Course Syllabus

WINTER 2016
SPIRITUAL FORMATION
SPIR 0700W - ONLINE

JANUARY 11 TO APRIL 11, 2016

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JEFF LOACH
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facebook.com/jeff.loach
twitter.com/passionatelyhis

Personal conversations are welcomed by appointment; email dialogues can take place at any time.

To access your course material at the start of the course, please go to http://class.tyndale.ca

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an integrated study of the Christian life and the development of personal character shaped by the values and virtues of God’s kingdom. It includes an examination of conceptual frameworks and major categories in spiritual theology, as well as understanding and practising the classical spiritual disciplines personally and corporately.

Included in this course is a two-day retreat which all participants must attend. Students near Toronto are invited to participate in the ‘on-the-ground’ course retreat at Queen of Apostles’ Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ontario (dates TBA); otherwise, students will be required to make a retreat by other means (details are included in the syllabus).

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the course, by

1. Participating in weekly online discussions;
2. Writing and presenting a brief paper describing their past and current understanding of Christian spirituality;
3. Completing and reflecting upon a series of spiritual exercises;
4. Participating in a retreat and reflecting upon the experience;
5. Presenting a spiritual direction paper; and
6. Writing a brief essay describing how this course has deepened their understanding of Christian spirituality,

Students should be able to

1. Identify and describe the foundational biblical nature of Christian spirituality;
2. Discuss and practise spiritual formation as a dynamic process of ‘being’, initiated by the Holy Spirit; reflect on that process; recognize and discuss that one is being rooted and grounded in Christ for the sake of others;
3. Live more fully in Christ by describing dominant spiritual disciplines, selecting personally appropriate ones, and beginning to integrate them into their daily activities; and
4. Identify with, practise and demonstrate the development of personal character shaped by the values and virtues of God’s Kingdom.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS


B. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Attendance & Participation
Due to the nature of the course, each member is expected to participate fully in online discussions and in the practical dimension of the course. Students participating in fewer than 7 of the 9 online discussions, or who fail to make a retreat or meet with a spiritual director, will not pass the course.

Online conversations, in individual and group discussions, will be based on questions from the lectures. Here is a schedule outlining how these will be structured:

- Monday: Read the discussion question, go over the weekly online materials, and begin the readings.
- Tuesday: Complete the readings, formulate and post your personal response to the discussion question.
- Wednesday: Post your reaction to the responses of your group members.
• Thursday: Formulate and post your personal synthesis of the discussions and responses of your group. These become the basis for your group summary.
• Friday: Post a response to your group summary.
• Saturday: Post the group summary and respond to other group summary papers.

2. Short Essay: Due February 1; worth 15% of the Final Grade
Submit a four-page essay describing your past and current understanding and practice of Christian spirituality. Integrate the concepts and categories explained in Holt’s *Thirsty for God*. Some helpful questions to guide the organization of your essay are:

- Which specific traditions or faith communities have shaped your spirituality? What do you see as strengths and weaknesses of your tradition?
- What key theological beliefs have shaped your spirituality?
- What personal or corporate practices of the Christian faith are most important to you?
- What area of personal spiritual growth would you like to pursue?

3. Spiritual Exercises: Due March 7; worth 20% of the Final Grade
You are required to read a chapter each week from Sherbino, *Re-Connect: Spiritual Exercises to Develop Intimacy with God*, and do the exercises in preparation for weekly interaction. Do not submit your workbook, or your complete reflections on the workbook. Submit a four-page summary of your reflections, emphasizing one discipline you found especially encouraging, and one discipline you found especially challenging.

4. Retreat and Reflection Paper: Due April 4; worth 10% of the Final Grade
The retreat is intended to be an opportunity to practice and experience some of the spiritual disciplines in a guided fashion. At the end of the retreat, you will write a three-page paper reflecting on your experience. In this paper try to identify with the experiences of Henri Nouwen in *Genesee Diary*. In particular, focus on the issues of silence, solitude, community, and worship. **Again, please note that making a retreat is mandatory for all students. You will not pass this course if you do not participate in a retreat. Students near Toronto are invited to participate in the retreat being offered for on-the-ground students at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre from March 2-4, 2016. Speak to the Instructor for details before the end of January.**

5. Integration Paper: Due April 11; worth 10% of the Final Grade
Write a three-page paper reflecting on your experience in the course, and integrating what you learned, and how the course has deepened your understanding of Christian spirituality and affected your faith journey. Give special consideration to anything in your reading which has challenged your image of God, and your self-image as a child of God. Conclude by writing about one thing you learned that stands out the most, that you hope to integrate into your life.

