

SPFM 7190: Syllabus for What Loss Can Teach Us
North Park Theological Seminary
Summer 2024, One credit, Intensive Hybrid
In-person classes June 13, 14 6-9pm; June 15 9am-5pm

Faculty

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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:

Texts:

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

Weeler, Francis. *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*. Berkely: North Atlantic Books, 2015

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

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.

1. Each week has assignments for reading, posting, viewing, and/or 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.
2. 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.
3. Requirements due AFTER the final Zoom session (**which meets on Tuesday June 25 from 7-9:00pm Central Time**) and the assignments for week 7.

A. Final Integrative Paper: **Due Tuesday, July 9, 2024**

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? What wisdom are you finding in your losses?

- 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.

B. 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 30th.
- 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 Integrative Reflection paper:

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 – May 20-25

- **Read** *What Loss Can Teach Us*, Introduction through the end of chapter 6
- **View** – The sermon “[Good Grief](#)” by Rev. Jacqui Lewis (approximately 25 min). The link is also available in Modules, Week 5 Overview
- **Journal** about a loss you haven't yet been willing/ready/able to look at or spend much time with as she references in her sermon. To help facilitate your process, use the spiritual practice of creating a healing sanctuary (pages 28-30 in WLCTU). (*You'll never be asked to share your journaling with anyone else. It will be helpful to reference your journaling in your final reflection paper*).
- **Post** your response to the following by Wednesday: *What do you suppose it looks like to be a good steward of your pain?* **Respond** to a classmate by Friday
- **Email:** Email me to set up a time for us to meet for 15-20 minutes next week. Slots are available Wednesday May 29 from 10am-5pm and Thursday May 30 from noon-5pm CST. Let me know what day/time frame would work for you. I'll look forward to meeting each of you before we gather in person in a few weeks. My email is btmiller@northpark.edu
- **Note:** I am out of town this week, but I will read your posts and emails upon my return by Monday 5/27

Week 2: May 27-June 1

- **Read** – *What Loss Can Teach Us*: chapters 7-11
- **Post your response to the following by Wednesday:** *What concepts/paradigms are you percolating on from *What Loss Can Teach Us*? What's standing out to you?* **Respond** to a classmate by Friday.
- **Connect** – if you haven't already, set up a time for us to have a 15 minute 1x1 this Wednesday 5/29 or Thursday 5/30 by emailing me at btmiller@northpark.edu.

Week 3 – June 3-June 8

- **Read** chapters 1-4 of *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* by Francis Weller
- **Post** your response to the following by Wednesday: *What concepts/paradigms are you percolating on from Weller's book? What's standing out to you?* **Respond** to a classmate by Friday

- **Report** via email to the instructor who your spiritual director will be and when you'll meet
- **Write:** a 300-word (no more) 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 class time next week.

- 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 4: June 10-15

- **Attend** class on **Thursday 6/10 from 6-9pm; Friday 6/10 from 6-9pm and Saturday 6/11 from 9-5pm**
- Bring with you your copy of *WLCTU, The Wild Edge of Sorrow* and your personal narrative to share

Week 5 – June 17-22

1. **View** – Webinar with Curt Thompson: "Redeeming Shame: Believing a Truer [Narrative](#)" — (approximately 52 minutes).
2. **Journal:**
 - What do you suppose is the connection between grief/loss and shame?
 - How do you suppose shame shows up in your life?
 - In what ways did you experience shame growing up?
 - What are your "tells" for when shame gets triggered in you? What happens in your body?
 - When you experience shame, who are you likely to "puff up against"? When are you likely to isolate in the face of shame? When are you most likely to start hustling in the face of shame? And what helps you stay in your sacred ground, building shame resilience?
 - Are you wearing a cloak of shame, an "ugly sweater" about something currently? Who in your life can help you take that off?
3. **Engage** one of the following spiritual practices (as described in *WLCTU*):

- Write your own lament (pages 157-158)
- Engage in a Visceral Lament (pages 87-88; pages 158-159)
- Create a Grief Playlist (From Appendix C, pages 160-161)
- Choose and watch a movie from Appendix D

4. Post about what stood out to you about the Curt Thompson webinar AND your experience with the spiritual practices by Wednesday. **Respond** to a classmate by Friday.

Week 6 – June 24-29

1. **Listen** to the podcast On Being with Krista Tippett interviewing Bessel van der Kolk : [“How Trauma Lodges in the Body”](#)
2. **Watch and participate** in: [Yoga for Grief with Adriene](#) (about 25 minutes)
3. **Post** (by Wednesday) about what stood out to you about the Bessel van der Kolk interview **and** your experience with yoga; By Friday, post a response to a fellow student.
4. **Final Session of Class via Zoom: Tuesday June 25 from 7-9PM**

Week 7- July 1-6

1. **Watch:** Mirabai Starr’s talk: [“Loss and Longing: Grief as a Spiritual Path”](#) (about 45 minutes).
2. **Listen:** Barbara Brown Taylor: **Life after Dark** on the Kate Bowler podcast (about 30 minutes) [Kate Bowler and Barbara Brown Taylor: Life After Dark](#)
3. **Post:** (by Wednesday) how **each** of these intersect with we have read/discussed thus far. Respond to a group member by Friday

4. 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?
- How are you coming to understand the “dark” differently?

Week 8: July 8-12

Final paper due July 9th

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

Tattoos on the Heart, Gregory Boyle

Strong Like Water, Aundi Kolber