



THEO 751 / CO 819 Life in the Mess: A Theology of  
Forgiveness and Reconciliation  
Spring 2025

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**Course Dates:** June 2-6, 2025

**Course Delivery Format:** In-person Modular Course

3 Credit Hours

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will evaluate contemporary models of forgiveness and reconciliation from both a theological and counseling 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 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 can 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

Allender, Dan B. and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress, 1992.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *What we have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*, 2015. (Online resource at link below)

[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf)

Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon, rev. ed. 2019. [The first edition of Volf is also acceptable].

For students in theological or biblical studies programs:

Davis, James Calvin. *Forbearance: A Theological Ethic for a Disagreeable Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

Or:

Martin, Ralph P. *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989, 1997.

For students in ministry or leadership programs:

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

For students in counselling programs:

NOTE: Although not required by all students, I do recommend this book for all as Griffith's approach aligns very well with the theology of forgiveness and reconciliation presented in this class.

Susannah Griffith, *Forgiveness after Trauma: A Path to Find Healing and Empowerment*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2024.

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>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

## COURSE OUTCOMES

- Develop a more thoroughly biblical understanding of the meaning and practices of forgiveness centered 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;
- Be better informed about the findings of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- Be intentional on identifying how Christians can contribute to seeing reconciliation between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

1. Forgiveness today: Assessing Contemporary Models in and out of the Church
2. The God and Gospel of Reconciliation: Toward a Theology of Reconciliation
3. The Cycle of Reconciliation: A Biblical Model
  - a. Reconciliation/Peace (Shalom)/Fellowship
  - b. Love
  - c. Forbearance
  - d. Sin / Enmity
  - e. Confrontation / Judgment of Grace
  - f. Separation / Excommunication
  - g. Confession
  - h. Repentance
  - i. Forgiveness
  - j. Discipline
  - k. Restitution and Restoration
4. Guest Lecture: Daniel Collado, ED, Aboriginal Bible Academy – Indigenous reconciliation
5. Short-Circuiting Reconciliation

## ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit all written assignments to Canvas.

### ***Pre-Course Assignments (20%): Due at beginning of class, June 2, 2025***

1. Read Allender (*Bold Love*), Volf (*Exclusion and Embrace*), Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*What We Have Learned*), and one of the assigned disciplinary books (4 texts total) in preparation for the course.
2. As soon as possible after you have read the *What We Have Learned* book, journal 1-2 pages (300-600 words) on your reactions to having read this document. Your reactions should be honest and can be positive and/or negative. You can reflect on theological, factual, spiritual, or any aspect you wish. These reflections will be called into use both in a mid-week class discussion and in a post-course assignment.  
(Note: This reflection is not marked separately but will be included as part of the post-course assignment; however, please be sure to upload the assignment to Canvas before class as proof of completion.)
3. As you read through the Volf, Allender, and one of Sande, Griffith, Davis, or Martin texts, identify a **single chapter** from any one of the texts on which to write a critical review. The review should be structured as follows:
  - 1) There is no need for an introductory paragraph, but the first paragraph (max. 300 words or 1 page, whichever comes first) should summarize the content of the chapter.
  - 2) 600 words (2 pages) on evaluation of the chapter from a biblical/theological perspective. I am not interested in critique of style, but substantive engagement with the chapter in which you indicate both strengths and weaknesses from a biblical and theological perspective.

- 3) 150 words (1/2 page) on ONE or TWO things maximum that you have taken away from the chapter that you will be able to apply practically to either your life or ministry.

Evaluation: clarity, conciseness, faithfulness to text summarized, thoughtful.

### ***Mid-Course Assignments:***

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 reflections and journaling from the pre-course reading of the TRC document *What We Have Learned* will prepare you for this discussion.

There will be no marks for this group discussion or class discussion time, but this exercise is mandatory and preparatory to post-course assignments #1 and #2.

