



SPFM 5201

Journey: The Story of Our Lives

North Park Theological Seminary

Fall term dates: August 24 – December 11, 2026

Canvas content will be available August 24

September 15-17, 2026 (In Person-Chicago)

September 21 – October 30, 2026 (Online)

1 credit hour

INSTRUCTOR: Rev. Troy Cady
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is the introductory course in spiritual formation at NPTS. It is designed to help students reflect upon key principles and adopt specific practices related to their own spiritual formation. Participants will be encouraged to reflect upon their formation history and celebrate their unique spiritual journey. In addition to class interactions, there will be Listening Groups where students will listen for God in the stories of others and in their own story.

Because we will take a story-based approach to spiritual formation, the class will be structured around some major turning points in Scripture: creation, exodus, Christ, and Pentecost. With each part, we will practice wondering together to discern core aspects of spiritual formation that are intrinsic to the overarching story of the Bible. To help us cultivate the spirit of wonder, we will enter into the stories in a playful way so we can see them with fresh eyes, like children. In other words, you can expect to play and think playfully about God and your relationship with God.

The course content and discussions are aimed at laying an enduring foundation for personal and ministerial formation. In addition to class interaction and readings, participants will be placed in Listening Groups so we may grow in our ability to discern the movement of God in our lives.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to...

1. interface the breadth of Christian spiritual formation with their own lives,
2. assess current personal spiritual practices and articulate renewed commitments that will help sustain healthy spirituality and ministry,
3. cultivate greater self-awareness and discernment by sharing experiences from one's personal life through active involvement in a Listening Group,
4. develop or modify a Rule of Life— a way of living that is grounded in God's faithful love.

Note: This course contributes toward the MDiv, MACF and MACM learning outcomes of demonstrating a theologically grounded ministerial identity committed to caring for the spiritual formation of the self, individuals, and communities.

COURSE TEXTS AND READINGS

I. Two books to read before in-person class sessions

Goodyer, Jennifer. *Playing in Living Water: Practising a Prayerful Life*. Chicago: PlayFull, 2026.

Peacock, Barbara L. *Soul Care in African American Practice*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020.

II. Readings for online discussion after in-person sessions (posted to Canvas)

Aroney-Sine, Christine. "Let Your Life Speak" in *The Gift of Wonder: Creative Practices for Delighting in God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 38-51.

Foster, Richard J. "Imitatio: The Divine Paradigm" in *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 1-22.

Woodley, Randy S. "Narrating Our Lives and Ideas: The Importance of Story" in *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 137-147.

III. Handouts for further enrichment (posted on Canvas)

from Cady, Troy B. "Daily Prayers" and various excerpts in *A Rhythm of Prayer: Daily Prayers & Meditations for Personal & Communal Use* (Chicago: PlayFull, 2024), 17-30, 43-44, 46, 67.

Other handouts include: the Awareness Examen, Lectio Divina, Listening Fully guidelines, The Life of the Beloved: a confession, Ways to Pray, Centering Prayer brochure, Praying with Imagination, 8 Play Personalities, and Properties of Play.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Submit Confidentiality Form. This form will be provided prior to participating in a Listening Group and it must be signed to participate. Breach of confidentiality will result in a failing grade for the course and it may result in additional discipline by the seminary.
2. Memorize “The Life of the Beloved” confession and remind yourself of your core identity in Christ throughout the course (preferably on a daily basis).
3. Practice and reflect on two new spiritual disciplines. Students are encouraged to use the two course textbooks, the disciplines we practice together in class, and/or the extra handouts (provided on Canvas) for inspiration.
4. Attend four Listening Group sessions. Listening Groups are typically 60-90 minutes long (the actual length depends upon how many people are in your group). We will host two Listening Group sessions during the in-person portion of the course and two via Zoom in the weeks to follow. A Listening Group facilitator will work with your group on scheduling the sessions that will be hosted on Zoom. Students are required to cooperate with their facilitator as they initiate scheduling these Zoom sessions.
5. Read the course textbooks and articles posted to Canvas.
6. Participate in discussion on Canvas. After the in-person portion of the course, you will read three articles (over the course of three weeks) that speak to the theme of seeing your story in the light of God’s story. See the schedule below and the prompts on Canvas. You will be responsible to respond thoughtfully to each prompt and interact with at least two of your classmates’ responses.
7. A final integrative reflection paper is required in this course and is due by 11:59 pm Central Time on Friday, October 23, 2026. The paper will be 6-7 pages in length (with a bibliography page included). You will submit the paper through Canvas. More information about this paper is included below.