6. Spiritual Direction Reflection Paper: Due April 18; worth 15% of the Final Grade
Each participant is required to have a spiritual director during this course. You are required to meet approximately every two weeks for focused conversation and prayer. Keep a journal of
your meetings and record your reflections, insights, and struggles. A three-page reflection paper integrating what has been helpful from your reading of Foster’s *Prayer* and the impact it had on your prayer life as discussed with your spiritual director, is to be handed in at the end of the course. You must meet with your spiritual director for a minimum of six sessions. You must indicate in your paper the number of times you have actually met. **Be sure to request that your spiritual director spend time reflecting with you on the Foster text.**

If you already have a spiritual director, please continue to meet with him or her regularly during the course. If you do not have a spiritual director, you can seek one in or near your community, or through one of the following means:

- Tyndale’s Spiritual Direction Practicum (contact Dr. Barbara Haycraft, Director of the Tyndale Spiritual Formation Centre: bhaycraft@tyndale.ca);
- Tyndale Association of Spiritual Directors (http://tyndale.ca/seminary/tasd); or
- Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (http://www.ecswisdom.org/esda).

Meetings via telephone, Skype or FaceTime are acceptable when distance is a factor and the spiritual director is willing to do so. **It will be imperative for you to arrange for your spiritual director in advance of the start of the course. Confirm with the instructor when you have obtained a spiritual director, and email him with that person’s contact information.**

**Student Time Expectation Table**

The following is an estimate of the amount of time that you will need to devote to this course. These are guidelines only; some may go faster and some may go slower.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
<th>Average Time Required</th>
<th>Average Weekly Time Required</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Reading and Listening (12 weeks)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>60 hours</td>
<td>5 hours/week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graded Discussion (best 6 out of 7)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20 hours</td>
<td>2 hour/week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Essay</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10 hours (student schedules)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Exercises</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat Reflection Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7 hours (student schedules)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7 hours (student schedules)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Direction Reflection Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Grade</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>126 hours</td>
<td>10.5 hours/week (average)</td>
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**C. COURSE CONTENTS: THEMES**

1. Biblical and theological foundations of Christian spirituality
2. Introducing spiritual direction and spiritual friendship
3. Giftedness set: spiritual gifts, natural talents, learned skills; a spiritual audit
4. *Lectio Divina* (holy reading)
5. Silence and solitude
6. Sabbath rest
7. Prayer forms and exercises
8. Inner healing
9. Spiritual formation and the community of faith; the church year
10. Worship
11. Rule of life
12. Discernment

D. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Late papers are penalized 10% per week.

Extension without penalty is granted in cases of a death in the family or personal illness. In the case of illness there must be a doctor’s certificate. All requests must be submitted prior to the due date of the assignment.

For proper citation style, consult the Chicago-Style Quick Guide (Tyndale e-resource) or the full edition of the Chicago Manual of Style Online, especially ch. 14. For citing scripture texts, refer to sections 10.46 to 10.51 and 14.253 to 14.254.

Academic Integrity
Integrity in academic work is required of all our students. Academic dishonesty is any breach of this integrity, and includes such practices as cheating (the use of unauthorized material on tests and examinations), submitting the same work for different classes without permission of the instructors; using false information (including false references to secondary sources) in an assignment; improper or unacknowledged collaboration with other students, and plagiarism. Tyndale University College & Seminary takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty.

Students should consult the current Academic Calendar for academic polices on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System. The Academic Calendar is posted at http://tyndale.ca/registrar.

E. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussion Forums</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Essay, due February 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Exercises, due March 7</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat Reflection Paper, due April 4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration Paper, due April 11</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Direction Reflection Paper, due April 18</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Grade</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
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You will note that three of these assignments are due a week apart. Your Retreat Reflection Paper can be submitted earlier, if the retreat and reading for it are complete. The Integration Paper and Spiritual Direction Reflection Paper may be submitted any time after the last week of class up to the due date.

F. COURSE EVALUATION

Tyndale Seminary values quality in the courses it offers its students. End-of-course evaluations provide valuable student feedback and are one of the ways that Tyndale Seminary works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. Student involvement in this process is critical to enhance the general quality of teaching and learning.

Before the end of the course, students will receive a MyTyndale email with a link to the online course evaluation. The evaluation period is 2 weeks; after the evaluation period has ended, it cannot be reopened.

Course Evaluation results will not be disclosed to the instructor before final grades in the course have been submitted and processed.

IV. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY (from Dr. David Sherbino)

A. CLASSICS OF DEVOTION

These are essential works which all serious devotees should read and read again.


1981.


Lewis, C.S. *George MacDonald – an Anthology*. Collins.


*The Confessions of St Augustine*. There are various editions such as John K. Ryan, Image Books, 1960, as F.J. Sheed, Sheed and Ward, 1943. Dramatic, modern translations have been made by Sherwood Wirts and Ray J Defarri.


**B. HISTORICAL SURVEYS OF SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS**


Buther, Dom Cuthbert. *Western Mysticism, neglected chapters in the history of religion*. 

January 2016
Constable, 1927.


C. ANTHOLOGIES OF SPIRITUAL WRITINGS


**Studies in the Spirituality and Theology of Individuals**


Bordeaux, Henri. *Saint Francis de Sales: Theologian of Love*. Langmans, Green, 1929. (A frank book of his human qualities and short-comings, both of which qualified him to advise others)

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo*. Faber and Faber, 1967. (a brilliant and incisive biography written in a secular frame)

Burnaby, John. *Amor Dei*. 1938. (a classic on Augustine's love of God)

Chesterton, G.K. *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*. New York, NY: Image, 1956. (a witty, shrewd study that captures the spirit of Aquinas)


Goudge, Elizabeth. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959. (there are numerous, larger and more authoritative studies of Francis, but none are written more sympathetically and of personal application than this)

Hoffman, Bengt R. *Luther and the Mystics*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1976. (a rather dull study, re-examining Luther’s spiritual experience and his relationship to the mystics, but there is little else available on this lively, human being)

coherent theological study on this unknown author, with a preface by Thomas Merton on the nature and dangers of mysticism)


Sanders, E.K. *Fenelon*. Langmans, Green, 1901. (a factual study of Fenelon, his friends and enemies, 1661-1715)


**D. SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

Diverse theological traditions have provided the Christian with a rich range of perspectives. These are sub-divided to help the reader seek what is needed personally, and bracketed to explain their ecclesiastical bias.

**General**


Bruce, A.B. *The Training of the Twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1963. (Free Presbyterian)


McNeile, A.H. *Devotion and Discipleship*. Heffer, 1936. (Anglican Theologian)


**Specific Disciplines**

**I. Love, Vulnerability and Compassion**


Kelsey, Martin T. *Caring. How can we love one another?* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981. (R.C. priest and counselor)


**II. Discernment, Prudence and Charity**


von Hildebrand, Dietrich. *In Defense of Purity*. Helicon, 1930. (R.C. ethicist)

**III. Freedom, Simplicity and Poverty of Spirit**


IV. Humility


V. Vowed Life and Devotion


VI. Fasting


VII. Wonder and Worship

Brunner, Peter. *Worship - the Name of Jesus*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1968. (Lutheran theologian)


VIII. Meditation and Prayer

There are innumerable books on this subject (see my other bibliography on Prayer) so this is highly selective.


Herman, E. *Creative Prayer*. London, UK: James Clarke, 1722. (wife of pastor)


E. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION


Edwards, Tilden H. *Spiritual Friend, Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist


**F. OTHER EDIFYING BOOKS ON DIVINE TOPICS**


Selye, Hans. *The Stress of Life*. Toronto, ON: McGraw Hill, 1956. (medical study that is a classic on this subject)


G. ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY


Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 1996.


