

SPIRITUAL FORMATION (SF5100-1)—IDENTITY & COMMUNITY SYLLABUS

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29 ESV)

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The mission of Dallas Theological Seminary is “to glorify God by equipping godly servant-leaders for the proclamation of His Word and the building up of the body of Christ worldwide.” As stated, this mission requires “godly servant-leaders,” men and women who image the character of our triune God. Their lives are to manifest self-giving love and humility in relation to both God and their fellow image-bearers. Such a life has been revealed most clearly in the God-Man, the Lord Jesus. Theological education must therefore prioritize the *formation* of believers so they become more and more like him, the One who is fully human and the true image of God. He is the standard and model we must imitate and follow in order to faithfully represent God’s rule over the earth—living, serving, and loving as Jesus did.

The Spiritual Formation ministry at DTS exists for this very purpose. In order to faithfully “proclaim” and “build up,” students must be engaged in the process of being conformed to Jesus Christ. Therefore, our mission in SF is “helping servant-leaders pursue Christlikeness.” We provide a context for the Spirit to transform students, a place of biblical community where students are encouraged to authentically and vulnerably share their lives with one another as they reflect, examine, share, and respond to issues of identity, community, integrity, and fidelity.

This two-semester course begins every fall. Students are placed into small groups where they will meet in-person with one another for one year. Trained leaders are provided to facilitate discussion and theological reflection.

This course has four primary goals achieved through the following four modules: Identity and Community (covered in the first semester), and Integrity and Fidelity (covered in the second). First, this course challenges students through the *Life Inventory* exercises to grasp more fully the reality of their identity as image-bearers who are in Christ, both individually and corporately. Second, through the *Life Story* exercises this course challenges students to discover the triune God’s authorship in their lives—the way in which he has formed them through various experiences and relationships. Third, this course challenges students to examine the personal and corporate implications of sin and grace in their lives through the *Life Change* exercises. And fourth, through the *Life Vision* exercises this course challenges students to live a life of faithfulness by implementing their divine design in building up the Body of Christ and witnessing to a lost world. This last module helps focus the remainder of the students’ academic experience by providing an opportunity to explore how they might serve the Lord Jesus Christ for a lifetime of effective ministry.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. **Cognitive:** By the end of this course, the student will:

Identity

Gain greater insight into their corporate identity in Christ; gain greater insight into their unique identity in Christ; understand their identity in relation to God, the body of Christ, and the world; honestly appraise their beliefs, practices, and virtues,

Community

Reflect on the various experiences and relationships in their life; notice God's presence and activity in their life; discern particularly formative experiences and relationships in their life story; identify themes in their life story,

B. **Affective:** By the end of this course, the student will:

Identity

Appreciate the corporate aspect of being in Christ; appreciate their unique makeup in Christ; appreciate the uniqueness of their Spiritual Formation group; value the practice of periodic self-examination; desire growth in their relationship with God and in their Spiritual life,

Community

Celebrate the unique and faithful way in which God has worked in their life; value the process of discerning God's unique formative work in their life; appreciate the importance of presence, trust, and authenticity in relationships; desire to increasingly respond to God's formative work in their life,

C. **Behavioral:** By the end of this course, the student will:

Identity

Honestly engage with and discuss the various *Identity* topics; create a personal position paper (or creative project) on the theological foundations of identity; share their position paper (or project) with their Spiritual Formation group; share selected topics with their group,

Community

Honestly engage with and discuss the various *Life Story* topics; write a thoughtful and creative presentation of their *Life Story*; authentically share their *Life Story* with their Spiritual Formation group; share selected topics with their group,

III. COURSE TEXTBOOKS¹

A. Required

SF100 Spiritual Formation Curriculum: Identity, Community, Integrity, and Fidelity. This workbook will be provided for each student.

B. Suggested

General Spiritual Formation

Burns, J. Lanier. *Pride and Humility at War: A Biblical Perspective.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018.

Greenman, Jeffrey P. and George Kalantzis, eds. *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

Jones, Barry. *Dwell: Life with God for the World.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014.

Mulholland Jr., M. Robert. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1993.

Pettit, Paul, ed. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008.

Schaeffer, Francis A., and James W. Sire. *The Mark of the Christian.* 2nd edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.

Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation.* Cultural liturgies, v. 1. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009.

Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2016.

Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Identity

Bridges, Jerry. *Who Am I?: Identity in Christ.* Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2012.

