

BRIERCREST

THEO 751 Life in the Mess: A Theology of Forgiveness and Reconciliation Spring 2019

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Course Dates: May 27-31, 2019

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will evaluate contemporary models of forgiveness and reconciliation from both a theological and counselling perspective. A Gospel-centered model of forgiveness and reconciliation will be presented out of which practices of forgiveness and reconciliation can be explored. Issues to be considered may include, but are not be limited to: the semantics of forgiveness and reconciliation; systemic and corporate dynamics of forgiveness and reconciliation; the problem of unrepentance; forgiveness and memory; forgiveness and reconciliation in non-ecclesial/non-Christian contexts; and the role of the local church in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation.

Note: May count as a Counselling elective.

COURSE INTEGRATION

Jesus teaches his followers to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Despite the simplicity of this line in the Lord's Prayer, the practice of asking and extending forgiveness remains one of the most difficult challenges of the Christian life. This is probably because forgiveness is able to be practiced, paradoxically, only in the midst of broken relationships and in the context of broken structures of family, church, and society. In this regard, there is no Christian calling or ministry that will not, at one level or another, be required to discern how to work toward the goal of seeing human relationships reconciled through the practice of giving and receiving forgiveness. This course will be of interest to anyone who faces the ordinary messiness of human interaction, including pastors, Christian counselors, mediators, organizational leaders, and parents.

COURSE TEXTS

Required for all credit students:

Allender, Dan B. and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1992.

Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*. Mariner Books, 2004.

Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

MA Theological Studies, MA Biblical Languages & Exegesis and MDiv students are required to read:

Philip D. Jamieson, *The Face of Forgiveness: A Pastoral Theology of Shame and Redemption*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016.

MA Leadership, MA Marriage & Family Therapy, Master of Counselling, Master of Christian Ministry students are required to read:

Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker*. 3d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004.

Certificate or non-degree students: Read either Jamieson or Sande above according to interest.

Recommended for all but not required:

Brauns, Chris. *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers for Complex Questions and Deep Wounds*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.mybriercrest.ca/seminary/documents/>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <http://briercrest.ca/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>; cf. <http://briercrest.ca/online/canvas>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, it is my hope that students will:

- Develop a more thoroughly biblical understanding of the meaning and practices of forgiveness as theologically centred in the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ;
- Grapple with and critically assess current attitudes and models to forgiveness;
- Become more self-aware (and self-critical) in how personal life narratives, gender, ethnicity, and ecclesiastical backgrounds shape attitudes and practices of forgiveness;
- Recognize the theological implications (positive and negative) implicit in commonly used practices and procedures of dealing with conflict in relationships;
- View the process of reconciliation in holistic terms such that individual and corporate issues are more closely linked;
- Begin to work with a practical model of forgiveness and reconciliation when dealing with issues of forgiveness and reconciliation in interpersonal and corporate relationships;
- Sharpen their ability to identify problems and to propose theologically consistent and practical solutions to pastoral situations where forgiveness and reconciliation is required.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

Note: The following is a conceptual outline of topics to be covered, which may not be dealt with in the order listed.

I. Forgiveness and Reconciliation Today: Why we are confused

II. Biblical Assessment of Contemporary Models of Forgiveness

III. A Biblical Theology of Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Living in the Mess

- The God and Gospel of Reconciliation
- Peace, Harmony, and Fellowship (Shalom)
- Love and Forbearance
- Sin/Enmity
- Confrontation
- Excommunication
- Confession
- Repentance
- Forgiveness
- Discipline
- Restitution and Restoration

III. Short-circuiting Reconciliation: Making Life Messier Than It Already Is

IV. Pastoral Problems in Reconciliation: Getting Our Hands Messy

Note: These are only meant as starting points. We will seek to identify and sharpen the issues as a class and work together toward proposing initial solutions to these problems as part of the seminar.

- What if I can't forgive?
- What if one of the parties dies?
- What if it is someone in authority over me?
- What if it is an issue of sexual or physical abuse/violence?
- What if it is a corporate or systemic wrong?
- Can organizations/institutions/governments "repent" and/or "forgive"?
- Is repayment necessary? To what extent?
- When should forgiveness and reconciliation go public?
- Can I/we ever forget the wrong/survive the pain?

PRE-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

A. Reading: Course text reading

Read the three texts by Volf, Allender/Longman, and Gobodo-Madikizela in preparation for the course. You will be asked the first day of class to report on your pre-course reading on a sheet provided in class. Although there are no marks awarded for reading, there is a 2% deduction for each 100 pages (or part thereof) of textbook reading not completed before the first day of class.

