

PT5350 – Pastoral Counseling

RTS-Atlanta; Summer, 2026

June 1-5, 2026

Instructor: Guy Richardson, Ed.D, LPC-S

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Course Description: This course provides the introductory groundwork for effective pastoral care through counseling. It will include an overview of counseling theory and practice to help those preparing for or already engaged in the work of counseling in ministry. Students will learn about various categories of problems that a pastor is likely to encounter accompanied with practical helps to minister to those dealing with them. The course format will vary and will include lectures with Q&A, guest interviews, videos, and active class discussions. Finally, participants will develop a stronger self-awareness of both abilities and personal limits along with guidelines for referring people to other caregivers when indicated. This course is taught by one who is an ordained PCA minister as well one who has been a licensed professional counselor (LPC) and counselor training supervisor for forty years.

Competencies: At the completion of this class, students should be able to:

- Understand the differences between basic counseling approaches and develop an initial model of pastoral counseling from a foundation of the Bible and Reformed theology.
- Gain an introductory understanding of the spectrum of problem categories that may be encountered by pastors in various ministry settings.
- Develop a basic vocabulary to allow for effective communication between pastors and other care-giving professionals (doctors, psychologists, etc.) as needed.
- Develop a sense of self-awareness in cultivating both interviewing and listening skills to facilitate the counseling process.
- Learn practical helps for both premarital and marital counseling.
- Become aware of issues, strategies and interventions in crisis counseling, including areas such as grief, suicide prevention, substance abuse, and other critical problem areas.

Required Reading:

Sam Allberry. *Is God anti-gay? (Questions Christians Ask)*, The Good Book Company, (2015) 90 pages

John Freeman, *Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God About Sex*. New Growth Press. 2014 132 pages

W. Brad Johnson and William L. Johnson. *The Minister's Guide to Psychological Disorders and Treatments*. Second Edition, Routledge Press, (2014) 201 pages

Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller. *The Meaning of Marriage*. Dutton Publishing (2011) 279 pages

Jim Newheiser, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. P&R Publishing (2017) 294 pages

Note: While **required reading for class preparation is only for pp. 165-294**, the entirety of this book is useful for finding succinct, biblical answers to many questions about engagement, marriage, and divorce.

Other short articles or resource materials (e.g. podcasts, resource web sites, etc.) will be made available during class.

Assignments (Student Performance Evaluation Criteria):

Class Participation (20%) This includes attendance, attention, and involvement in class discussions.

In-class quizzes (10%) These simple, short quizzes will be given on the assigned reading pages and the previous day's class notes.

Book Reviews: (20%) Write a short paper reflecting on things that you learned from each of the required books assigned. This is NOT to be an outline of each book, but rather your own personal gleanings from what you learned by reading it. Each book review shall be no more than two to two and a half pages long and double spaced. Students will be expected to reference page numbers to insights.

NOTE: If possible, reading the assigned books by the week of class should be considered a priority in order to maximize their usefulness with class lectures and discussions. Due dates for uploading book reviews are as assigned in the Assigned Due section of the course schedule, however, due to the compressed format of this class, students will be allowed to upload book reviews up to two weeks after the end of class.

Personal Awareness Project/Survey: (10%) Each student is to ask at least three different people to give honest feedback about YOU personally- both what they observe as your personal strengths AND areas needed for growth. The three people who help you should be: (1) One person should be someone who is related to you, i.e. your spouse or a parent, sibling or close relative. (2) The second person should be someone who has observed your work in ministry or service for a reasonable period of time and who can give feedback in that dimension. (3) The third person would be a good friend – but not someone related to you - who has observed you for a number of years in personal (not work) relationships. After thinking about who you would want to ask, please approach each of these

three people with a request that they give some time to think, pray, and give honest (!) feedback on at least three points of strength that they observe in you and additionally, at least three points of needed growth. The more you encourage them to be truly honest, the more helpful this assignment will be. After the responses have been gathered (3 people each giving at least 6 responses), collate the comments onto one document. There is no required style or format for presenting this feedback in your summary. Students can use either direct quotes or 'bullet-point' summaries of each comment. Due date is by the start of class on Tuesday, June 2nd.

