

# Syllabus

## Writing to Explore Your Spiritual Journey

Nan Phifer, Instructor

### Course Goals

1. To achieve reflective writing that deepens self-understanding and increases awareness of the mystery of God in your life.
2. To understand how to make use of the writing process when reflecting on your own spiritual formation and when guiding the formation of others.
3. To acquire skills that contribute to powerful spiritual writing.



First Week

### Introduction to Introspective, Spiritual Writing

I'll guide you through a writing process that will enable you to identify many of your most meaningful experiences and write about one of them. After you write a quick initial draft, in small groups, you'll respond to each other's writing. I'll provide questions you may use reflect on the spiritual dimensions that underlie your writing.

Assigned Readings for the first week:

A short essay, *Writing to the Center*, found under the icon of a labyrinth on web site <http://www.memoirworkshops.com/>

Chapters 1 and 2, *The Vision and the Plan*, from *Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography*, Writer's Digest Books • ISBN 1582970807



Second Week

### Mapping the Landmarks of Your Spiritual Journey

You'll identify the specific, formative landmarks in your spiritual life and again follow the writing process by writing quick drafts, responding to each other's drafts, and

reflecting on questions I'll provide. As an aspect of spiritual growth, you may look also at how you've grown away from particular forms of religiosity.

Assigned Reading:

Posted article, "Memoirs with Sacred Resonance," published in *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, vol. 11, No. 4, December, 2005

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Third Week

### **Breathing Life into Spiritual Writing**

You'll employ a technique that will enable you to recall an influential experience in detail and write about it in prose that creates a sense of immediacy and presence. You'll fill an overview with specific nouns and verbs descriptive of the surroundings and you'll reconstruct your thoughts, feelings, and prayers. From this diagrammatic collection, you'll write a vivid, compelling account.

Assigned Reading:

*Memoirs of the Soul*, Part V, The Skills, p. 230 – 238

Posted page: Advice about Content and Style

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Fourth Week

### **Writing to Recognize Attributes and Influences**

What sparked your desire to minister? What were your innate inclinations? Which people influenced you? What now feeds the flame that sustains you—and what winds flicker that flame?

You'll look first at your talents, aptitudes and enthusiasms, the qualities within yourself that you brought to the role of ministry. Next, you'll recognize the people who inspired you and perceive what characteristics in yourself responded to them. Finally, you'll consider how the context in which you work does, and does not, fuel your zeal to minister.

Assigned Reading

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Guides for Expanding and Polishing Spiritual Memoirs

A list of autobiographies by ministers

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## Fifth Week

### **Writing to Sense and Express the Numinous**

Through writing, you'll explore the times when you have experienced profound emotions such as expansive joy, awe, fulfillment, and gratitude, as well as times of distress, grief, loss, or despair. I'll facilitate an initial writing and then guide you in an adapted application of a medieval, monastic, practice, *Lectio Divina*. This ancient way of listening illuminates the sacred in our lives, cultivates a sense of wonder, and brings awareness of holy presence.

From this workshop you'll acquire a listening strategy that elicits powerful writing, applies life-affirming reflections, and shines light into the spiritual depths of our ultimate concerns.

#### Assigned Reading:

A posted article: Poultry and an Almost Dead Fish: Evoking and Assessing Spiritual Writing

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## Sixth Week

### **Writing to Reconcile Sorrows and Blessings**

Mature spirituality accepts and integrates both grief and gratitude. With this in mind, you'll first identify the blessings and the sorrows in your life and then observe the ways they are interwoven. Loss and abundance, distress and joy, even doubt and faith are interconnected. You'll write to see how the threads of your life intertwine, and you'll look for the relationships that help us ascent to grief, as well as gratitude, as components of our spiritual lives.

#### Assigned Reading:

*Memoirs of the Soul*, Part Three, The Rewards, p. 195-212

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Seventh Week

**Writing to Forge a Path toward Altruism**

Charged with the commandment to love each other, to treat others as we wish to be treated, and with the admonishments of the Beatitudes, you'll look first at your small and large efforts to bring about social justice. You've probably contributed more than you realize.

To generate the energy and courage necessary to take altruistic action, we need a positive vision, a dream. Writing is a way to create visions and dreams. Using any genre, you'll write about an actual, or imagined, experience. You might write: a scene, an essay, a poem, a debate, a speech, a letter to a newspaper or to a misguided public official, or, like Thoreau, a letter from jail.

When you reflect on this creative writing, you're likely to find in yourself: compassion, courage, resolution, energy, service, devotion, and generosity. Your vision may clarify your individual calling to become one with a larger group and one with God.

Retrospective overview of all writings.

In place of a reading assignment, please evaluate the course. Thank you.

