Beyond Suffering: Advanced Theological Studies  
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Email: kmcreynolds@joniandfriends.org

**Course Description:**

How could a good and loving God allow such evil and suffering: war, poverty, famine, and starvation? People with disabilities suffer from the evils of the world more than many other people groups. How could God allow this to happen to the most vulnerable? Considered one of the largest underrepresented groups, there are over 1 billion people worldwide who live with some kinds of disability (roughly 12% of the world’s population). It is also one of the largest underrepresented groups in the church. This is most unfortunate because people affected by disability have much to teach us about spiritual transformation. Their specific plight—their sufferings both personally and publically—mirror the human condition and Christian journey in many unique ways.

The purpose of this course is to explore the problem of evil in general and then to examine ways in which the disability community provides the global church with a dynamic model of spiritual transformation. The serious student will take away from this course not only a deeper understanding of the disability community and the church’s obligation to reach out to those who are most vulnerable, but he/she will also learn to embrace their own brokenness in a whole new way. This course will benefit those who are majoring in biblical studies, education, counseling, human services, business, any health-related field, or intercultural studies.

**GORDON-CONWELL MISSION:**

**Article 3: To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry.** The Church and the seminary share the goal of seeing knowledge, skills and experience integrated in the person who ministers. Through the courses and the practica/internships, a combination of careful training and supervised experience in counseling ministries are pedagogical practices essential to achieving that goal.

**RELATIONSHIP TO THE CURRICULUM:**

Beyond Suffering is an elective both in the MACC and MDiv degree programs. It builds upon core curriculum of these two degree programs in the following ways:
1. The course reinforces content from other core Bible and theology course requirements, emphasizing doctrines such as a theology of suffering.

2. It offers students an opportunity to engage in biblical interpretation, particularly the passages that address the nature and etiology of physical disability and other results of living in a Fallen world.

3. In addition to other ministerial electives, counseling courses, counseling practica and internships and mentored ministry rotations, this course provides practical knowledge and skills regarding ministry to an underserved populations.

**Course Objectives:**

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

**Cognitive Objectives:**

1) Identify and define some of the most prominent physical and intellectual disabilities.

2) Interpret and explain some of the major biblical passages which address disability issues.

3) Understand and describe Christianity as a knowledge tradition which reflects the ways things really are.

4) Explain some primary historical perspectives on the image of God and disabilities.

5) Identify and explain some of the major bioethical issues which affect people with disabilities.

6) Understand the relationship between Christianity and human services.

**Affective Objectives:**

1) Move to embrace your own sufferings as a way of spiritual transformation.

2) Grow to appreciate all persons with disabilities, to view them with dignity, and to engage them as equally valuable to the Body of Christ.

3) Desire to stand for justice in order to correct the wrongs that society causes or allows to happen to those affected by disabilities.

**Behavioral Objectives:**

1) Develop an integrated biblical worldview of suffering, disability, & your discipline.
2) Put together a model that facilitates the full inclusion of people with disabilities into the life of the church.

3) Actively seek to bring people with disabilities into the Church in accordance with the "Luke 14 Mandate."

**Required Texts:**


4) *The Holy Bible* (Select Scriptures: No Paraphrase Please)

**Course Requirements:**

**The Beyond Suffering Study Guide Assignments: (SG)**

**(SG) 1. The Exegetical Project**

The Scriptures are God's instrument to equip his people for every work of ministry he calls them to (2 Tim. 3.16-17). In this paper, the student will discuss a topic from one of the four modules, relating their study of a text to that topic. The goal of this assignment is to allow students to experience Scripture's ability to impact their lives and ministries in a powerful way.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

The purpose of this assignment is to give students an opportunity to do a detailed study of a major passage of Scripture. The overall objective is to enable students to understand a biblical text in its original context. It is important that they learn how to exegete (explain, interpret) Scripture for themselves and for others.

This is a Bible study project, and, in order to do exegesis, the student must be committed to understand the meaning of the passage in its own setting. Once they know what it meant, they can then draw out principles that apply to all of us, and then relate those principles to life. The following simple three-step process can be given with the assignment to guide students in their personal study of the Bible passage:

1. What was God saying to the people in the text's original situation?
2. What principle (s) does the text teach that is true for all people everywhere, including today?
3. What is the Holy Spirit asking me to do with this principle here, today, in my life and ministry?

Once students have answered these questions in their personal study, they are ready to explain their insights for their writing assignment. The leader should give a sample outline, along with the criteria for the paper, is given in each assignment.

Sample Outline for Exegetical Project and Paper Criteria

1. List what you believe is the main idea of your selected text.
2. Summarize the meaning of the passage. You may do this in two or three paragraphs or by writing a verse-by-verse commentary.
3. Outline one to three key principles or insights this text provides concerning some aspect of suffering and/or disability and/or disability ministry and/or God’s character.
4. Tell how one or more of the principles may relate to one or more of the following:

   1. Your personal walk with Christ.
   2. Your life and ministry in your church.
   3. Situations or challenges related to suffering and/or disability.

