

Summer 2026

Reformed Theological Seminar: **Course 6PT5350: Pastoral Counseling**

Professor: Dr. William Clark, wwcpractice@comcast.net, (703) 864-9645.

Office Hours: By appointment

Course purpose/description:

This course is an introduction to the counseling process with an emphasis on counseling from a Christian perspective in a pastoral context. The course will include discussions regarding: the nature of people and problems, the nature of change, definitions of health and maturity, various models and modes of counseling, the phases of counseling, and the role of client and counselor. In addition, material concerning marital counseling, family counseling, and lay counseling in the context of the local church or para-church ministry will be presented. Finally, specific content regarding counseling individuals struggling with anxiety, depression, sexual brokenness and addictions, trauma and betrayal, and suicidal urges will be included. Primary skills addressed in the course include; approaching Scripture to find a framework for understanding and helping people, self-examination, emptiness, listening, assessment, feedback and processing. Participants will engage in small groups for portions of the class to practice some of these skills. Participants should find that they understand their own theology of relationships and change better. They may feel adequately exposed to at least one model of Christian or “Biblical” counseling. These gains could allow a participant to more adequately practice as a novice lay counselor and as a referral agent in the ministry.

Required reading:

Perry, Bruce, M.D., Ph.D., Winfrey, Oprah. What Happened to You? Flatiron Books, NY, 2021.

Thompson, Curt, M.D. Anatomy of the Soul. Salt River (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), 2010.

Tripp, Paul David. Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands. P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2002.

Clark, William W. Notes on Lay Counseling. The Lay Counselor Institute, 2011.

Select other handouts.

Recommended reading:

Stringer, Jay. Unwanted. Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2018.

Yalom, Irwin. Love’s Executioner. Basic Books, New York, 1989.

Jones, Stanton L. and Butman, Richard E. Modern Psychotherapies. IVP, Downer's Grove, IL, 1991.

Suggested additional reading:

Allender, Dan. Bold Love. NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1992.

Crabb, Larry. Understanding People. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1987.

Crabb, Larry and Allender, Dan. Encouragement: the Key to Caring. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984.

Course will meet June 3-7, daily from 8am-5pm at the RTS campus in Tyson's Corner, VA.

Attendance will be kept. One final paper will be expected on a research topic of your choice. A case discussion, a paper on counseling in the church, and a personal reflection paper will be required and graded. Grades determined by:

Attendance and participation	20%
Personal reflection paper	10%
Paper on "Integrating counseling into the local church"	10%
Case discussion	20%
Final research project (explained in class)	40%

Tentative schedule:

1. 6/1/26
 - a. The goal of counseling
 - b. Models of counseling and change
 - c. Therapy and theology; categories and narrative
 - d. Basic dimensions of human nature

Group one; story work

lunch

- e. The role of environment and development (our "story") in the change/growth process
- f. Biblical look at "story," and development
- g. Being *present*:

break

- h. Needs, goals/desires, defense mechanisms and protective strategies (conscious and un)
- i. Case presentations, film clips, personal reflection guidelines (look at your story)
- j. LCI counseling model; 4 stage model
- k. Phase one; assessment, organization and empathy

Group two: story work

2. 6/2/26

- a. *Listening* theory and skills
- b. Phase two; “tinkering,” experimenting, processing, homework
- c. Advanced empathy; *giving feedback*
- d. “Problems of the moment,” and “processing”
- e. Gender theology
- f. Gender identity and attachment theory

Group three: listening and feedback

lunch

(reflection paper due tomorrow)

- g. Marriage and family model(s) (with counseling implications)
- h. Sexual development
- i. *Theory guided questions*

Break

- j. Sexual brokenness
- k. Sexual addiction (with counseling implications)
- l. Exposure, conflict, resistance and repentance (with counseling implications)
- m. Discussion of research paper

Group four: gender stories

3. 6/3/26

- a. Trauma; loss, abuse, neglect, PTSD, complex PTSD
- b. The impact of trauma, loss, on the formation of personality, relational style and life strategy
- c. Shame, guilt, betrayal, ambivalence, etc.

Group five: trauma stories

lunch

- d. Turning points, “holy encounters,” major changes in the Scriptures
- e. Phase three: major change, turning points, conversions, and callings (with counseling implications)
- f. *Divine provocation and exhortation*

Group six: divine encounters

Q&A

4. 6/4/26

- a. Grieving, endings, termination of relationships
- b. Phase four: termination of counseling, celebration
- c. Model summary with implications

Group seven: grief stories

lunch

- d. Anxiety, depression, bi-polar, OCD and other common diagnoses
- e. Marriage and family counseling; a brief look
- f. Revisit: Comparison of this model with other models or approaches
- g. Addictions and addiction counseling
- h. Personality disorders and “extra grace required” people in the church

Group eight: counseling stories

5. 6/5/26

- a. Feedback, Johari Window,
- b. Conflict and conflict management
- c. Managing conflict in counseling situations
- d. Group work

Q & A

- e. Discussing the implications for counseling in the church, ministry models, pastoral counseling
- f. Consideration of recovery programs, lay counseling, small groups, referrals, etc.
- g. Case presentations (may be oral depending on time) and personal reflection
- h. The church, the pulpit and counseling ministries

Q & A

Papers: counseling in the church paper due _____, case presentation due _____, Research paper due _____

GRADING SYSTEM Grade point averages on RTS transcripts will be determined on the basis of work done only at Reformed Theological Seminary.

A (97-100) 4.00

A- (94-96) 3.66

B+ (91-93) 3.33

B (88-90) 3.00

B- (86-87) 2.66

C+ (83-85) 2.33

C (80-82) 2.00

C- (78-79) 1.66

D+ (75-77) 1.33

D (72-74) 1.00

D- (70-71) 0.66

F (below 70) 0.00