Guidelines for Final Paper

Each participant will write an integrative reflection paper for their final assignment. In this paper, please prayerfully reflect on all the aspects of the course and outline your paper using the following four headings:

- General Reflections
- Listening Group Reflections
- Spiritual Discipline Reflections
- Moving Forward Reflections

General Reflections: Feel free to draw from the following questions to help you write this portion of your paper. Don’t feel obligated to respond to every question, though; just pay attention to the prompts that seem to have a lot of “energy” for you. What did you notice happening in your heart and life as you went through the course? What stood out to you? What was stirred in you? What reading had the most impact on you? Why? How is your story being formed at this season of your life? What do you need to pay attention to in light of the course? ***As you offer these reflections, be sure to describe your understanding of the***

nature/role of play and story in spiritual formation. What did you notice going on in your heart and mind as we approached spiritual formation through the phenomena of play and story?

Listening Group: What was your experience of the Listening Group like? How did your Listening Group touch you and change you?

Spiritual Disciplines: Reflect upon the two new practices you adopted. Describe how these practices helped in your relationship with God. Will you continue to use them? Why or why not?

Moving Forward: Conclude your paper by responding to this statement: “As a beloved child of God, I intend to nurture my life with God by...” In this section, please include a description of the key elements of your Rule of Life, including any significant changes you may have made to it (if applicable). If you didn’t have a Rule of Life when the course began, make a start and mention in the paper some of the key elements you feel will be important for you, going forward.

In your paper, use of the pronoun “I” is appropriate and expected. Refrain from summarizations or generalizations such as “the class struggled with the practice of centering prayer.” This is about *your* life and *your* unique journey with God and what God did in *your* heart and mind. Because this is a paper about your walk with God, it should be personal and reflective; this is not an academic piece. The goal is to integrate the content from the class (play, stories, thematic material, discussions, texts, the practices you adopted and the Listening Groups) with your own life. Please refrain from negative critique and practice appreciative evaluation in your reflections.

The total length of your paper will be between 6-7 pages, depending on how heavily you quote from the required reading, class content, and Scripture. In other words, aim to devote at least 4 pages of writing that represents *your own thoughts and reflections* about the course. The final page of your paper (page 6 or 7) will be a bibliography. If you include a cover page, the total document length will be 7-8 pages.

To format the paper, please use Times New Roman, 12 pt. font with double-spaced lines and 1-inch margins. Use the indentation method to delineate new paragraphs (as opposed to extra space between paragraphs). Save the paper in one of these formats:

- .doc
- .docx
- .rtf
- DO NOT turn in a PDF

To cite your sources, please follow the examples below, using the parenthetical style of notation *in the body of your reflections*, rather than via footnotes:

~When citing from one of our required readings, list the author’s last name, year of publication, and relevant page number(s). Example: (Goodyer, 2022, 135)

~When citing something someone said in class, list the last name of the person you are referencing, followed by NPTS, the month and year. Example: (Braun, NPTS, September 2026).

~When citing a handout, list the author's last name followed by the title of the handout (in quotation marks) and (if applicable) the year it was created. Example: (May, "The Awareness Examen" handout, year n/a)

~When citing Scripture, simply list the book, chapter and verse. Example: (Ps. 131:2)

~Note: anything you cite in the body of your paper needs to be included in your bibliography, too. Please use standard formatting for your bibliography and be sure to include which version and year of publication you used for your Scripture citations. To see the proper formatting for a bibliography, look at the bibliography in the Goodyer text as an example.

Grading Rubric for the Final Paper: Though this is not an academic paper, the student is still expected to meet certain standards reflective of a seminary level course. This paper represents half of your grade (50 out of 100 points). Here is the rubric for the 50-point paper:

- The paper was turned in by the due date: 5 points
- The student used proper formatting, citations (both in the body of the paper and for the bibliography), spelling, and grammar: 5 points
- The student demonstrated thoughtfulness and integrated key aspects of the course content in the paper: 40 points

Grading Rubric for the Course

This course is graded on a Pass/Fail binary. 90 points are required for a passing grade. Here are the categories on which you will be evaluated:

Course Readings and In-Class Participation (30 points)

- The student interacted meaningfully during the in-person portion of the course: 12 points (4 points per day)
- The student practiced two new spiritual disciplines throughout the course: 5 points
- The student completed at least 80 percent of the Goodyer and Peacock texts: 6 points (3 points per book)
- The student read and responded to the articles by Foster, Woodley, and Aroney-Sine: 6 points (2 points per article)
- The student memorized "The Life of the Beloved" confession: 1 point.

Listening Groups (20 points)

- Engage thoughtfully in the Listening Group sessions.
- 5 points per session x 4 sessions = 20 points.