**A GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL READING (from Dr. David Sherbino)**

by J.M. Houston

Our lives are both private and public. But the pressures of our culture are to believe the public activities, duties and responsibilities are more important. Function then becomes more valued than being. Meanwhile, our souls get starved, and the inner person within us cries out for fulfillment of deeper needs. We long for a deeper, more real spiritual life. For we sense we are unauthentic when we are only professors and promoters in the shallows of life. We know that we must nourish this drive to know God.

This is the purpose of this reading list, not as a comprehensive list you must read, master and know, to have a "how-to kit for spirituality," but as suggestive of what might introduce you to the classics of faith and devotion, and to other helpful material. There is, however, an art in devotional reading that is not exegetical, not informational, nor literary in its emphasis. For spiritual reading is essentially formative of the soul before God. We need then to read this devotional literature in such a way that it helps us be inspired and in tune with God, in "[the
inner man." It is writing which turns us heavenward, and is formative of our character in Christ.

Curiously, however, in spite of the spate of new books and reprints of this spiritual literature, there is little guidance offered how the art of spiritual reading can and should be cultivated. The following guidelines are suggested to help you focus on this art.

First Guideline

Spiritual reading requires a primary emphasis on the devotional use of Scripture, so not allow the excitement of entering into devotional literature detract you from the priority you give to Bible study and meditation on the Scriptures. For remember, the Scriptures are the canon of the devotion of God's people, who saw the Scriptures as God's revelation, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

Devotional reading by theological students is made difficult by the admixture of methods used. This mixture is inevitable, and not bad, provided we slowly begin to allow the text to speak to us personally, rather than being detached from it as abstraction, more information or more hypothetical knowledge.

Second Guideline

Growing in the art of devotional reading is less a matter of techniques and more a matter of attitudes of heart. It is like developing "a sixth sense," of reading interiorly, as distinct from reading to others, informing them or teaching them. So the changed attitude is from seeking information and know how, to being inspired and transformed. Devotional reading is more dwelling on meanings about life. The former looks for transparency, and the latter is content to contemplate mysteries. Again, informational reading is more dialectical and comparative, where logic is important. But devotional reading is more docile and receptive, rather than critical and comparative.

Again informational reading tends toward being dissective, taking data to pieces by analysis, in order to increase erudition. But devotional reading is more living and dynamic, seeking to relate the material given into living situations. For this reason, devotional reading is more personal, allowing the reader to interpret its insights in such personal forms of assimilation as a spiritual journal and the practice of prayer. In these ways, the effects of interior reading are personalized and deepened, to affect and shape character, nourish the soul, and permeate the whole of one's life.

Third Guideline

Devotional reading is an art gained by facilitating conditions and circumstances, rather than by cognitive techniques. It is God's grace which alone prompts us to have any desires for God, and therefore any thirst for spiritual literature. Since we cannot invent, create or refashion "facilitating conditions" for our own sanctity, or become better listeners to God's guiding Word, "facilitating conditions and circumstances" are those which help remove obstacles to the action of grace.
In the history of the Church, as well as in the history of the soul, we experience "the desert" as such a facilitating condition. We feel "the desert within" of loneliness, "the desert outside" of relationships. Desert silence and solitude may be an experience. We re-learn the priorities and essentials of life in the spiritual experiences of the desert. We discover new dimensions there of self-knowledge. We need patience, fortitude, and acceptance of desert suffering. We discover dependence and need of God in new ways. There, we reverse the worldly values of self-reliance towards dependence upon God, the dynamic of spiritual life.

A re-awakening of the consciousness of indwelling sin in the believer, and a sensitivity to the reality of Satan also drive us to our knees. We discover the great Puritan classics on the pathology of the heart, its deceptions, its hiddenness, its inaccessibility to our control. Temptation is a constant reality, requires a more watchfulness, alerted by the writings of those experiences in its subtleties. Repentance becomes a lived reality that needs support and comfort.