Attend in person (preferably) or via Zoom (if necessary), one AA, NA, or Celebrate Recovery Group Meeting: (20%) Students should attend in person at least one session of an Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Celebrate Recovery meeting. If you are truly unable to attend in person, you may substitute your in-person meeting with a Zoom meeting. Many groups re-organized during the pandemic with on-line accessibility and are often open to guests, just as in-person meetings are. Each student should write their own summary of the experience (roughly 2 pages, double-spaced) and include (1) date and place of meeting; (2) whether you attending in person or via teleconference; (3) your personal observations and impressions from the experience. Due date for your written summary is by the start of class, Thursday, June 4th.

NOTE: some groups are 'closed' to outside observers, but most are not and generally, they are very, very glad to allow you to join them as an observer-especially if you tell them that you are doing this to help you train for ministry. A simple Google search will usually turn up multiple meeting locations near you, and most will give a contact phone number to call ahead to ask for permission to attend as an observer. Students can participate either individually or (preferably) with someone else from your class. Through the years of requiring this as a part of this pastoral counseling class, students have been very positive about their experience observing these support groups, so don't be afraid of this assignment.

Final Exam: (20%) In lieu of a written final exam on the content of this course, students will write a summary paper (approximately 8-10 pages, double spaced, 12 pt type) on what you have personally learned from various aspects of this class. This may include, but is not limited to your readings, your study and reflection of Scripture, class lectures, observations, etc. as you are preparing for (or continuing in) the work of pastoral counseling. Due date to upload to Canvas will be two weeks after the end of the course: Friday, June 19th. If additional time is needed, students are responsible to contact the professor to request permission well ahead of the due date (see Extension Policy information below).

Grading Scale: A (100-95); A- (94-93); B+ (92-91); B (90-85); B- (84-83); C+ (82-81); C (80-77); C- (76-75); D (74-70) F (Below 70)

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is expected and required. An *unexcused* absence from one day of class (or a significant part of the day) will result in the loss of points equal to one letter grade per absence. If illness or a special situation prevents a student from attending a significant part of any class, it is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor before the class begins. It is also the responsibility of the student to obtain from another student any materials handed out or presented during the missed class.

Class Participation:

Students are expected to participate in all components of the class and will be evaluated on their contribution in both quality and active participation in discussions. Each student is expected to read the assigned materials in advance for each class and is encouraged to have prepared written comments and questions for class discussion. Participation should reflect knowledge of the reading assignments or other sources.

Personal Computers:

Computers are a welcome educational tool and your use of a computer during our class time is allowed. However, if you use your computer, your professor will assume that you are committing yourself to refrain from distracting yourself or others by using it for other purposes during our class time.

Accommodation of Students with Special Learning Needs:

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your professor prior to the start of this course. The professor and student will discuss the available accommodations for the course. If the student with a disability does not disclose that they have a disability, then the student is agreeing to take full responsibility for any related consequences that may occur.

Zoom Policy

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by your professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by your professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by special request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

Disclaimer: This syllabus is intended to reflect the learning objectives, instructional format, and other information necessary for students to appraise the course. However, during the course of the semester, the instructor reserves the right to modify any portion of this syllabus as may appear necessary.