### ***Post-Course Assignments:***

#### **1) Post course Reflection (5%) – Due: June 13, 2025**

In the days immediately after the course, take some time to journal your personal reactions to the course material and discussion. In no more than 3 pages double spaced, reflect on some of the following questions.

- What are some things you have been personally challenged to think differently about?
- What are some things you were convicted about? Remain unconvinced about?
- How would you describe the personal impact certain concepts, discussions, or readings had on you?
- What are practical actions you intend to do as a result of something you've learned or been challenged by in the course?
- What is something you are still struggling to work out or understand?
- What do you think is a major lesson the Holy Spirit has been teaching you this week?
- Anything else you want to reflect on?

It is not necessary to answer all or even any of these questions, but the point of this exercise is to push you to seek to process and apply the course while the content is fresh in your mind. It is acceptable to make mention of personal relationships or contexts, but ensure anonymity of names when necessary. Also note that it is entirely acceptable to disagree with something that has been dealt with in the class and can be a good point of reflection to help you verbalize why you disagree.

This is purely a self-reflective exercise and no additional sources are necessary.

Evaluation: Clarity, thoughtfulness, evidence of engagement with concepts of class.

#### **2. TRC Document: *What We Have Learned* - Reflection (25%) – Due: August 1, 2025**

In light of your reading of the assigned course text entitled, *What We Have Learned*, and what you've learned from the course content, compile the following reflective assignment. (Please note: This assignment is reflection only on the TRC document in interaction with the course content, not other course texts).

Part 1: Pre-Course reflection – These reflections should be included as they were completed before class (Pre-course assignment 2). Do not edit in light of course or class discussion. (1-2 pages)

Part 2: In point form (no more than 10 points), list items of information, facts, perspectives, etc. from the *What Have We Learned* document that had the greatest impact on you and why. (1 page)

Part 2: Incorporating Scripture, course material, the group discussions, and/or other class texts, write about how you think an aspect of the theology of forgiveness and reconciliation modelled in class might come into play in the national truth and reconciliation (TRC) conversation, keeping in mind that the TRC exercise is inherently non-theological and only about reconciliation between people groups and not necessarily about reconciliation between God and humans. I am not looking for anything specific here as much as seeking to push you to apply the concepts you've learned and processed in class toward a contemporary national Canadian issue.

It may be helpful to think on the following: How does the biblical model of forgiveness and reconciliation presented in class complement, supplement, and/or challenge some of the working assumptions or practices inherent in the TRC document? (3 pages)

Part 3: Choose one or two of the "10 Principles of Reconciliation" (pp. 3-4 of *What We Have Learned*) and describe one or two ways you might personally, in either your current or anticipated ministry context, make a practical effort to help individuals to whom and with whom you minister to improve Indigenous/Non-Indigenous relationships in Canada. (1-2 pages).

### **3. Major Research Paper – (50%) – Due August 1, 2025**

It is expected that the maximum 12 page (double spaced, not including front and back matter) major research paper 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 subpoints in the Cycle of Reconciliation model presented in class on which to do your major paper. Choose from one of the options below on how to structure your paper. These examples are just to get your mind thinking about the possibilities.

- 1) Choose a biblical text or set of texts on which to do a focused exegesis and exploration related to the topic. e.g., Who is the "Church" Matthew 18 to whom the unrepentant brother is brought? What is historical background that illumines Paul's use of the term Reconciliation? Are there various types of Forgiveness spoken of in the Psalms? What is the nature of restoration in the account of Nathan's confrontation of King David's sin? Why is repentance declared impossible for some in Hebrews 6? How does Jesus practice confrontation in the Gospel of Luke? etc.
- 2) Identify various theological theories related to the model and argue for the superiority of one. e.g., Is forgiveness possible for the unrepentant? Must confession of sin be made to the person sinned against? What is the sign that repentance is genuine? What are the sins against the body vs. sins outside the body? Can there be true reconciliation between Christians and non-Christians? etc.
- 3) Explore how one or two aspects of the cycle of reconciliation could be used in professional practice. e.g., Is seeking forgiveness and reconciliation in a secular workplace appropriate? Should fallen leaders of Churches be given opportunity for restoration? What is the role of counselling confidentiality in view of a confession in a Christian counselling session? etc.