As a reference, please feel free to read the commentaries or Bible dictionaries and integrate insights from them into your work. Make sure that you give credit to whom credit is due if you borrow or build upon someone else’s insights. Use references, footnotes, or endnotes. You must be consistent with whatever form of citation you use.

Make sure that your exegetical paper meets the following criteria:

1. It is well written or typed.
2. It is turned in on time.
3. It is 5-6 pages in length for graduate level work.
4. It follows the outline given above, clearly laid out for the reader to follow.
5. It shows how the passage relates to disability ministry.

All you need to show in this paper is that you studied the passage, summarized its meaning, drew out a few key principles from it, and related them to your own life and disability ministry.

(SG) 2. The Ministry Project

This course requires that students gain hands-on experience by participating in some aspect of disability ministry.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION
A Ministry Project is an assignment that requires students to spend eight hours gaining some practical experience in disability ministry.

You can do one of the following:

1) Visit, observe and interact with a church disability ministry.
2) Evaluate and assess the interest and need for a disability ministry in your home church if one does not exist.
3) Interview an individual who works in a disability ministry field.
4) Interview an individual with a disability or family who has a member with a disability. Seek to gracefully listen and learn from their perspective regarding life with a disability.
5) Visit, observe and interact with a disability-related support group.
6) Shadow a Home Health RN, Physical Therapist, or Occupational Therapist.

Write a 5-6 page graduate level paper describing the type of ministry or group you observed, the experience you had, and the lessons you learned. Be sure to include perceptions regarding strengths and weaknesses, as well as, thoughts and ideas for improvement and growth.

(SG) 3. Lesson Reflection Questions

A critical part of the graduate students’ development is the ability to engage the ideas and claims of others respectfully, to read what they have written, and restate their position clearly, whether or not they believe it. Only when the student understands the author’s argument are they in a position to evaluate its truth. The student must strive to understand before he or she seeks to judge.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This course requires students to answer the reflection questions at the end of each lesson. The questions are meant to allow the students to reflect on the main themes of the lesson and on the arguments and thoughts of the particular reading assignments. It is of utmost importance to equip your students to analyze a text, that is, to read it, understand its thesis (main point), articulate its argument in a charitable way (whether they agree with the author or not), and then respond as to why they agree or disagree with the author.

Ancillary Assignments:

1) Read *Why O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*.

Then write an 8-10 page position paper that defines and summarizes your position on God and his use of various types of suffering and disability. If appropriate, please provide an exegesis of various biblical passages related to suffering and disability.
Theological reflection and contemplation of the various author’s thoughts are expected to be conveyed in your paper.

2) Read *The Bible, Disability and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God.*

Please carefully read Yong’s book and write a 3-4 page book review. As you write your book review, remember that your goal is to analyze the text by discussing the strengths and weaknesses—as opposed to summarizing the content. You should also note that it’s best to be as balanced as possible in your analysis. Include both strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, if you think the book was either dreadfully written or ingenious, you should say so!

Here are some other important elements to include in your analysis:

1. **Date/range of the book.** Define the time period that the book covers. Explain if the book progresses chronologically or if it addresses events by topic. If the book addresses one particular subject, explain how that event fits into a broader time scale.

2. **Point of view.** Can you glean from the text if the author has a strong opinion about an event? Is the author objective, or does he express a liberal or conservative viewpoint?

3. **Sources.** Does the author use secondary sources or primary sources, or both? Review the bibliography of the text to see if there is a pattern or any interesting observation about the sources the writer uses. Are the sources all new or all old? That fact could provide interesting insight into the validity of a thesis.

4. **Organization.** Discuss whether the book makes sense the way it is written or if it could have been better organized. Authors put a lot of time into organizing a book and sometimes they just don’t get it right!

5. **Author information.** What do you know about the author? What other books has he/she written? Does the author teach at a university? What training or experience has contributed to the author’s command of the topic?

The last paragraph of your review should contain a summary of your review and a clear statement that conveys your overall opinion. It is common to make a statement such as: This book delivered on its promise because...

- This book was a disappointment because...
- This book contributed significantly to the argument that...
- The book [title] provides the reader with deep insight into...

The book review is an opportunity to give your true opinion about a book. Just remember to back up a strong statement like those above with evidence from the text.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Assignment</th>
<th>Expected Time Commitment (Hours)</th>
<th>Student’s Actual Time On Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BYS Study Guide + Reflections</td>
<td>50 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exegetical Project</td>
<td>20 Hours</td>
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<td>Ministry Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position Paper</td>
<td>30 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Book Review</td>
<td>15 Hours</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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**Course Policies:**

1) **Attendance:** You must attend all classes.

2) **Participation:** Critical thinking and discussion are essential to this class. Also, because you will be interacting with the comments made by fellow classmates, it is vitally important to keep an open mind in this process.