As you read the Gobodo-Madikizela book, think about take notes on the following two questions in anticipation of having a mid-week discussion out of class on the text:

What are the benefits and drawbacks to Gobodo-Madikizela's primarily psychological account of her interpretation of Eugene de Kock and his personal and political involvements in the apartheid regime?

How might a theological and/or biblical perspective have helped or hindered her account, and potentially altered some of her conclusions?

B. Pre-Course Reflection Paper (20%) – submitted on Canvas

Choose **ONE** of the following two options on which to do a pre-course paper.

A) Read *Bold Love* in its entirety. As you read, think of a situation you have faced or are facing in which forgiveness and reconciliation is needed. Being careful not to break confidentiality (i.e., do not use actual names or reveal situations that might reveal identities), write a 3-4 page (900-1200 words) reflection paper on how some of the strategies reflected in chapters 10-12 might relate to or help you in your situation. You should also indicate whether the person(s) in question fit into one of the broad categories listed in chapter 10-12: 1) The Evil Person; 2) The Fool; and 3) The Normal Sinner. If you plan to reflect on a past situation that is already resolved, you might want to focus on how your situation may have illustrated some principles from Allender and Longman's book, or how things could have been worked out differently. This paper will be evaluated on how well you are able to bring the content of the book to bear on a concrete, real life situation. It is not intended to be a restatement of the content of the book, i.e., the content will be assumed. Feel free to reference the book using simple parenthetical annotations. E.g., (p. 35).

B) Read *Exclusion and Embrace* in its entirety. Write a 3-4 page (900-1200 words) reflective paper in which you identify two or three of the most helpful/profound/important themes in Volf's book. Provide a rationale for why these themes were so important to you and anticipate how they might inform your own personal or ministry context in the future. If you make specific references to real life situations, be sure to be careful not to break confidentiality (i.e., do not use actual names or reveal situations that might reveal identities). This paper will be evaluated on how well you are able to anticipate how the content of the book might be brought to bear on concrete, real life situations. It is not intended to be a restatement of the content of the book, i.e., the content will be assumed. Feel free to reference the book using simple parenthetical annotations. E.g., (p. 35).

MID-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

Notes and Discussion from *A Human Being Died that Night* (10%)

The class will be divided into groups for a minimum 1 hour out-of-class discussion that must be completed before Thursday's class. The notes from the pre-course assignment on *A Human Being Died that Night* will prepare you for this discussion.

You will need to hand in these notes (hard copy only please) as evidence of having completed the pre-course assignment. Make sure you include title page, please.

The notes can be as detailed as you wish, but should be no less than 500 words, and no more than 1500 words.

You will be marked on thoughtfulness of how you answer the questions, not necessarily on the length of your answer.

We will have a debrief of the discussions sometime during Thursday's class.

POST-COURSE ASSIGNMENTS (due July 26, 2019) – submitted on Canvas

Constructive Book Review (20%)

Write a four page (1000 word) "constructive book review" of either the Jamieson or Sande books (depending on which book is required for your major). Your constructive book review should aim to engage the book from the perspective of your disciplinary major and while certainly having an eye open to areas of weakness in the book, will seek also to build upon the book's strengths. In other words, a constructive book review must seek to assess the books from a critical, biblical perspective, but it must also seek to anticipate how the book's contribution could be extended to a particular issue within the discipline.

Example 1: If you are Leadership major and reading Sande's text, you will need to provide your assessment of any biblical or theological weaknesses you see in Sande, but you will also go on to show how Sande's approach might suitably complement other aspects of Leadership theory (e.g., conflict management, problem solving, etc.), or alternatively, how attention to these other aspects may help to strengthen Sande's own approach.

Example 2: If you are an MA Theological Studies, Old Testament major, you will need to provide your assessment of any biblical or theological weaknesses you see in Jamieson, but you may also want to go on to show how his theology may be complemented by certain Old Testament themes, or alternatively, how certain Old Testament themes may in fact be in tension with Jamieson's perspective and needing some form of "reconciliation."

The overall goals of the constructive disciplinary book review, then, are to show 1) that you have read the text against the standard of the Bible, and 2) to show how your increasing expertise in your discipline can be integrated (or how it may stand in tension with) the content of the book.