- 4) Do an analysis and biblical evaluation of a theologian or comparison of theologians or traditions on one of the topics in the cycle of reconciliation. e.g., What did Dietrich Bonhoeffer believe about the requirements for a "good confession"? How did Luther and Calvin view repentance? How does Roman Catholic theology differ from Protestant theology on the role of a confessor in confession? etc.
- 5) Other. If you have another topic that does not quite fit in the categories above, please consult with the instructor for approval before proceeding.

In whatever way you choose to do your paper, all papers will be evaluated on the following:

- 1) Is there a clear focus and a well-stated research question?
- 2) Has there been sufficient engagement with the Biblical text? (i.e., in-depth engagement and not merely cursory "proof-texting" of biblical texts)
- 3) Is there evidence of both quality, quantity, and breadth of secondary research (books, commentaries, articles, etc.) for a graduate level paper? (Note: It is difficult to gauge a minimum of sources, but aim for a minimum of at least 10 sources besides the Bible. This can include citations from the course textbooks.)
- 4) Is there an attempt to identify practical or ministry implications?
- 5) Is the paper well organized, well written, engaging, and properly documented according to Briercrest Seminary guidelines? (i.e., structure, grammar, compelling argument, footnotes/parenthetical citations).

## 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*

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

### *Modular Courses*

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

### *Online Courses*

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

### *Semester-Based Courses*

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

### *Modular 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*

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI without instructor authorization violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately.

Generative AI is an umbrella term for a type of machine learning and a group of algorithms that can create new content, such as text, code, images, videos, music, or a combination of all these formats. Generative AI produces output in response to a query or prompt using generative models such as Large Language Models (LLMs) that rely on large datasets. Generative AI features are also often embedded within tools such as Grammarly, allowing these tools to generate new content, such as the rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarizing of existing text. The generated responses of these tools are probabilistic, which can result in errors and biases in responses.



The use of generative AI to create audio or visual media, to produce outlines, to generate partial or complete drafts of assignments, to answer questions on quizzes or exams, or to edit the grammar of assignment drafts is considered unauthorized unless it is explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. All use of generative AI tools must be properly documented.

Students are responsible for ensuring they are using their sources and completing their assignments with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#) and the Briercrest Format Guide. In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

### **Academic Accommodations**

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email ([arc@briercrest.ca](mailto:arc@briercrest.ca)). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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- Allender, Dan B. and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992.
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- Bash, Anthony. *Forgiveness: A Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015.
- Binau, Brad A. "Holding On" and "Letting Go": The Dynamics of Forgiveness." *Word & World* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 23-31.
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- Gowan, Donald E. *The Bible on Forgiveness*. Pickwick Publications, 2010.
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- Moule, C. F. D. ". . . As we forgive . . .": A Note on the Distinction between Deserts and Capacity in the Understanding of Forgiveness." In *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, 278-86. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
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- Taylor, Vincent. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology*. London, UK: Macmillan, 1941.
- Watson, Thomas. *The Doctrine of Repentance*. Banner of Truth Trust Publishing, 1988.
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### **Theological and Philosophical Explorations on Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

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- Boersma, Hans. "Being Reconciled: Atonement As the Ecclesio-Christological Practice of Forgiveness in John Milbank." In *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, edited by James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, 183-202. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.
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### **Forgiveness in Psychology and Counselling**

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### **The Practice of Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

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### **Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Many resources on Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) can be viewed online:

<https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>

Although far beyond the focus of this course (and the instructor's expertise), I recommend the following book if you are seeking to better understand Indigenous issues in Canada. (This is not a theological book, but a widely regarded primer).

Vowel, Chelsea. *Indigenous Writes*. Winnipeg, MB: High Water Press, 2016.