Final Reflection Paper (50 points)

- See the guidelines and rubric above.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Before in-person class sessions: Read the texts by Goodyer and Peacock in their entirety.

Tuesday, September 15- 9 am to 12 pm CST (In Person)

- *Course Introduction:* Spiritual Formation; Decolonized Spirituality; Story & the Spirit of Play; A Rhythm of Prayer; The Life of the Beloved
- *The Story of Creation:* The Playfulness of God; Desire & Creativity; Rest & Work; The Rhythm of Nature & Time; The Both/And of Being Human; Agency & Befriending Our Limitations
- *Disciplines:* Morning Prayer & Lectio Divina; Midday Prayer & Beloved Affirmations

Tuesday, September 15- 1 to 5 pm CST (In Person)

- *The Story of Exodus:* The Mystery of Yahweh; Identity & Calling; Freedom & Play
- *Disciplines:* Wasting Time with God; Evening Prayer & the Examen
- *Homework:* Bedtime Prayer

Wednesday, September 16 – 9 am to 12 pm CST (In Person)

- *The Story of Christ:* The Good News of Yeshua; Incarnation & Sacrament; Discipleship & Play; Abiding & Prayer; The Cruciform Life; Easter Laughter
- *Disciplines:* Morning Prayer & Beholding; Midday Prayer & Beloved Affirmations

Wednesday, September 16 – 1 to 5 pm (In Person)

- Listening Groups: intro and practice
- *Disciplines:* Group Spiritual Direction; Evening Prayer & the Examen
- *Homework:* Bedtime Prayer

Thursday, September 17 — 9 am to 12 pm CST (In Person)

- Centering Prayer: intro and practice
- Listening Groups: practice
- *Disciplines:* Morning Prayer; Centering Prayer; Group Spiritual Direction; Midday Prayer & Beloved Affirmations

Thursday, September 17 –1 to 5 pm CST (In Person)

- *The Story of Pentecost:* The Breath of the Spirit; Community & Creativity; Charisms & Christlikeness; Discernment & Decision Making
- Practicing a Rule of Life

- *Disciplines*: Identifying with the Life of Christ

Week of September 21-26 (On Canvas)

- Reading and discussion of the chapter from Foster, *Streams in the Desert* (see above). A prompt will be posted on the morning of Monday, September 21 and your response is due by the end of the day, September 26.

Week of September 28 – October 3 (On Canvas)

- Reading and discussion of the chapter from Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation* (see above). A prompt will be posted on the morning of Monday, September 28 and your response is due by the end of the day, October 3.

Week of October 5-10 (On Canvas)

- Reading and discussion of the chapter from Aroney-Sine, *The Gift of Wonder* (see above). A prompt will be posted on the morning of Monday, October 5 and your response is due by the end of the day, October 10.

Weeks of October 12 - 24

- Reflection Paper Due - Submit Paper on Canvas by Saturday, October 24 at 11:59 pm (Central Time).
- Course Reading Completion Form Due – [Submit via Google Forms](#) by Saturday, October 24 at 11:59 pm (Central Time)

INCOMPLETE GRADES

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, pregnancy, illness, personal and family issues, military assignment, etc.), a student anticipates they will be unable to complete course work within the allotted time, that student may request a grade of incomplete from the course instructor before the last day of class clearly stating the reason(s) for this request.

Overscheduling and/or lack of self-discipline are not considered extenuating circumstances. If the request is timely and meets the criteria, the student and the instructor will submit the incomplete grade form and the grade for that class will be listed as “I” until the last day of the following semester. If coursework is not submitted by the last day of the following semester, the listing of “I” will automatically be changed to “F.” For the full policy, see page 15 of the Seminary Academic Catalog.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park Theological Seminary is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating will receive a failing grade

on the assignment and are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion from the seminary. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – the use of another’s work as one’s own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from the internet.
2. Copying another’s answers on an examination or assignment.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one’s answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
5. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.

For additional information, see the Seminary Academic Catalog, pp. 25–26.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Your experience in this class is important to me. North Park is committed to creating inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established your accommodations, please share your accommodation letter with me so we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. If you have not yet established services and have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please email the Disability Access Specialist or contact by phone (773-244-5737). Student Engagement facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations.

TITLE IX

Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against, or involved in sexual violence should contact the Title IX Coordinator (773-244-6276 or TitleIX@northpark.edu) for information about reporting, campus resources and support services, including confidential counseling services.

As members of the North Park faculty, we are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are available to discuss any concerns. Faculty are legally obligated to share information with the University’s Title IX coordinator in certain situations to help ensure that the student’s safety and welfare is being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of sexual assault, relational/domestic violence, and stalking.

Please refer to North Park’s Safe Community site for reporting, contact information and further details.