

Reformed Theological Seminary
PT5300 Worship
2026 Syllabus

I. Course information

Class dates:	Feb 5 - May 7, 2026
Class time:	Thursday 1pm - 3pm
Term paper:	April 16, 2026
No class:	March 19 (RTS Spring break) Professor research break TBD
Dinner discussion:	Professor's home; date TBD in first class 5841 Woodleigh Oaks Dr Charlotte NC 28226
Credit hours:	2 (13 class sessions, one in our home)
Contact:	Chad Van Dixhoorn (cvandixhoorn@rts.edu)
Office hours:	In the Spring term I plan to be in my office regularly on Wednesday and Thursday, and frequently on Tuesdays. Contact me for (1) personal matters, (2) class content related questions. Please try valiantly to meet me during those three days, but email Faith Key (fkey@rts.edu) for scheduled in-person appointments or appointments at other times in the week. If you have a question about the class, please ensure that you have read the syllabus carefully first.

II. Course catalogue description

The purpose of this course is to provide students with the biblical foundations for worship. This course will emphasize that gathered worship is legitimate, necessary, important, and should be conducted biblically in both form and content. In addition, the course will address the liturgical use of creeds, matters of music, congregational singing, contextualization, and “worship styles.” The goal is to prepare students to be biblical worshippers, to help others be biblical worshippers, and to be effective leaders in worship.

III. Course overview

A. Course Objectives

- (1) To understand and to articulate the history of worship in the church.
- (2) To grasp the biblical principles informing a worship reformed according to the Scriptures.
- (3) To learn how to structure a worship service.
- (4) To acquire practical knowledge of the ministry of worship leading.

B. In class

I recognize that many students will come from churches committed to contemporary evangelical worship rather than a classically presbyterian tradition of worship. That said, I believe that a class on worship is best served when a particular perspective is presented and defended. And precisely because worship matters, all matters related to worship are also worthy of substantive discussion, and time will be dedicated to such discussion in class. A theological seminary remains a good place to engage subjects substantively; if we must agree to disagree, we should do so only after understanding the perspective of others.

A class on biblical worship at Reformed Theological Seminary is inevitably a class on worship as understood and practiced in the Reformation tradition. Both lectures and readings will argue that patterns of worship are not all created equal, and that approaches to worship are more biblical than others. Students can be assured, however, that I even as I argue for worship reformed according to the Scriptural pattern that I will also seek in this class to foster an atmosphere of respectful engagement on these issues.

Recommended reading for class conduct: Samuel Miller, [*Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits*](#), (New York: G&C Carvill, 1927), Letter IX. Dated, but with some thoughtful points for reflection.

C. Out of class

This course requires modest take-home reading. The texts assigned are very practical and students expected to lead in worship, or as a pastor to oversee the ministry of worship-leading, should consider purchasing both required and recommended texts.

Recommended reading for study habits: Samuel Miller, [*Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits*](#), (New York: G&C Carvill, 1927), Letter VIII. Dated, but with some thoughtful points for reflection.

D. Class dinner

My wife Emily would like to host you all for one evening of dinner and dessert this term. This shared meal and discussion will count as the thirteenth week of class time.

IV. Assessment

In addition to faithful class attendance, there are five requirements -- note the **varying due dates**.

A. Reading notes (20% of grade) - Students will provide rough notes of their reading. These are **DUE May 13, 2026**. Your notes should show evidence that you have read the works and understand the main argument(s) made therein. You may offer your notes in point form, but your points should make sense to the reader (me) and not simply to the writer (you). These should normally show a grasp of the main flow or structure of a text and its main point(s). Nonetheless, if a reading is lengthy, students (while still reading the entire assignment), may focus their notes on one part of a work only. Your submitted document containing your notes should be a minimum of 15 pages SINGLE spaced.

B. Book review (15% of grade) - Students are to write a review of a book on worship not already assigned for this course. It is **DUE May 13, 2026**. It should be styled as a gracious and thoughtful review and contain a clear recommendation to readers at its close (must read it; read with care; best book on the topic, unhelpful, etc.) Your written book review should be 5-7 pages DOUBLE spaced. Number your pages.

This review should entail a brief summary and response. It must include a statement of the most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspect of the book. The reading choice is yours but it must (1) be 200 pages or longer (if less, you must supplement with some additional reading); (2) be a book that you have not already read; (3) be a book which – to your knowledge – is not required in another seminary course; (4) be included in the works recommended in this syllabus, ‘Recommended works’ (below), unless you get permission for an alternative text from me.

C. Orders of Service / Bulletins (10% of grade) - Two complete “worship bulletins” or “orders of service” are **DUE May 13, 2026**. Full details as to requirements will be given in class but let it be noted that: (1) one must include the Lord’s Supper, and (2) a “Worship Guide” is expected, explaining why each element is present.

