



# PRAIRIE COLLEGE

**Online Education Course Syllabus for  
NT112 READING THE GOSPELS AND ACTS  
Edition 1, Published 2019  
3 Credit Hours**

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## **I. Course Description:**

In this course, students are introduced to the story of Jesus Christ and his earliest disciples as told by the four Gospels and the book of Acts. Students will grow in their understanding of who Jesus is as well as in their ability to interpret the bible by attending to its literary, historical, and theological character.

## **II. Course Rationale:**

This course provides a foundational understanding of who Jesus is as well as foundational training for reading scriptural texts well.

## **III. Course Outcomes:**

1. To gain a basic understanding of the life of Jesus and the earliest disciples as these are presented to us in the canonical gospels and the book of Acts. Special attention is given to the literary, historical, and theological character of these books as they tell the story of Jesus.
2. To sharpen the skills of attentive Bible reading, especially narrative analysis, four-fold gospel reading, theological appropriation, and use of Bible dictionaries.
3. To encounter our triune God in reading the Gospels and Acts, leading to greater love for God and a deeper attentiveness and obedience to his Word, Jesus Christ, spoken to us by the Spirit through these scriptural texts.

## **IV. Required Texts:**

Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus*. Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2007.

If you do not already have a quality study Bible, I suggest the following:

Keener, Craig S. and John Walton, eds. *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2016.

## V. Performance Evaluation:

Assignment	Course Outcomes	Percentage of Grade
Reading	1, 2, 3	7.5%
Forum Participation	1, 2	7.5%
Exams	1, 2	30%
Narrative Analyses	1, 2	10%
Four-Fold Gospel Project	1,2	20%
Reflections	2, 3	10%
Bible Dictionary Assignment	1, 2	5%
Final Creative Project	1, 2, 3	10%

## VI. Course Requirements:

### 1. Reading – 7.5%

Required reading consists of the assigned portions of Strauss' *Four Portraits* (abbreviated throughout the course as *FPOJ*), one supplemental reading on Acts, as well as the whole of the biblical text of Matthew-Acts. This reading accounts for 7.5% of your course grade. Students will report at the end of class how much they have read from both *FPOJ*/Acts supplemental reading (how many pages read out of 406 pages total [381 from *FPOJ*, 25 from the Acts supplemental]) as well as from Matthew-Acts (how many chapters read out of 117 chapters total).

Note: The percentage of the Gospels and Acts you read determines the total percentage of your course grade. For example, if you read 90% of the Gospels and Acts, your final course grade will only be 90% of your course grade after all assignments/tests are marked (e.g., if you were going to have a course grade of 95/100, but only read 90% of the Gospels and Acts, your actual final course grade would be 90% of 95, or 85.5).

### 2. Forum Participation – 7.5%

Throughout the course you will post in online discussion forums at various points immediately before or after course lectures. These posts represent your participation grade for the course, and account for 7.5% of your final grade.

All forum posts are not graded for accuracy, but for effort. Students will receive a 100% participation grade if they provide a thoughtful, thorough answer to the questions posed, 50% for a thoughtful but partial answer, and 0% for anything else. For any grade lower than 100%, students will receive detailed feedback and instructions for improvement.

### 3. Exams – 30%

Students will have an exam at the end of each unit; each exam will cover one of the gospels or Acts. Students will also be given an exam covering the geography of the Roman province of Judea and its surroundings at the time of Jesus' ministry. The Instructor will provide a basic study guide for each exam (on Brightspace). These exams together account for 30% of your course grade (5% each).

#### 4. Narrative Analysis Assignments – 10%

You will analyze two biblical narratives, one in Matthew, another in Mark, by answering the questions on the assignment sheet provided on Brightspace and in the following Appendix. This assignment will train you to ask good, curious questions of the text. These analyses are graded on attention to detail, providing exhaustive, thoughtful answers to each of the questions asked. There will be two analyses, accounting for 5% each of your final course grade.

