

North Park Theological Seminary
SPFM 7190: What Loss Can Teach Us
September 11-November 5, 2021
One credit

Faculty

Beth Taulman Miller
Adjunct Professor
btmiller@northpark.edu

Course Description

God truly wastes nothing and will often steward the losses that come our way to invite us into more deeply knowing ourselves and Divine Love. Yet often when we experience loss, we opt to contort ourselves around the pain rather than allowing it to transform us. Typically we want to shut pain down in the fastest way possible -- and most of us have many effective ways of doing so. But what if our good, compassionate God longs for each of us to be on the formational journey towards our true self and offers us an "on ramp" towards that experience through our pain? This course offers an opportunity to consider that our losses (whatever their shape, size, or origin) most often come with an invitation for our spiritual and emotional formation.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Reflect on the perspective that loss has wisdom to offer and can be spiritually and emotionally formative
2. Identify and explore what lessons loss can teach you, your congregation, and your community
3. Engage in spiritual practices that help you move through loss

Course readings:

Text: Miller, Beth Taulman. *What Loss Can Teach Us: A Sacred Pathway for Growth and Healing*. Nashville: The Upper Room, 2021

Other readings, podcasts, videos, and course materials represent diverse perspectives whose authors are from a variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Grading

This class is pass/fail. All the following requirements must be completed satisfactorily to pass the class.

Requirements:

The requirements for each week are explained below. Please note that the majority of the reading is towards the front end of the class because the scheduled times for the class to meet fall in the earlier part of the semester. **And the first week has several assignments before you come to class on 9/11 so please give yourself time to attend to those before class.**

1. **Class attendance and promptness** as well as active participation in discussion are normative expectations. **You must attend the entirety of the days your class meets to earn the grade of Pass.**

2. Each week has assignments for reading, posting, viewing, and often journaling. The journaling will never be viewed by anyone but you. However, it's expected that your journal reflections will be drawn upon as you write your final reflective paper.

3. Confidentiality: a signed "NPTS Confidentiality Statement" must be on file. This form will be provided. Discussion in class and group is protected under this statement.

C. Requirements due **AFTER** the final Zoom session (which meets 11/5)

1. Final Integrative Paper: Due November 13

In 5 pages (12 font, double spaced) write an integrative paper using required readings/viewings, class discussions and experiences from the class, and your journal entries written during class. All quotes by authors, the instructor and the Bible must be noted and cited (see below in Submission Details). Please note your journal entries with the date they were first written with a footnote or parenthetically. Use the following as a *guide* to your writing:

- The class is organized around the theme of exploring how loss can be spiritually and emotionally formative, specifically in the area of grieving well, seeing God as Midwife, understanding our belovedness, exploring the need for healthy anger, embracing a non-dual lens in life, living in healthy community, forgiveness, shedding shame, welcoming what is, embracing the body, and understanding your Larger story. Discuss which of these "lessons" you found most relevant to you personally at this point in time and why.
- In various ways we discussed the belief that loss has wisdom embedded in it. How are you learning to create space and time to listen for what it can teach you?
- Describe your experience of engaging perspectives different than your own within the class and any ways this influenced your experience of God. Here you will integrate readings, discussions, and class experiences.
- Describe a new way (or ways) you might engage grief and loss.
- As you engage God as Midwife, what do you suppose God is wanting to bring forth in you?
- Describe any questions raised during the class which you continue to ponder.
- Cite all direct and indirect references used in your paper including your personal journal notes taken throughout during the class.

2. Two sessions of Spiritual Direction

- Each student will participate in two sessions with your seminary spiritual director. This is the person with whom you met in Vocational Excellence. You are responsible for contacting your director and scheduling those sessions. Spiritual Direction is commonly a monthly meeting. Please keep this in mind when scheduling. These sessions must be completed **by Nov 16th**.
- If you have yet to complete Vocational Excellence and have not been assigned a spiritual director, contact Sue Braun suebraun4@gmail.com who will help connect you to a director.
- If it seems appropriate, use these sessions to explore what loss is teaching you in your own life.
- Report on completion by November 30th to instructor.

Submission Details for Book Reflection and Integrative Reflection:

SAVE as: LastNameFirstName 7190 (ex.SmithKiera7190))

Send as a WORD doc.

