famous books in the Christian tradition authored by people on a quest for holiness. By discussing a cluster of popular texts and authors on the subject of godliness, students learn to read with discernment as they set their own devotion to God on a firm foundation.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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### READING

This course requires **a lot** of reading over a very short period of time. Moreover, as devotional literature, these works demand our slow, careful, and reflective reading. Students will find it a challenge to complete this reading in a timely way. I urge you to set aside a particular day and time of the week to devote to this class. The Lord's Day would be an especially fitting occasion to engage in a profitable study of these writers and subjects.

### READING RESPONSES

Students are to read and write responses on the assigned texts (see note below on editions), and they are to come to class prepared to discuss each of the texts under consideration. The responses for each assignment will differ among the readings and will be found on Canvas.

Responses are to express ideas in your own words. Do more than supply extended quotations. Please submit good prose (in double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font). Aim for 300 words or less in your reading responses. Follow Calvin's motto: *brevitas et facilitas* ("briefly and clearly")!

## A NOTE ON EDITIONS OF TEXTS

Students can read any edition of these texts, print or electronic.

For the Luther reading, I recommend the translation from the Concordia Publishing House (St. Louis, 2010). Or you can find an online version here: <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/7A8A3ABB-213E-47A6-95A2-2360CDF21143>

For the Calvin reading, you can substitute the *Golden Booklet on the True Christian Life* or simply read the *Institutes*, Book III, chapters 6–10. But I *strongly* recommend that you read *A Little Book on the Christian Life* (Ligonier, 2017).

For Jeremiah Burroughs and Thomas Brooks, my recommendation is that you purchase the Puritan Paperback editions of their books published by Banner of Truth.

The readings for Edwards, Vos, and Bonhoeffer will be provided electronically in the “files” section of Canvas.

## CONFESSION/CATECHISM ASSIGNMENT

Students are to read daily, over the course of one month, from one of these six catechisms or confessions: Heidelberg Catechism, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Westminster Larger Catechism, Westminster Confession of Faith, or London Baptist Confession, and write a 300-word summary of their experience of reading a confession *devotionally*.

## BOOK REVIEW

Students are to read an additional Christian devotional classic and submit a longer (500-700 word) book review. Do not go to lengths in summarizing the book. Focus instead how the author has challenged you in living the Christian life, pointing out the book’s strengths and weaknesses (if any). The reading choice is yours, but (1) it must total at least 150 pages; (2) it must be a book that you have not already read and which (to your knowledge) is not required in another RTS course. The attached list of titles is suggestive. If you have doubts about the fitness of a particular feel free to ask me.

## DISCUSSION POSTS

Students are to participate in three class discussions on the Canvas discussion board. For each topic, you are to respond to the question posed on Canvas and then interact with at least one other student’s response.

## ASSESSMENT

- Reading Digests: 60%
- Book Review: 20%
- Confession Reading: 10%
- Discussion Posts and Class Participation: 10%
- Late work will be penalized one letter grade per day, unless prior permission for late submission is granted.
- The RTS grading scale used in this course can be found by consulting the RTS Catalog, page 47.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

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## ONLINE SCHEDULE

Week of December 1

- Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
- To be read: books 1-2
- Submit response 1

Week of December 7

- Martin Luther, *Larger Catechism*
- To be read: Prefaces and parts 1 and 2 (Ten Commandments and Apostles' Creed)
- Submit response 2

Week of December 14

- John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*
- To be read: all
- Submit response 3

Week of December 21

- Topic: Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*
- To be read: chapter 1
- Submit response 4

Week of December 28

- Topic: Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*
- To be read: Epistle Dedicatory, Ch 1 (Proof of the Point), Ch 2 (Devices to Draw the Soul to Sin), and Conclusion
- Submit response 5

Week of January 4

- Topic: Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love*
- To be read: all
- Submit response 6

Week of January 18

- Topic: Geerhardus Vos, "Heavenly-mindedness"
- To be read: all
- Submit response 7

Week of January 25

- Topic: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*
- To be read: chapter 1 ("Cheap Grace")
- Submit response

Week of February 1

- To be read: devotional reading of a Confession/Catechism for a month
- Submit Confession/Catechism reflection summary

Week of February 8

- To be read: Christian devotional classic of student's choosing
- Submit 500 to 700 word review
- *All work for the semester must be completed by February 13.*

## IN CLASS SCHEDULE

January 15:

What is devotional reading?

What is a devotional "classic"?

How to read devotionally

January 16:

Discussion of Thomas À Kempis, Luther, and Calvin

January 17:

Discussion of Burroughs, Brooks, and Edwards

Preview of Vos and Bonhoeffer

Making devotional reading a life-long practice

## SUGGESTED TITLES FOR FURTHER READING

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Alleine, Joseph, *Sure Guide to Heaven*

Ames, William, *The Marrow of Theology*.

Baxter, Richard, *Dying Thoughts*.

Brainerd, David, *The Diary of David Brainerd*.

Bunyan, John, *Pilgrim's Progress* (any non-children's version, original is recommended)

Edwards, Jonathan, *The Religious Affections*.

Flavel, John, *Christ Altogether Lovely*.

Goodwin, Thomas, *The Vanity of Thoughts*.

Gurnall, William, *The Christian in Complete Armor* (abridged version is fine)

Hodge, Charles, *The Way of Life*.

Law, William, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.

Lewis C. S., *Mere Christianity*.

M'Cheyne, Robert Murray, *A Basket of Fragments*.

Murray, Andrew, *Humility*.

Owen, John, *Communion with God*.

Owen, John, *The Mortification of Sin*.

Packer, J. I., *Knowing God*.

Peterson, Eugene, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

Rutherford, Samuel, *The Loveliness of Christ*.

Scougal, Henry, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

Sibbes, Richard, *Bruised Reed*.

Spener, Philipp, *Pia Desideria*.

Tozer, A. W., *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

Watson, Thomas., *The Doctrine of Repentance*.

### Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Classics of Personal Devotion

Professor: Muether

Campus: Orlando

Date: Winter 2025

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b>	<b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b>
<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> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Participation in class discussions.
<b>Scripture</b>	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.)	Minimal	Prerequisite for, but not the main focus of the class.
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Important to see how Reformed theology relates to Reformed spirituality.
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Point of the class is to learn from voices in the past that model our growth in sanctification.
<b>Desire for Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	Learning to love God in all circumstances of life.
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	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	Exposure to difference voices in different ages calls for humility and discernment in learning from other traditions.
<b>Preach</b>	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	Personal devotional life should influence pulpit ministry
<b>Worship</b>	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Minimal	Private worship shapes public worship
<b>Shepherd</b>	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians.	Minimal	A familiarity with devotional literature helps a pastor to commend titles to his flock.