#### 5. Four-Fold Gospel Project – 20%

In this assignment you will reflect upon the way each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death in their own individual voices by comparing them as four complementary witnesses to a single story. See detailed instructions on the Brightspace page and in the following Appendix. This assignment is graded on attention to detail and thoughtful, perceptive bible reading. This assignment is central to the course, and as such it accounts for 20% of your course grade.

#### 6. Reflections – 10%

In these assignments you will attend to the biblical texts you have been reading as the word of God, and not simply as an ancient historical document. See detailed instructions on the Brightspace page and in the following Appendix. There are four reflections in the course, accounting for 10% of your course grade. These assignments are graded based on completion.

#### 7. Bible Dictionary Assignment – 5%

In this assignment, you will (1) select a passage that interests you from the gospels about which you would like to learn more, (2) find articles that are related in some way to that passage in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Brown and Perrin, eds., 2nd ed., InterVarsity Press, 2013) and read 30 pages of that material, then (3) provide a report on your reading. You are free to read whatever interests you in the dictionary that is in some way related to your chosen passage. Use the table of contents and the indices in the back to find relevant material. Your report (no minimum or maximum length, ~1 page) should simply list the titles of the articles that you read in the dictionary, and provide one sentence for each article describing what you learned that was relevant for your chosen passage. This assignment is graded on thoughtful completion, and accounts for 5% of your course grade.

Note: If you do not have access to *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. via a local library, and do not have the means to purchase it (I highly recommend purchasing it, but it is not a required text for this course), please contact me by email to arrange an alternative.

#### 8. Final Creative Project – 10%

In this assignment, you will share some of your learning experience. Reflect on this course, and identify one thing you learned that was especially significant for you that you would like to share with others. Then, consider how you might like to share that experience with others, including how you can best express what you learned, with whom in particular you would like to

share it, and how you might best communicate to them. You may share this experience in any number of possible ways: for example, you could design a classroom lesson, create a piece of visual art, write a song or poem, write a blog post, shoot a video, etc.

Before beginning this assignment, all students must approve their project idea with the instructor. Please email the following details to the instructor: (1) the concept or experience that was most formative for you in this course that you would like to share with others (2) who you might like to share this with and why (your audience) (3) how you would like to share it (visual art, blog post, etc.), with a rationale for why this means of communication is best suited for your desired audience.

This assignment is graded based on (1) depth of reflection and (2) care taken in crafting how you share what you learned with others.

## VII. Academic Policies

### 1. On Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic violations of any kind will not be tolerated (including plagiarism, cheating, falsifying documents, duplicating work from other courses, or complicity in any such offense). Please see the Academic Guide, pp. 17–18 on the Registrar’s webpage: <https://prairie.edu/current-students/registrar-office/>

### 2. Grading and Response Time

The timeline for grading and assignment feedback is 7-10 days. The instructor will endeavour to respond to student communications within 2 days, excluding weekends, holidays, and vacation time. The following Prairie College Grading scale applies to all written assignments.

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Rating	Point Value
A+	90-100		4.0
A	85-89	Excellent	4.0
A-	80-84		3.7
B+	77-79		3.3
B	73-76	Good	3.0
B-	70-72		2.7
C+	67-69		2.3
C	63-66	Satisfactory	2.0
C-	60-62		1.7
D+	55-59		1.3
D	50-54	Poor	1.0
F	0-49	Failure	0.0
P	-----	Pass	
AU	-----	Audit	
I	-----	Incomplete	
W	-----	Withdrew	

Numerical course grades are not rounded.