Highfield, Ron. *God, Freedom, and Human Dignity: Embracing a God-Centered Identity in a Me-Centered Culture.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

Rosner, Brian S. *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.

Community

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together.* New York: HarperCollins, 1954.

Jordan, Merle R. *Reclaiming Your Story: Family History and Spiritual Growth.* 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

¹ The selection of textbooks does not necessarily imply the professor's endorsement of the views of the authors. Textbooks are selected for their perceived value in helping meet the course goals and objectives. As graduate students you are expected to read and interact with texts critically and learn from both those with whom you agree and those with whom you do not.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Reading Assignments

1. **Curriculum Weekly Sessions:** Students are expected to carefully read and thoughtfully reflect on the weekly sessions of the course curriculum.
2. ***Foundations of Spiritual Formation Readings (Optional):*** Students are encouraged to read the following from Pettit's book, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*:
 - Foreword
 - Introduction
 - Chapter 1: Introducing Spiritual Formation
 - Chapter 6: Character and Spiritual Formation
 - Chapter 7: Love and Spiritual Formation
 - Chapter 8: Leadership and Spiritual Formation
 - Chapter 9: Calling and Spiritual Formation
 - Chapter 10: Life Story and Spiritual Formation
3. **Memorization (Optional):** Students are encouraged to memorize Philippians 2:1-11. Once memorized, they can recite it to their group, spouse or friend.

B. Written Assignments

1. **DISC Personality Assessment:** Students are expected to complete an online personality assessment per the Course Lectures and Assignment Schedule (below). Details and instructions will be provided via DTS Online.
2. ***Identity Foundations Position Project:*** Students are expected to write a 3-4 page paper on the theological and biblical foundations of identity, with an emphasis on the personal and corporate implications of what it means to be an image-bearer who is "in Christ." Students will present it to their Spiritual Formation group.

This paper is a biblical theology with a very personal slant. In addition to (1) what it means to be an image-bearer "in Christ" both corporately and individually, it needs to include elements such as (2) places other than Christ where the student is tempted to put his/her identity, (3) "false identities" the student tries to present to others, and (4) areas where he/she has had victory in identity issues.

Creative Option: For students whose learning style benefits from creative projects, a second option for this assignment is available. It consists of two parts, both of which must be completed to receive credit.

1. Complete a 2-page paper as described above.
2. Complete a creative project to elaborate on the meaning of being "in Christ" both corporately and individually. Some creative examples might include: write and

perform a song, write a short story or poem, create an art project, photography, or other medium of choice. This project will need to be shared with and explained to the group.

3. *Life Story Overview*: According to the guidelines in the course curriculum, students are expected to write and present their personal *Life Story* to their Spiritual Formation group.

C. Attendance and Participation

1. **Videos**: Students are expected to watch all required videos included in course content (available at DTS Online [i.e., Canvas]).
2. **Attendance at all scheduled events and group agreed-upon retreats and outings is required**. All Spiritual Formation groups will determine a group agreed-upon method of communicating absences with their leader. Please see Class Participation and Absences under Course Policies for additional information (below).

Please Note: Due to the nature of building community, **please miss no more than two group times per semester**. More than two absences in any particular semester will result in failure to receive credit on your transcript for this course and failure to progress with your SF group. You will have to start over in the next fall semester.

3. **Spiritual Formation Fellow**: Each SF group and its leader will be assigned an SF Fellow (from the SF staff) for the duration of this course. The SF Fellow will serve as their contact for the course, a grader, and help with any student or group issues that may arise.

V. COURSE POLICIES

- A. **Grading**: Credit for this course is a non-academic credit (CR) required on student transcripts. Credit or No-Credit designation will be determined by the SF Leader based on satisfactory completion of all course requirements.
- B. **DTS Online Education (<http://online.dts.edu/>)**: Dallas Theological Seminary's Online Education website (a.k.a. Canvas) provides content through video, slides, and transcripts. It is a custom learning environment where students and faculty engage in theological content, biblical assignments, and community interaction. To login to the DTS Online Education website go to: online.dts.edu. Courses are structured in units (usually 1 to 2 weeks in length) with activities that include readings, reflections, and submissions.

VI. COURSE SECTIONS & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Here are the available DC SF5100-1 sections for Fall 2024. Students will remain in their chosen section for both fall (SF5100-1) and spring (SF5100-2) semesters.