A desire to re-set our course in life, after failure and dishonesty with our soul, intensifies our search to learn how others have done so. Spiritual restoration is not seen as a return to the status quo, but as a radical change in direction into unknown territory, where we can walk "more by faith than by sight." Seeing life with deeper meaning calls for much greater spiritual resources than we ever imagined previously we would need.

Such deeper surrender to the will and purpose of God, after the defeat of self-will, creates longing in the soul for inner peace, spiritual gentleness, serenity, and spiritual refreshment. A deeper understanding and experience of the love of God, creates a desire to build up covenant relations in friendships that embody the reality of God in social relationships. Moved by God's grace and compassion, we look below the marred and shattered forms of human relations, to the potentials of redemption.

Fourth Guideline

Devotional reading has its own pace of assimilation, just as the speedy insights of the mind, or the transformation of thought into action, or the assimilation of deed into character, have their relative paces. The motion toward Godliness is the slowest pace of human actions. Inauthenticity occurs when we move too fast, inappropriate to the nature of the transformation. Devotional reading needs its own time that is not determined by the academic calendar nor the impatience we have for "instant results." Spiritual classics cannot be read in one evening, like detective novels. Such slow motion requires a regular habit of fixed times for such devotional reading, and an unhurried leisure to learn the disciplines of meditation and contemplation.

Devotional reading requires also space in our lives. Literally, this may lead to the habit of a particular environment being developed - one spot in our room that locates an "altar" of devotion. Physically, it may require comfort, a particular chair, an accustomed posture, where we learn most readily to relax, and where the atmosphere is made for such exercises of devotion. Spaces are associated by activities, such as the library where we study, the lounge where we talk, the class-room where we learn. Devotional reading requires a quiet spot, habitually frequented in solitude.
Fifth Guideline

Choose the work you want to read devotionally carefully for the benefit of your own soul. Choose it then, possibly with the advice of others. Keep in mind that the book should be chosen to open the doors of perception for you in terms of new as well as existing needs and desires. An imitation of others may not be the best reason for your choice. Because its purpose is to nurture the unique conditions of your own life, individual choice is important. At the same time, bear in mind books we reject today may be re-discoveries later because we are then ready for their insight.

Personal adoption of a book is also helped by marking the text. This may record our first reactions to what we read, of approval, of help, or of questioning and rejection. It may also help to keep a spiritual journal which we feed with quotations reflected upon and assimilated, from the text. Such a reflective notebook may record the immediate reactions to the text, the state of mind we were in when we read a passage, as well as to duties faithfully performed as a response to what we read. Recordings of ordinary feelings and happenings set within the framework of the devotional readings keep the realities of ordinary life before us. Writing down our thoughts on the text are more permanently retained and remembered, as well as making the meaning of the message clearer and available to us. This written reflection becomes a further means of nurturing our spiritual life. On re-reading our notes later, we may see an over-confidence, or self-centeredness, or dogmatism, or judgmental attitude on our part, of which we were previously unconscious, but have now recognized to be in need of correction.

Sixth Guideline

Use your choice of the spiritual classics for the exercise of true ecumenicity. Range widely and without prejudice over the classics of devotion, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. From our perspective of history and cultural change, we can read more appreciatively of other traditions. Their encapsulation within their own culture helps us also see how likely we are entrapped by our culture too.

Do not let the great merits of the Reformation block your view of the past, so that you think there is nothing between the New Testament and 1520 worth reading! Enjoy richly the devotions of the patristic, medieval, modern and contemporary periods alike. Discover the communion of saints, as a living reality in all periods of history. Do not let modernity make you temporarily parochial.

Discern the spirits wisely, by penetrating to the presuppositions and assumptions of theological stance, of your writers. Learn to distinguish false from valid mysticism.

Seventh Guideline

Enjoy fellowship with soul-friends, so that you mutually benefit in a group, a shared reading program. Such a group may meet every three or four weeks to hear and discuss books reviewed in turn, by members of the group. Discernment and shared enrichment are thereby exercised together. Insights may be shared of a more personal nature as confidentiality is
developed. Differing perspectives may correct or add to individual impressions. The common goal of growing in Christ is emphasized as a corporate maturity that excludes no one in the group.