Use Spell Check. Do not submit with colored markings from uncorrected document

Use parenthetical referencing: Speaker: (Thompson, April 10, 2020); Book: (Miller, 2021, 37)

Submit paper to bmiller@northpark.edu

See “Academic Honesty” below.

Title IX: Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against, or involved in sexual violence should contact the Seminary Dean of Students and Community Life ((773) 244-6222) or Dean of Students (773-244-5565) or Director of Human Resources (773-244-5599) for information about campus resources and support services, including confidential counseling services.

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

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

<http://www.northpark.edu/Campus-Life-and-Services/Safe-Community>

Disabilities Accommodations

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the program's office (773-244-5619). Please do so as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely manner. Please review the following website:

<http://www.northpark.edu/ada>

Academic Honesty

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

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

For further information on this subject you may refer to the Academic Dishonesty section of the University’s online catalog.

Grading:

This class is Pass/Fail based on participation and completing **all** course requirements. In order to pass students must satisfactorily complete assignments within the allotted time frame unless they have received **prior** approval for an extension from the professor. If you miss more than 3 weeks of posting (which means either neglecting to post OR posting late without having requested prior approval from the professor), you will not pass this course.

Confidentiality:

This is a spiritual formation course and all personal information shared in class discussion is confidential and should not be shared with anyone. Students who have not done so for prior NPTS spiritual formation classes should read and sign the confidentiality agreement.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 – September 6-11

Module One: Avoiding a Second Death

- **Watch** – The welcome video from the instructor
- **Connect** – schedule 15-minute conversation with instructor via email at bmiller@northpark.edu. Slots available the week before class begins starting August 30 through September 10
- **Post** – Introduction in your small group by Thursday, 9/9, with the prompt: *What do you suppose it looks like to be a good steward of your pain?*
- **Read** – *What Loss Can Teach Us (WLCTU)*: Intro and chapters 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8
- **Write** – a 300 word personal essay (no more) that you'll share in a small group in class on 9/11. See prompts below.
- **Attend**: Class on 9/11 via Zoom from 10am-6pm Central Time/8am-4pm Pacific Time

Personal Narrative – bring to first class September 11 (via Zoom)

Write a 300-word personal narrative about loss from one’s own life story to be shared in listening groups during class, responding to **one** of the prompts below. Sharing these narratives will be part of our group discussion on September 11.

- Describe a situation in which you experienced someone grieving well. What about it seemed healthy to you?
- Describe an early memory of grief and loss and the impact that had on you.
- For better or for worse, directly or indirectly, who/what taught you about grief?
- Describe a loss that might not be typically recognized as “grief worthy” but left you feeling grieved, nonetheless.
- Describe a loss experienced in your family or church and how the family or church **system** responded.

Week 2 – September 12-18

Module Two: Strangely Wrapped Gifts

- **Read** – *What Loss Can Teach Us*: chapters 3, 5, 9, and 10
- **Read**: Parker Palmer “On Staying at the Table”
<https://www.sixeight.org/resources/blog/staying-table-spirituality-community>
- **Post** – *What are you percolating on from chapters 3, 5, 9 or 10 from WLCTU or the Parker Palmer essay?* Post by Wednesday, and respond to a fellow student by Friday
- **Journal a response to the following:**
 - What’s the narrative you live by? The tape you listen to (chapter 3, WLCTU)
 - What kind of host are you for yourself? For others (chapter 5)
 - Who in your life has listened to you well?
 - How does the fact that Jesus came as a bodied person impact how you see your own body?
- **Report via email to the instructor** who your spiritual director will be and when you’ll meet

Week 3 – September 19-25

Ignite Cohort will meet in person this week so no additional assignments for that cohort

Chicago group:

- **Engage** the spiritual practice of creating a healing sanctuary (pages 28-30). Spend some time journaling about a loss you're facing with the questions of
- **Review** chapter 8 in WLCTU, "Take Off That Ugly Sweater."
- Then **View** – Webinar with Curt Thompson: "Redeeming Shame: Believing a Truer Narrative" – <https://www.ttf.org/?portfolio=curt-thompson-online> (approximately 52 minutes)
- **Journal**:
 - How do you suppose shame shows up in your life?
 - In what ways did you experience shame growing up?
 - Do you suppose you've shamed someone out of a place of self-righteousness?
 - Are you wearing a cloak of shame, an "ugly sweater"? Who in your life can help you take that off?