3) **Style of Papers:** Your papers are to be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides in no larger than 12 point lettering. Please staple your paper and number each page!

**Grading:**

- BYS Study Guide, Readings & Reflection Questions 250 points possible
- Exegetical Project                               150 points possible
- Ministry Project                                 150 points possible
- Position Paper                                   150 points possible
- Critical Book Review                             100 points possible

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800 total points possible
Grading Scale:

780-800: A  708-719: C+
760-779: A-  700-707: C
748-759: B+  680-699: C-
740-747: B   668-679: D+
720-739: B-  660-667: D
641-659: D-
640 or below: F

Syllabus Addendum

Academic Standards
Cheating and plagiarism are considered serious breaches of personal and academic integrity. Cheating involves, but is not necessarily limited to, the use of unauthorized sources of information during an examination or the submission of the same (or substantially same) work for credit in two or more courses without the knowledge and consent of the instructors. Plagiarism involves the use of another person’s distinctive ideas or words, whether published or unpublished, and representing them as one’s own instead of giving proper credit to the source. Plagiarism can also involve over dependence on other source material for the scope and substance of one’s writing. Such breaches in academic standards often result in a failing grade as well as other corrective measures. For more information, please consult the Student Handbook.

ADA Policy
The seminary complies with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A student with a qualifying and authenticated disability who is in need of accommodations should petition the seminary in accordance with the stated guidelines in the Student Handbook.

Cancellation of Class
In the event the seminary has to cancel a class meeting (impending storm, professor illness, etc.), the Registration Office will send out an email (via the GCTS email account) notification to all students registered in the respective course. If the cancelation occurs the day of the scheduled meeting, the Registration Office will also attempt to contact students via their primary phone contact on record. The professor will contact the students (via GCTS account) regarding make-up. If a weekend class is cancelled, the class will be made up during the scheduled Make-Up weekend (see the academic calendar for the designated dates). For more info, consult your Student Handbook.
Extension Policy
Arrangements for submission of late work at a date on or before the “last day to submit written work”, as noted on the seminary's Academic Calendar, are made between the student and professor. Formal petition to the Registration Office is not required at this time. This includes arrangements for the rescheduling of final exams.

However, course work (reading and written) to be submitted after the publicized calendar due date, must be approved by the Registration Office. An extension form, available online, must be submitted to the Registration Office prior to the “last day to submit written work.” Requests received after this date will either be denied or incur additional penalty. For a full discussion of this policy, please consult the Student Handbook.

Grades
Grades are posted on line within twenty-four hours of receipt from the professor. Students are expected to check their CAMS student portal in order to access posted grades. Those individuals who need an official grade report issued to a third party should put their request in writing to the Registration Office. Faculty have six weeks from the course work due date to submit a final grade.

Returned Work
Work submitted through Sakai will be returned via Sakai since no hard copies will be turned in. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with any hard copy work submitted if you wish to have it returned.
Course Outline: (Tentative Schedule)

Tuesday January 28 2014:

Module 2: Theological Aspects: Biblical Views of Suffering

9am-12pm
- Overview of the Course
- Stretch Break
- The Old Testament
- The Ways We Suffer
- Discussion

Lunch: 12pm-1:30pm

1:30-5pm
- Luke as a Framework for a Theology of Suffering and Disability
- The Messianic Banquet
- The New Testament
- Stretch Break
- Butterfly Circus: Doorpost.com
- Discussion
**Wednesday January 29 2014:**

**Module 2: Theological Aspects:**
**Suffering & The Sovereignty of God**

9am-12pm

- The Problem of Knowledge, Postmodernism & Biblical Interpretation
- Christianity & Knowledge
- Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge
- Discussion

- **Stretch Break**

- The Question of God Part I: Why Believe? Human Mythology; From Spirits to God

**Lunch 12pm-1:30pm**

1:30pm-5pm

- God’s Sovereignty
- Evil & Suffering
- God’s Problem

- **Stretch Break**

- The Question of God Part II: Promised Land; A Grief Observed; Suffering & Death
- Discussion
Thursday January 30 2014:

Module 1 & 4: Overview of the Problem
Introduction to Bioethics

9am-12pm

- Origins of Contemporary Human Services Patterns Part I
- Discussion

- Stretch Break

- Christianity & History of Human Services Part II

Lunch 12pm-1:30pm

1:30pm-5pm

- Introduction to Bioethics

- Stretch Break

- Discussion
**Friday January 31 2014:**

**Module 3: The Church & the Disability Community**

9am-12pm

- The Church: A Theological Framework
- What Happens When Disability First Strikes a Family?
- Evangelizing Those Affected by Disability
- The Church: Breaking Through Barriers

5:00pm-7pm

**Colloquium Dinner: Graduate Students Only**
**Location: Joni and Friends Charlotte**

**Fifth Day:**

**Practicum**
**Joni and Friends Charlotte**
Selected Bibliography