PT5350 Course Sequence

(NOTE: This is subject to modification before and during the week of class)

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Day	Topic	Assignments Due
Lecture 1- Monday , June 1	Introduction: Syllabus Overview and Course Requirements; Foundational Things	Be prepared by having read: Johnson and Johnson [J&J]: <i>The Minister's Guide to Psychological Disorders and Treatments</i> . Chapters 1-2; pp. 1-49
Lecture 2- Monday, June 1	A Biblical View of Affliction, Suffering, Grief, and Loss; The Place of the Church in Helping and Healing	
Lecture 3- Monday, June 1	Listening is not a Spiritual Gift - Basic Understanding and Skills for Effective Pastoral Counseling: Part 1	
Lecture 4- Tuesday , June 2	Basic Skills: Part 2	Be prepared for (1) a short quiz on yesterday's lectures; (2) Bring a printed copy of your Self-Awareness Project/Survey results to class; (3) Review for class J&J Chapter 3 pp. 53-87 and Chapter 6 pp. 151-173
Lecture 5- Tuesday, June 2	The Most Common Issues: Anxiety and Depression (including potential suicidal awareness signs)	
Lecture 6- Tuesday, June 2	An Overview of Various Psychological Disorders Also- visiting sick/infirm; issues for the aging (including dementia, Alzheimer's, etc.)	
Lecture 7- Wednesday , June 3	An Introduction to Understanding Maladaptive Personality Disorders	Be prepared for (1) a short quiz on the last day's lectures; (2) Review for class J&J Chapter 5; pp. 121-149; (3) Upload book reviews on the Freeman and Allberry books Freeman: <i>Hide or Seek:</i>

		<p><i>When Men Get Real with God About Sex</i></p> <p>Allberry: <i>Is God anti-gay? (Questions Christians Ask)</i></p>
Lecture 8- Wednesday, June 3	The Way God Made Us - Gender and Sexual Identity Issues	
Lecture 9- Thursday , June 4	Basics for Relationship Counseling (Premarital and Marital Counseling Overview): Part 1	Be prepared for (1) a short quiz on last day's lectures; (2) Review for class J&J Chapter 4 pp. 89-103; (3) Discussion of Keller & Keller, <i>The Meaning of Marriage</i> and Newheiser, <i>Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage</i> (Pt. 2 – Chapters 21-40; pp. 165-289)
Lecture 10- Thursday, June 4	Basics for Relationship Counseling (Premarital and Marital Counseling): Part 2	
Lecture 11- Thursday, June 4	An Introduction to Understanding Addictions and Substance Abuse	
Lecture 12- Friday , June 5	An Introduction to the Effects of Major Crises & Trauma as Relating to Pastoral Counselors	Be prepared for (1) a short quiz on last day's lectures; (2) Read: J&J Chapters 7-8, pp. 175-200 (2) Upload to Canvas your AA (or NA/CR) Meeting observations
Lecture 13- Friday, June 5	Last Things – Avoiding Ministry Burnout; When/How to Refer (or Not); Final Q&A time	
Final Exam	Personal Growth/Reflections Paper	Personal Growth Paper due to be uploaded to Canvas by midnight, Friday, June 19 th

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: PT5350 Pastoral Counseling
 Professor: Guy Richardson
 Campus: Atlanta
 Date: Summer, 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.	Moderate	Pastoral counseling requires the ability to articulate a framework and practice of counseling that is consistent with a Biblical worldview.
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.)	Moderate	Pastoral counseling has to have a foundation and formulation based on the Scriptures. The Bible is both a foundation and a filter for best practices.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Pastoral counseling from a Reformed perspective is consistent with the Westminster Standards, helping inform the counseling process.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.	Strong	Pastoral counselors are guided by Scripture and through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will

			learn and grow themselves as they help others.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Pastoral counselors grow in their ability to interpret, explain and apply Scripture to all of life.
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	Pastoral counseling should always be gracious yet faithful to sharing the truths of Christ to both believers and non-believers. This would include evangelism as well as education in the Truth.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both churched and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Xns.	Strong	Pastoral counseling is a crucial component of shepherding the hearts and lives of a church congregation as an interactive activity that informs a minister of the needs and concerns of those to whom he preaches, teaches, and seeks to lead. Effective Pastoral counseling is also able to interact with caregivers both inside and outside of the church with some degree of knowledge in the various fields as to terminology and treatments.