

Reformed Theological Seminary
PT5400 Classics of Personal Devotion

Course information

Times: 5:00pm to 6:00pm

Dates: Tuesdays, from 8 September until 15 December 2026

Instructor: Dr Rufus T Burton

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Email: pastorburtonfpc@comcast.net

Office hours: By appointment / Usually, the hour after class in the library.

Course description:

Classics of Personal Devotion exposes students to some of the most famous books in the Christian tradition authored by people on a quest for holiness. By reading and reflecting on a cluster of popular texts and authors from the history of the church on the subject of godliness, students learn to read with discernment. Students will also set their own devotion to God on a firmer foundation by having a greater knowledge of and deeper love for the Lord.

Goals:

1. The student will be *introduced* to the broad sweep of Christian devotional literature with particular emphasis on the Augustinian and Reformed traditions.
2. Through the lectures, the student will be *exposed* to the links between theological commitments and the devotional life of Christians and *develop* a greater critical appreciation for Christian devotional literature.
3. Through the readings and discussions, the student will be *oriented* to key figures, beliefs, practices, and patterns in the Christian devotional tradition and will *explore* how they relate to contemporary Christian life and ministry.
4. Through the primary source readings, the student will *appreciate* Christian devotional practices, and the *experience* the way in which Reformed theological commitments directly shape and inform Reformed devotional practice.
5. Through the routine prayer, journaling, and Final Digest Paper the student will *reflect* on how healthy Christian devotional practices have relevance for contemporary Christian life, worship, and ministry in a Reformed context.

Texts:

This course is designed to be a “great texts” course in which *reading* great texts is the point. Building a library of great texts is almost as important as a knowledge of them. While the Professor has endeavoured to make most of the readings available on *Canvas*, a pdf-file is no substitute for a personal library. Three books are required for purchase, several more are recommended, and four will require discernment in collecting.

Texts Required of Purchase:

Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*, re-typeset edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2021 [1652]); ISBN: 978-1800401679.

NB: The student *must* own a copy of this book to pass the course.

John Calvin, *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, trans. Henry Van Andel (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004 [1952]); ISBN: 978-0-801065286.

NB: There are several fine editions of the *Golden Booklet* available, any edition will do.

Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford World’s Classics, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: OUP, 2009); ISBN: 978-0199537822

NB: Any edition will do, but the student must possess a physical copy of the *Confessions*.

Recommended texts:

All of these texts will be made available on *Canvas*. The recommendations below are of editions that are worth putting into a library for a lifetime of companionship.

Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, Popular Patristics Series, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011 [c. 375]); ISBN: 978-0881418767

Beowulf, Any edition. The edition I read to my children was *Beowulf*, trans. Seamus Heaney (New York: Norton, 2000); ISBN:978-0393320978

J.R.R. Tolkien rescued *Beowulf* in 1936 and his translation is still available. Douglas Wilson recently offered a “new verse rendering” that leans into our cultural context.

Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, ed. and abrg. Robin Taylor, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022 [1677]); ISBN: 978-81433580482

George Herbert, *George Herbert: The Country Parson and the Temple*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1981); ISBN: 978-0809122981

Jonathan Edwards, “Heaven is a World of Love,” in *Charity and its Fruits*, ed. Kyle Strobel (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012 [1738]); ISBN: 978-1433529702

The Banner of Truth also do a good edition of *Charity and Its Fruits*
ISBN: 978-1800403567

J. (John) C. (Charles) Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hinderances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth 2014 [1877]). ISBN: 978-1848715066

Worth the Hunt for a Good Edition:

Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*. Any Edition. Often Catholic printers will publish this brief tract with a copious commentary that “rescues” Bernard from the accusation by Luther and Calvin that they learned to preach Christ from Bernard. While Bernard is worth reading, many of his modern commentators are not. Protestants, on the other hand, will put out Bernard’s tract in a poorly printed edition in order to disguise the fact that Bernard was a committed and reforming Cistercian monk.

Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, Any Edition. Often in the past the *Large Catechism* was published as a stand-alone volume for home use, outside of the *Lutheran Book of Concord*. If you can find one in a thrift store or used bookshop it might be worth putting in your library.

Heidelberg Catechism, Any Edition. Numerous translations of this important Reformed catechism exist. It is bound in with the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Three Forms* are worth possessing. The trouble is that wooden nineteenth century translations can obscure the warmth of the *Catechism*.

Geerhardus Vos, “Heavenly Mindedness” from *Grace and Glory*. *Grace and Glory* is a volume of sermons preached at Princeton Seminary. It was republished with a great deal of extra material by the Banner of Truth in the 1990s and again about 2020. It has fallen back out of print. If Vos is a particular personal hero, it is worth trolling the internet for a copy.

Artificial Intelligence Use in Coursework

All writing in every course assignment must be, for all intents and purposes, the original work of the student. Thus AI **may not** be used to generate key components of a writing project that are aimed at cultivating certain competencies in the student, such as thesis/topic sentences, outlines, critical engagement with other views, and so forth. In addition, AI may not be used to write full sentences or paragraphs.

For the full detailed AI policy, please refer to the Catalog (pp.49-50).

Course Requirements

1) Class Participation and Worship Leadership 35%

Students are expected to attend class and to demonstrably participate in the learning process. Part of each period will be devoted to a brief service of evening prayer. Students are expected to participate and help lead in the class's devotional exercises.