Major Research Project (50%)

It is expected that the major research project for this course will provide an opportunity for you to apply what has been learned in the course and in your own research to a topic within your own academic discipline (major) or ministry. Choose one of the following options upon which to do your major project. Papers should be no more than 12 pages in length (not including front and back matter), and should demonstrate thoroughness of research (i.e., reading and using both Scripture and other books, articles, resources), depth of insight, careful documentation, and adherence to Briercrest Seminary Format guidelines.

a) Theological exegesis – Starting with one of "steps" in the "cycle of reconciliation" (as presented in class), select a set of biblical texts discussed in class and/or additional texts/passages that relate to and speak to that step. (E.g., Confession, Repentance, Forgiveness, Discipline, etc.) Do a thorough theological exegesis on one or several of these texts and demonstrate how your findings might supplement, complement or even challenge the model as it is presented in class. Thorough theological exegesis will take care to consider not only the exegetical issues of the text (grammar, syntax, semantics, etc.) but also will be conversant with the ways in which various Christian traditions have read (or may have misread!) these same texts. Broad use of resources (including

commentaries, monographs, journal articles, etc.) will be necessary for this project.

b) Theologian of Reconciliation – Choose a historic or contemporary theologian on which to do a careful study, exposition and evaluation of her or his theology of reconciliation, or some closely associated topic. (E.g., forgiveness, confession, repentance, etc.) Attention to primary sources by the theologian is a necessity, along with judicious use of scholarly secondary sources.

c) Counselling Integration – Identify a particular situation in which you might realistically be called upon (or are now being called upon) to give counsel or to serve as a mediator working toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Beginning with the model presented in class, provide a thorough investigation into the theory, processes and procedures that ought to be followed to bring about resolution to the issue. You should be careful to define the parameters of the context (e.g., serving as a professional counsellor; serving as a pastor; helping as a friend, etc.) and then proceed to develop your strategy in accordance with the practices acceptable for that context. (E.g., How might serving in a “non-Christian” setting affect how you might bring to bear the principle of an explicitly “Christian” model of reconciliation?)

The primary goal of this paper will be to demonstrate thoughtful integration of both acceptable counselling practice and theory and the biblical/theological principles developed in the class. It will be also very important to note if there are any points at which “tension” may result between the counselling practice and the theology of the model.

d) Leadership Integration - Identify an area of leadership studies in which you are particularly interested or currently involved. (E.g., leadership development, mentoring, conflict resolution, strategic planning, problem-solving, vision-casting, etc.) Write a paper in which you seek to integrate both contemporary leadership theory with biblical/theological principles of forgiveness and reconciliation developed in class.

The primary goal of this paper will be to demonstrate thoughtful integration of both the goals of acceptable leadership theory and practice, but also the goals of seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. In other words, in what way can the theory and practice of leadership not only embrace influence and change toward a practical or organizational goal, but also intentional leading toward both vertical (with God) and horizontal (with one another) reconciliation? It will be also important to note if there are any points at which “tension” may result between leadership theory and the theology of forgiveness and reconciliation.

e) The Church and Socio-political Case Study – Choose a particular socio-political context upon which to engage in a case study whereby a current or historical problem is analyzed with the goal of proposing a process and anticipated solution. E.g., The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in regard to First Nations; Francophone/Anglophone relations in Canada; Israel/Palestine; clergy misconduct in a particular denomination; the problem of Christian-Jewish or Christian-Muslim relations, etc. The study should be engaged, where possible, on the basis of official documents related to a specific aspect of the problem and have as a goal making suggestions for possible means of dealing with corporate issues of reconciliation, particularly in contexts where Christianity is not always (or rarely) the dominant voice. Practical attention should be paid to how the local church (or denominations) may best be involved and at what levels to fostering reconciliation in the situation studied.

f) **OTHER:** The instructor is open to alternative research projects that do not fit one of the categories above. However, permission must be sought from the instructor no later than **June 7, 2019** if this option is chosen. Permission to grant an alternative must come in the form of a one paragraph description (use #1-6 above as examples) of the project you wish to complete.

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current Seminary Calendar:

<https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/academics/calendar/>.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend 100% of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible, arrangements must be made with the course professor. A maximum of 1 full day of class can be foregone. Students should request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit if additional time is missed.

Course Schedules

Classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

Students are accountable to perform each task according to principles of academic honesty. Please refer to pages 24-25 in the [academic calendar](#) for more information.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or illness who may need academic accommodations should discuss them with the course instructor after contacting the Student Success Centre in person (located in the Library), by telephone (1-306-756-3230) or by email (studentsuccesscentre@briercrest.ca).

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