D. Attend a service of Reformed worship (5% of grade) - Students will attend at least one (1) meeting of a Reformed church for morning or evening worship. Students will then meet with at least one (1) member of the eldership (a pastor or an elder) and discuss that service with that elder, using the suggested questions supplied below. The meeting should last around a half hour. Students will submit to the course TA a statement indicating the extent to which he has fulfilled these requirements. This statement should be as follows – “I, [Name], attended [the worship of X church] on [date]. After the meeting, I spoke with [RE/TE name].” This statement is **DUE May 19, 2026**.

E. Prayers (10%) PASS/FAIL only

Students will write FOUR prayers. These are **DUE May 13, 2026**. The practice of extemporary praying is a good one and one for which our puritan and Presbyterian forefathers fought hard to maintain. But even these traditions called for what they termed “studied prayers”: prayers that had been planned and thought through and then delivered without notes. These prayers should be submitted on Canvas. The prayers should be approx. 300-500 words in length.

You will be graded for completing this assignment or not completing it, with 25% of this component going to each prayer. In general, then, I will not be ‘assessing’ your prayers. That said, if your writing is filled with grammatical and typographical errors, I will deduct points for a lack of care and attention to the assignment.

You must choose from among the following ten texts and topics:

1. Psalm 95
2. Psalm 100
3. Ephesians 1
4. The Trinity
5. The Gospel
6. The Cross

7. Baptism
8. Lord's Supper
9. Wedding
10. Funeral (of a young child of covenant parents)

How should one go about writing these prayers? One approach is to take a passage of Scripture, say, a Psalm, and meditate on it. Then begin to formulate the ideas and word structures of the psalm, adapting them for suitability in 21st century parlance. Follow the order of thought in the psalm where appropriate. Grading someone's prayers poses some problems. Still, a measure of objectivity will be attempted. Grading will depend on such things as style, wording, biblical content, structure, and whether the prayer seems edifying and God-glorifying.

I recommend that you purchase the following books to help you in public prayer:

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995).

Terry L. Johnson, *Leading in Worship* (Oak Ridge, TN: The Covenant Foundation, 1996).

Arthur Bennett, *A Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1975).

C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Prayers* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1993).

Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1993).

F. Research paper (40% of grade) - Students will write a research paper on some aspect of Reformed worship or government, historical, theological or exegetical in nature. It is **DUE April 16**. Guidance on the nature of the paper will be given in class. Your research paper should be 10-15 pages in length, DOUBLE spaced, and deploy at least 10 academic or primary sources.

V. Reading list

A. Required Reading

James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* (unabridged eds: 1869; 1974; 1991), Part III, Division II, Subdiv. I & II; Or unabridged (2015), pp. 339-441 (110 pages).

David Clarkson, *Prizing Public Worship*, series, *Puritan Treasures for Today* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023).

Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What happens when we worship?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), all (185 pages)

Westminster Assembly, [Westminster Confession of Faith](#) Chs. 20-22, 27-29; [Westminster Shorter Catechism](#) Q. 49-52, 88-97; [Westminster Larger Catechism](#) Q. 107-110, 153-177; [Directory for the Publick Worship of God](#), (50 pgs).

Terry Johnson, "Historic Reformed Ministry: Pitfalls to Avoid," <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/422141740341>

Terry Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin: recovering the historic ministry and worship of Reformed Protestantism* (2014; 2020), chs 8 and 9 only (90 pages).

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (1984), all (177 pgs).
C. H. Spurgeon, Lectures to my students (any edition), “Our public prayer.”

B. Recommended Reading

1. *Reformed Philosophy of Ministry and Worship and the Regulative Principle*

John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (1996). A defense of contemporary worship.

T. David Gordon, “[Some Answers about the Regulative Principle.](#)”

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With reverence and awe: returning to the basics of Reformed worship* (2002), all (177 pages).

Terry Johnson, “Historic Reformed Ministry: Pitfalls to Avoid,” sermonaudio.com

Kenneth A. Myers, *All God’s Children in Blue Suede Shoes* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989

David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (2002), recommended by Derek Thomas.

Derek Thomas, Ligon Duncan and Philip Ryken (Eds.) *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (2003).

William Still, “[Thirty-Eight Years at Gilcomston.](#)”

2. *Constructing liturgies / planning orders of service*

Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey, eds, *Reformation worship: liturgies from the past for the present* (2018).

Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (1999).

Terry L. Johnson, *Leading in Worship* (1996)

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1995)

OPC; PCA, etc., *Directories for Public Worship*

Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (1980)

3. *Understanding elements of Worship and the Sabbath*

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (2008), vol. 4, pp. 461-585.

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In Christ alone* (2007), ch. 50, on the sabbath.

Ryan McGraw, “The Benediction.”

Ryan McGraw, “The Call to Worship.”

Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer.*

Stuart Robinson and Thomas Peck, “Church Music.”