Section Name	Meeting Day	Meeting Time	Description
DC-W	Group decides	TBD	This section is for women only.
DC-M	Group decides	TBD	This section is for men only.

Each SF5100 group will adhere to the following schedule.

WEEK/DATE	SESSION TOPIC(S)	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
<i>Beginning of Fall Semester</i>		
August 2024	Before Semester Begins	<p>Download and read the syllabus from Canvas.</p> <p>Verify your SF registration and your selected section (Men, Women).</p> <p>Update Biographical Information on DTS Student Portal (portal.dts.edu).</p> <p>Submit preliminary Canvas assignments.</p>
August 24 1:30—4:00 pm	<p>Kickoff Day! DTS-DC Campus Burke Community Church</p> <p>(See Canvas for more details.)</p>	<p>Attend Kickoff on 8/24</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is where you will meet your group for the first time so it is essential that you attend. • Small Group Time: Life Sketch, Group Covenant intro <p>Submit SF Expectations via DTS Online.</p>
<i>Identity: “Who am I?” (August–October 2024)</i>		
Week 1: 8/26/24–8/30/24	<p>“Introduction to SF” Introduction to Identity</p>	<p>Read Foreword, Preface, and Session 1 for Identity module on your own.</p> <p>Watch “Introduction to SF” video on Canvas.</p>
Week 2: 9/3/24–9/6/24 (9/2 Labor Day)	<p>Image of God Design</p>	<p>Watch “Introduction to Identity” video on Canvas.</p> <p>Read Sessions 2 and 3 and answer Reflection Questions on your own.</p> <p>Complete Life Inventory Exercise 1.</p>
Week 3: 9/8/24–9/13/24	Heritage	<p>Read Session 4 and answer Reflection Questions on your own.</p> <p>Discuss Session 4 & Life Inventory Exercise 2 as a group.</p>
Week 4: 9/15/24–9/20/24	<p>Our Identity in Christ Belief</p>	<p>Read Sessions 5 and 6 and answer Reflection Questions on your own.</p> <p>Complete Life Inventory Exercise 3 on your own.</p> <p>Discuss Session 5 as a group.</p>

Week 5: 9/22/24–9/27/24	Practice Virtue Identity Foundations Project	Read Session 7 and 8 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Inventory Exercises 4 and 5 on your own. Discuss Session 7 as a group. Leader shares Identity Foundations Position Project.
Week 6: 9/29/24–10/4/24	Identity Foundations Project	Read Sessions 9 and 10 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Inventory Exercise 6 (Identity Foundation Projects) on your own. Share Identity Foundations Position Project as a group.
Community: “Who are we?”		<i>(October–December 2024)</i>
Week 7: 10/6/24–10/11/24	Introduction to Community God’s Authorship	Watch “Introduction to Community” video on Canvas. Read Session 1 and 2 of Community module and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Story Exercise 1. Discuss Session 2 as a group.
Week 8: 10/13/24–10/18/24	Experiences and Relationships	Read Session 3 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Story Exercise 2 on your own. Discuss Session 3 and Life Story Exercise 2 as a group.
Week 9: 10/27/24–11/1/24	Formative Elements and Themes	Read Session 4 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Story Exercises 3 & 4 on your own. Discuss Session 4 as a group.
Week 10: 11/3/24–11/8/24	Telling Our Stories, Hearing Our Stories	Read Session 5 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Story Exercises 5 and 6 on your own. Discuss Session 5 as a group.
Week 11: 11/10/24–11/15/24	Life Story Presentations	Read Session 6-10 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. Complete Life Story Exercise 7 on your own. Leader shares <i>Life Story</i> with group. Arrive on time to the group session. Be prepared to listen attentively, encourage, and pray for the presenters.
11/18/24–11/22/24	<i>Reading Week</i>	No assignments. (Continue preparing <i>Life Story</i> .)
11/25/24–11/29/24	<i>Thanksgiving</i>	No assignments. (Enjoy some rest.)
Week 12: 12/1/24–12/6/24	Life Story Presentations	Continue sharing <i>Life Story</i> as a group.
Week 13: 12/8/24–12/13/24	Life Story Presentations	Continue sharing <i>Life Story</i> as a group.

Week 14: 12/15/24–12/19/24	Knowing & Being Known Turning Toward Integrity	Read Session 11 and 12 and answer Reflection Questions on your own. As a group, enjoy a time of celebration to bring a close to this semester's SF group experience.
<i>End of Fall Semester</i>		

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