## VIII. Course Outline:

Topic	Reading & Viewing	Assignments/Assessments
Beginnings: Course Overview	Read the Course Syllabus. Watch the Instructor's Introductory videos.	Complete the Introductory Forum Post
<b>Unit 1: The Gospel according to Mark</b>		
A. Gospels Introduction	<i>FPOJ</i> , pg. 23-42; 67-79 Instructor's Lecture	
B. Intro to Mark: The Roaring Lion	<i>FPOJ</i> , pg. 171-183; Mark 1:1-13 Bible Project video; Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
C. The Authority & Mission of Jesus	Mark 1:14-3:34; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 123-148 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
D. Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, Part 1	Mark 4:1-8:26; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 93-122 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
E. Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, Part 2	Mark 8:27-10:52; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 183-211 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
F. Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, Part 3	Mark 11:1-16:20	Pre-Lecture Forum Post Narrative Analysis 1 Unit 1 Reflection Unit 1 Exam; Map Exam
<b>Unit 2: The Gospel according to Matthew</b>		
A. Intro to Matthew: The Human Person	Matthew 1:1-25; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 213-230 "The Bible Project" videos; Instructor's Lecture	
B. The Sermon on the Mount 1: Beatitudes	Mt. 2:1-5:12; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 149-167 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
C. The Sermon on the Mount 2: Law	Mt. 5:13-7:29; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 435-454 Instructor's Lecture	Post-Lecture Forum Post
D. Parables of the Kingdom	Mt. 8:1-13:58; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 230-258 Instructor's Lecture	
E. Forgiveness	Mt. 14:1-18:35 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
F. The New Tenants and their Commission	Mt. 19:1-28:20 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post Narrative Analysis 2 Unit 2 Reflection Unit 2 Exam
<b>Unit 3: The Gospel according to Luke</b>		
A. Intro to Luke: The Calf	Luke 1:1-2:52; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 259-275 "The Bible Project" video; Instructor's Lecture	

B. The Tempted Savior	Luke 3:1-4:44 Instructor's Lecture	
C. Transfiguration 1: The Window	Luke 5:1-9:26; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 43-65 Instructor's Lecture	
D. Transfiguration 2: Synoptic Problem	Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
E. Transfiguration 3: Luke's Perspective	Instructor's Lecture	Post-Lecture Forum Post
F. Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son	Luke 10:1-15:32 Instructor's Lecture	
G. Discipleship & Material Possessions	Luke 16:1-19:27 Instructor's Lecture	Post-Lecture Forum Post
H. Emmaus	Luke 19:28-24:53; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 275-296, 469-491 Instructor's Lecture	Unit 3 Reflection Unit 3 Exam
<b>Unit 4: The Gospel according to John</b>		
A. Intro to John: The Eagle and the Word	John 1:1-18; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 297-322 Instructor's Lecture	
B. Water and Wine	John 1:19-5:47; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 455-468 Instructor's Lecture	Post-Lecture Forum Post
C. Bread of Life	John 6:1-7:52 Instructor's Lecture	
D. The Man Born Blind	John 8:1-12:50 Instructor's Lecture	
E. The Glorified Passover Lamb	John 13:1-21:25; <i>FPOJ</i> pg. 322-343, 493-509 Instructor's Lecture	Unit 4 Reflection Unit 4 Exam Bible Dictionary Assignment Four-Fold Gospel Project
<b>Unit 5: The Book of Acts</b>		
A. The Ascension	Acts 1:1-26; Acts by Powell (PDF) "The Bible Project" videos; Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
B. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly	Acts 2:1-8:40 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post
C. Mission and Conflict	Acts 9:1-15:41 Instructor's Lecture	Post-Lecture Forum Post
D. Unhindered	Acts 16:1-28:31 Instructor's Lecture	Pre-Lecture Forum Post Creative Project Unit 5 Exam Reading Report Course Evaluation

## **IX. Appendix**

### **A. Narrative Analysis**

This assignment will train you to ask good, curious questions of the biblical text. These analyses are graded on attention to detail, providing exhaustive, thoughtful answers to each of the questions asked. There will be two analyses, accounting for 5% each of your final course grade. Read the passage prescribed on Brightspace (analysis 1 on Mark 5:21-43, analysis 2 on Matthew 8:5-13), then answer all of the questions below on a single page (do not go beyond a single page). Submit your completed questions as a word document or PDF. Be as exhaustive as possible in your answers. Complete sentences are not required. Please include biblical references in all of your answers that refer to the text.

Passage: \_\_\_\_\_

When does the story take place? (Read around before and after this passage if needed)

Where does the story take place? (Read around before and after this passage if needed)

Who are the characters? For each character, list how he, she, or they are described, or "characterized" (list every detail given in the text)?

What are the main events in the story?

What is the conflict of the story?