Due Date: **Weekly** **In Class**

2) Weekly Journaling 25%

Students will be required to respond to a written prompt from the reading at the start of each class period. These brief responses are an opportunity to display knowledge of the material and reflect on the meaning and importance of devotional literature for contemporary Christian life. Paper will be supplied each period.

Due Date: **Weekly** **In class**

3) Final Book Digest 40%

Students are to read an additional Christian devotional classic and submit a 1750 – 1950 word digest of the work, including a summary of the most beneficial (if any) and most problematic (if any) aspects of the book. The reading choice is yours, but (1) it must total at least 200 pages (if less, you must supplement with some additional reading); (2) it must be a book that you have not already read and which – to your knowledge – is not required in another RTS course; and (3) should be among the following titles (please ask if you want to read a text not on this list):

Due Date: **Final Book Digest** **8 December 2026**

Recommended books for the *FINAL BOOK DIGEST*:

Alleine, Joseph. *Sure Guide to Heaven* (or *Alarm to the Unconverted*).

Andrewes, Lancelot, *The Private Prayers of Lancelot Andrewes* (or *The Devotions*).

Ames, William, *The Marrow of Theology*.

Baillie, John. *A Diary of Private Prayer*.

Baxter, Richard. *Dying Thoughts*.

Boston, Thomas. *The Beauties of Boston*.

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

Brooks, Thomas. *Christ is the Life of Believers*.

Brooks, Thomas. *The Secret Key to Heaven*.

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Burroughs, Jeremiah. *Gospel Remission*.

Chalmers, Thomas. "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection."

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections*.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Christian Life*.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification*.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *Grace Alone. How the Grace of God Amazes Me*.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *Grow in Grace*.

Ferguson, Sinclair. *Know Your Christian Life: A Theological Introduction*

Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance*.

Flavel, John. *Christ Altogether Lovely*.

Goodwin, Thomas. *The Vanity of Thoughts*.

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

Guthrie, William. *The Christian's Great Interest*.

Hamilton, Ian. *The Faith Shaped Life*.

Hooker, Thomas. *Danger of Desertion, or A Farewell Sermon of Mr. Thomas Hooker*.

À Kemis, Thomas, *The Imitation of Christ*.

Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal God*.

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

Lewis, CS. *Screwtape Letters*.

Manton, Thomas. *Let Patience Have Its Perfect Work*.

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

Murray, Andrew. *Humility*.

Newton, John. *Out of the Depths*.

Newton, John. *Selected Letters and Poems of John Newton*.

Owen, John. *Communion with God*.

Owen, John. *The Glory of Christ*.

Owen, John. *Indwelling Sin in Believers*.

Owen, John. *The Mortification of Sin*.

Owen, John. *Triumph Over Temptation*.

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*.

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

Rutherford, Samuel. *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*.

Rutherford, Samuel. *The Loveliness of Christ*.

Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion*.

Scudder, Henry. *The Christian's Daily Walk*.

Sibbes, Richard. *Divine Meditations*.

Sibbes, Richard. *Bruised Reed*.

Watson, Thomas. *All Things for Good*.

Watson, Thomas. *A Test of Assurance*.

Watson, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Repentance*.

RTS Grading Scale

The seminary uses the following attenuated grading system:

A	(97-100)	4.00 quality points
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
I	(incomplete)	0.00
W,WP	(withdraw, withdraw passing)	0.00
S	(satisfactory)	0.00

The grade "I" indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination. A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an "I" grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to "F."

Late work:

Late work is not accepted. With the exception of the Final Book Digest, most of the work will be completed in class. The Final Book Digest is due at the start of class (17:00) on 8 December 2026. Only serious personal issues, with excuses almost always cleared in advance of the due date, are given consideration. If you are traveling for some important reason are away when assignments are due, please arrange to have your work delivered on time.

Incomplete work:

Given that **late work is not accepted**, students should consider submitting incomplete work rather than nothing at all.

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: PT5400
 Professor: Burton
 Campus: Washington, DC
 Date: Fall 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<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>		<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	Students will have to speak and write knowledgably about the topics at hand. .
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	The devotional tradition is primarily an exegetical tradition.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Reformed theology and its practical ramifications for devotion are a focus of the course.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	The point of the course is to learn from voices in the tradition that model growth in sanctification.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Moderate	Use biblical pre-suppositions to think clearly and piously about issues of worship
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	In lectures and discussions, model critically sympathetic engagement with other perspectives.
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-Christians.	Strong	In lectures and course work model helpful pastoral habits and attitudes, particularly with reference to personal devotion.

Burton

Classics of Personal Devotion

Fall 2026

Week	Date	Reading	Presidency
1	8 Sep 2026	CPD	RTB
2	15 Sep 2026	St. Basil, pp. 15-67	
3	22 Sep 2026	St. Augustine	
4	29 Sep 2026	<i>Beowulf</i>	
5	6 Oct 2026	St. Bernard	
6	13 Oct 2026	RTS READING WEEK NO CLASS	
7	20 Oct 2026	Calvin	
8	27 Oct 2026	<i>Heidelberg Catechism</i>	
9	3 Nov 2026	Scougal	
10	10 Nov 2026	Brooks	
11	17 Nov 2026	Herbert	
12	24 Nov 2026	Edwards	
13	1 Dec 2026	Ryle	
14	8 Dec 2026	Vos	RTB/ PAPER DUE