C.H. Spurgeon, *On Commenting.*

Terry Johnson, “The Ebb and Flow of Lectio Continua Bible Reading in the English Speaking Reformed Churches, 1539-2000,” in *The hope fulfilled: essays in honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. R. L. Penny.

Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith* (2014), pp. 357-399.

Chad Van Dixhoorn, “The Sacraments: communion with God in union with Christ,” in *Theology for ministry: how doctrine affects pastoral life and practice*, eds., W. R. Edwards, J. C. A. Ferguson, and C. Van Dixhoorn (2022), pp. 449-469 (20 pages).

Thomas Witherow, *I will build my church: Select writings on church polity, Baptism, and the Sabbath*, ed. J. Gibson (2021), pp. 153-251.

VI. Grading policies

All written work must be submitted on Canvas.

Late work is not accepted. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, **please submit incomplete work instead.**

Extensions Policy for Assignments: In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied. *All extension requests must be made prior to the assignment deadline.* No retrospective extensions will be granted.

Each term I will routinely choose as many as three people with whom to discuss one or more pieces of their written work. Students should expect that in this conversation I will ask about the development of their written work and discuss with the student claims made or sources used. I also reserve the right, in the event that I have any concern about AI use, plagiarism, or cheating, to substitute an oral exam for any assignment, quiz, test or exam. The length and complexity of the oral exam will depend on the scope and complexity of the assignment or assessment exercise.

For additional help understanding the grading scale or my hand-written notes, please see the file, "Grading Policies," in Canvas.

VII. Note on computer use

I'm joining the ranks of those strongly discouraging laptop computers from class, although tablets are fine. Even the godliest, most focused student find screens a distraction, including the screens of others. Moreover, recent research has plausibly suggested that students learn better when taking notes by hand.

If a student believes that not using a computer will cause hardship or inhibit learning, they should, of course, use their computers in class. Abuse of laptops (using them for a purpose other than note-taking) will result in my request that the laptop not be used by the student for the remainder of the semester. Unless there is an emergency, please also forebear the use of cell phones.

**Follow-Up Meeting
With a Minister or Worship Leader
Regarding a Meeting of Worship**

The following are sample questions to help you in your follow-up meeting. They are not exhaustive, and you are not restricted to them. They are ways to help prime the pump of your conversation. Use your judgment as to whether a question or line of questioning is edifying and constructive, and feel free to add your own carefully considered questions.

1. How is the order of service put together?
 - What order does it follow?
 - Why does it follow this order? Could it follow another order?
 - Who is involved in putting it together?
 - When is it sent out to the congregation? How is it sent out to the congregation?
2. How did you prepare for leading in worship?
 - How would you advise me to prepare for leading in worship?
 - Looking back, what would you have done at the beginning of your ministry to help you to have better prepared you to lead in worship?
3. Did this meeting reflect a typical service of worship?
 - Why or why not?
 - What factors can a service longer or shorter? more or less difficult to lead?
4. Who is ultimately in charge of the ordering and leading of worship in this church?
 - What are they tasked with doing? (discuss each one)
 - What is the rationale behind this leadership structure or committee or team? In your opinion, is it an effective structure? Could it be improved? If so, how?
 - Have you ever served on such a committee? Chaired such a committee? What were your experiences? What did you (not) enjoy? What surprised you most about the work you did on this committee? Would you like to do it again? Did you find it helpful to you in your ministry? If so, how? Did your experiences in ministry help you contribute to the work of that committee?
 - If the worship leadership structure, committee or team is not the eldership of the church, how would you describe the relationship between that committee and the eldership? Is there trust between the two? Why or why not? What are some ways that an eldership can help to foster trust between its committee and itself? What are some things that can break down trust between an eldership and its committees?
5. What, for you, was the highlight of this meeting of worship? Why?
6. What, for you, was the most challenging or difficult moment of this meeting of worship? Why?
7. Do you think that elders and members left this meeting of worship encouraged? Why or why not? What are some ways that the minister or those leading in worship can encourage a congregation? In your experience, what are some things about meetings of worship that can discourage worshippers? How can these matters be addressed constructively?
8. What advice would you give to me if I were to lead in worship?

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Worship
 Professor: Chad Van Dixhoorn
 Campus: Charlotte
 Date: Spring 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><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></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	History of worship traced; theological and biblical case made for Reformed worship
Scripture	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.)	Strong	Scripture is expounded in defense of Reformed worship
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Confessional heritage is explained in support of Reformed worship
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	Worship is presented as a means of sanctification
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability	Strong	We exist to worship, and thus in the Reformed

	to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.		tradition worship in the is at the center of our conformity to the Word of God
Winsomely Reformed	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	This course recognizes that there is a long tradition of worship in the church, and that students will come from various perspectives
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Strong	Preaching is addressed as a component part of worship. Students who complete the course should be knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms and have an ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service. Various Denominational traditions and the church's engagement with the world are also addressed in this course