How is the conflict resolved?

What themes does this story portray that can be found elsewhere in the same biblical book?

Why is the author telling this story? In other words, what question is the author trying to answer by telling this story?

## B. Four-Fold Gospel Project

In this assignment you will reflect upon the way each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death. You will write a paper that provides answers to the following prompts below. Please submit your finished paper in a Word doc or PDF. There is no set length requirement, though be sure to provide complete answers to the prompts below.

**Pay close attention to these instructions, read them all before beginning!**

The focus of this assignment is your own reading of the biblical texts, and thus you are not allowed to use any sources other than your Bible and your brain to complete this assignment. This assignment consists of **two parts**:

### **PART ONE:**

First, compare the following passages verse by verse: Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:22-41; Luke 23:33-49; John 19:16-30. Create an exhaustive list of the similarities and differences you find in the way each gospel tells the story, including what details each gospel includes (events, speech, scriptural fulfillment, etc.), and in what sequence they tell the story. Summarize each item (don't quote in full), and include scriptural references.

Arrange the list in the following way. I have given you some examples to get started:

1. Material shared in all four gospels:

(a) the name of the place of the crucifixion, Golgotha, place of the skull (Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:17)

(b) ... etc.

2. Material shared amongst three gospels, not four (specify which three)

(a) Darkness fell during Jesus' crucifixion (Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44)

(b) ... etc.

3. Material shared amongst just two gospels (specify which two)

(a) Jesus' cry on the cross "My God, My God, why...?" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34)

(b) ... etc.

4. Material unique to Matthew

5. Material unique to Mark

6. Material unique to Luke

(a) Jesus says on the cross, "Father, forgive them..." (23:34).

(b) ... etc.

7. Material unique to John

(a) Jesus bears his own cross (Jn 19:17).

(b) ... etc.

**PART TWO:**

Second, choose one characteristic of the story that is unique to each gospel (one each for Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John; a characteristic of each one that is not found in the other three), and explain why the gospel writer chose to tell the story with this particular detail.

In your explanation of each unique detail, at least 4-5 sentences in length, make sure you draw from two other passages or themes in that gospel to explain why this detail is significant and how it fits within the bigger picture of the gospel in which it is found. Part two will be four paragraphs long, one for each unique detail selected.

### C. Reflections

These are exercises in listening, based on the reality that the Gospel of Mark is not just an historical or literary work, but also God's word through which he speaks to his people each day. Take 45 minutes to reflect prayerfully upon a passage from the gospels that has been particularly striking to you (see Brightspace for recommended passages for each of the four gospels, corresponding to each of the four reflections). It can be any passage, no longer than one chapter. Perhaps the passage struck you because it was confusing, challenging, or simply interesting. Read the passage prayerfully in whatever way you have found most helpful, asking God to show you what he wants to communicate to you in your present circumstances. If needed, I have included below a selection of passages and a brief step-by-step process for this time of reflection.

**After your time of reflection, write a brief record** (between 1/2 page and 1 page, double-spaced, size 12 font). Include these things in the record: **(1)** the passage you reflected upon, **(2)** how you sensed God communicating with you through this passage in your life circumstance, and **(3)** how you will respond over the next week (this could be, for example, praying a specific prayer to God regularly, or taking up and/or resisting a particular habit).

Suggested steps for your time of reflection:

1. Begin with prayer. In a place that is comfortable and free from distractions, thank God for the gift of prayer, and ask him to help you listen to Him today and in this time of interaction with his word.
2. Read the passage through at least three times, and notice what draws your attention as you read (e.g., words, phrases, images, events in the story, etc.). If desired, imagine yourself in the story, with its sights, sounds, smells, emotions, etc.
3. Reflect upon why your attention is drawn to these particular details. Reflect about your life currently, the present state of your relationship with God, and how these details of the text that stand out relate to your present circumstances in life with God. Pray to God about the things that come to your mind and heart in this process, asking him what he wants to say to you now through this passage. In silence, wait for God's answer to become clear.
4. Respond to God in whatever way is appropriate based on God's word to you, and thank him once more for the gift of prayer and the time spent with him.