Eighth Guideline

Recognize that spiritual reading meets with obstacles to distract, discourage, or dissuade us from persistence in our reading. Often we do not see clearly enough what the obstacles are, other than that we seem to lose interest or get distracted easily by other things.

A first obstacle to remove is the time-bound and cultural or theological perspective of what we are reading. The imagery of a book, like Teresa's Interior Castle or Bunyan's Holy War, is bound to a particular time and culture. Nevertheless, the truths and insights contained in such works are timeless. The message of surrender and desire in the one book, or of watchfulness in temptation in the other are timeless. Try not to be prejudiced with such labels as "old fashioned," "relevant for today," "traditional" or even "classic."

We may dislike allegory, or be impatient with the turgid, heavy style of a sermon. Or we may be entranced so much by the romantic imager that we lose sight of the truth being conveyed. For being enraptured, just as much as being turned off, we may remain spectators, not really involved spiritually and personally in the text, and its meaning to us. We remain connoisseurs with no real personal involvement. Many works of scholars are just doing literary criticism with no spiritual food for the soul.

A third obstacle is taking this further into the scholastic games played with the text: such as one-up-manship, where we create novelty of interpretation; or name-dropping, when we review all that everyone else has said about the text; or negative listening, where we ignore all that is said positively and only draw attention to what is not said, and what we think should be said. Such reading is shallow, in spite or apparent erudition, and rejects the docility and abiding in the test which we have already described as necessary for devotional reading.

A fourth obstacle is the ensuing despondency when we compare our state negatively and unfavorably with the spiritual condition of the writer. We can feel so miserable about our sinful, inconsistent weak condition spiritually that we are tempted to feel we should ignore such spiritual books that show us up so badly. Yet we learn precisely in this way that God can do nothing with our self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and self-respect. Acceptance of our limitations, repentance, and pleas for redemption from God, these are the basis for spiritual growth.

Finally, discouragement will rear its ugly head, even when there are signs all around us of encouragement and blessing. Patience with God's ways, trust in God's control of our circumstances, persistence when spiritual exercises seem fruitless, are all needed. The seed has to die, to bear much fruit. Whether then, God leads us into the desert or into the garden in our devotional reading, let us follow Him. Accept mortification, as much as blessing, in your spiritual reading.

Ninth Guideline
Seek a balance in your reading, both between modern and ancient, as well as in the range of your affections being nourished and strengthened by good reading. Remember contemporary literature is untried, lacks vintage, and often reflects the fads of the market place. As C.S. Lewis has said:

A new book is still on trial, and the amateur is not in a position to judge it... The only safety is to have a standard of plain, central Christianity ("mere Christianity" as Baxter called it), which puts the controversies of the moment in their proper perspective. Such a standard can only be acquired from old books. It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should read an old one to every three new ones. "On the Reading of Old Books," God in the Dock, edit. by Walter Hooper, Eerdmans, 1970).

Examine also the need of balanced reading. In this same essay, Lewis gives us his preferences. Match, he argues, the somewhat "astringent" Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis, with the "joyous" Centuries of Meditations by Thomas Traherne. Perhaps sandwich in between them the anonymously written Theologia Germanica which Luther loved. For Lewis, frequent companions were Richard Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, George Herbert's poems, The Temple, William Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, and Francis de Sales' Introduction to the Devout Life. Some books, once read may build important foundations, such as Boethius' On the Consolations of Philosophy, which gave Lewis a firm awareness of the solidity of eternity that was more than measureless time. For every young enquirer or convert, Augustine's Confessions were Lewis' choice in inspiring the reality of the soul's relationship before God. However, Lewis' boon companions were G.K. Chesterton as his intellectual mentor on the sanity of the Christian faith, and George MacDonald who fed his imagination with true devotion.

Lewis, however, would have us not slavishly imitate his fancies, but encourage us to find devotion in heavy theological stuff as well as theology in the lived experiences of simple things. He made friends with books in the whole range of affections we need to develop and exercise before God. Today, we tend to suffer from illiteracy of too much rapid, superficial reading - or rather mere glancing at books. Digestion, assimilation and then a life's time companionship with a book is a good test to see whether it is really a classic of faith and devotion, or not.