Week 4 – September 26-October 2

- **View** – The sermon "Good Grief" by Rev. Jacqui Lewis <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp6dIIVzzgk> (approximately 25 min)
- **Journal** about a grief you haven't yet been willing to look at or spend much time with (as she references).
- **Engage** one of the following spiritual practices (as described in WLCTU) and then post in your group about your experience by Wednesday. Respond to a fellow group member by Friday.
 - Write your own lament (pages 157-158)
 - Engage a visceral lament (pages 87-88; pages 158-159)
 - Create a grief playlist (from Appendix C, page 160-161)
 - Choose and watch a movie from Appendix D

Week 5 – October 3-9

Chicago Group: Students meeting at North Park will meet in person this week on Saturday October 9 so no additional assignments for you. Be sure you are prepared for class on Saturday with all of your reading (all chapters but 2 and 11 of WLCTU and the Parker Palmer Essay)

Ignite Cohort:

- **Engage** the spiritual practice of creating a healing sanctuary (pages 28-30, WLCTU). Spend some time journaling about a loss you're facing with the questions on page 29.
- **Review** chapter 8 in WLCTU, "Take Off That Ugly Sweater."
- Then **View** – Webinar with Curt Thompson: "Redeeming Shame: Believing a Truer Narrative" – <https://www.ttf.org/?portfolio=curt-thompson-online> (approximately 52 minutes)

October 10-16

- **Review** chapter 10 of WLCTU ("Embracing the Body")
- **Listen** to the podcast On Being with Krista Tippett: <https://onbeing.org/programs/bessel-van-der-kolk-how-trauma-lodges-in-the-body/>
- **Watch and partake** in: Yoga for Grief https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEVn59U2_LY
- **Post** in Canvas (by Wednesday) about your experience with the above; By Friday, post a response to a fellow student.

Week 7 October 17-23 (Reading Week)

Week 8 October 24-30

Module Three: A Gracious Invitation

- **Read:** chapters 2 (God as Midwife) and 11 (The Larger Story) from WLCTU
- After you have read chapters 2 and 11, **Watch:** Mirabai Starr's talk: "Loss and Longing: Grief as a Spiritual Path" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX-T6qHEPaU> (about 45 minutes).
- **Post:** (by Wednesday) how her talk intersects with we have read/discussed thus far. Respond to a group member by Friday

Journal:

- What are some "why" questions you've wanted to ask God?
- If you're willing to transition to "what" questions with God, what are those questions? (ex: what are you wanting to form and shape in me? What are you surfacing? What are my options for how I want to respond?)

- If you are able to get your heart and mind around the idea that God is more in the business of midwifery than rescuing, what do you suppose God is wanting to birth in you?

Week 9 October 31-November 6

- Listen to an episode of On Being with Krista Tippett entitled “The Losses We Grow Into”. This link will take you to the podcast or the transcript that you can read. https://engage.onbeing.org/20210814_the_pause
- Engage the practice of dialogue journaling (page 37-38). Post your response to that experience by Wednesday. Respond to a group member by Friday
- Final class meets on Friday evening Nov 6 via Zoom, from 6-8pm central.

November 12: Final Integrative paper due

At the beginning of the syllabus are the requirements for the final integration paper. A few other guidelines:

Reflection papers should be a dialogue between you and the class material, not a report. Discuss the thoughts and feelings that this material evokes as well as any issues that it raises for you personally.

Talking about issues for people in general or seminary students in particular is not appropriate for an integrative reflection. Rather you should reflect on your own personal experience as your life has interfaced with the material of class this semester. One way to tell that you are doing this is your use of pronouns. A reflection paper should use “I” language rather than talk about others. The bottom line for this paper: Drawing from the content and experiences in this class, what are you coming to see that loss can teach you?

Suggested additional reading:

A Grace Disguised, Jerry Sittser

When the Heart Waits, Sue Monk Kidd

Everything Belongs, Richard Rohr

Tatoos on the Heart, Gregory Boyle

