

Union Congregational Church  
Adult Sunday School/Abram K-J  
September 22, 2013  
St. Augustine of Hippo

***Introduction to the Class***

*Pray*

*Q: What have you found to be helpful ways of connecting with God in your day-to-day life?*

Praying Other People's Prayers

*Why do it?*

- a. ...To know *what* to say.
- b. ...To stay focused.
- c. ...To join with billions of other Christians around the world and throughout history.
- d. ...Because there are people who know more than I do about God and how to pray.

*A 19th Century nun and spiritual director said...*

"If you want a deeper prayer life, say the Lord's Prayer but take an hour to say it."

**These Six Weeks in Adult Sunday School**

[HANDOUT]

Introduction to *Devotional Classics*: "We today suffer from the unexamined notion that the more recent something is, the better, the more true it must be. This book is our attempt to counter this present-day myopia."

*Devotional*="writings that aim at the transformation of the human personality. They seek to touch the heart, to address the will, to mold the mind. They call for radical character formation. They instill holy habits."

*Classic*="many people over a sustained period of time have drawn strength from its insights and witness to its value."

*Devotional Classic* is "a kind of writing that has stood the test of time and that seeks to form the soul before God."

“[E]ach phrase is pregnant with meaning, and it is best to read at a measured pace, pausing often to reread, rethink, reexperience the words until we not only understand their meaning but are shaped by the truth of them.”

*Any questions about what we'll be doing together in these coming weeks?*

## **St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)**

Augustine bio

- R.S. Pine-Coffin: “great sinner who became a great saint”
- Born in Thagaste (now Algeria)
- Pagan father Patricius, mother Monica was devoted Christian
- Professor of rhetoric
- 386 is conversion
- 397/8: wrote *Confessions*

Augustine's Confessions

- Spiritual memoirs
- But unique in that they are addressed to God

“Confessions” has a double meaning:

- Accusation of oneself (“We confess that we have sinned against you”)
- Praise to God (“Every tongue confess...,” “Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord”)

*Augustine takes these up as a unified whole—he looks at himself closely and sees his sin clearly... this leads him to praise God for his grace and salvation*

READ Book I, chapter 1:

*Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? How magnificent his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you *thwart the proud*. But still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. **The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.***

Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether a man is first to pray to you for help or to praise you, and whether he must know you before he can call you to his aid. If he does not know you, how can he pray to you? For he may call for some other help, mistaking it for yours.

Or are men to pray to you and learn to know you through their prayers? *Only, how are they to call upon the Lord until they have learned to believe in him? And how are they to believe in him without a preacher to listen to?*

*Those who look for the Lord will cry out in praise of him, because all who look for him shall find him, and when they find him they will praise him. I shall look for you, Lord, by praying to you and as I pray I shall believe in you, because we have had preachers to tell us about you. It is my faith that calls to you, Lord, the faith which you gave me and made to live in me through the merits of your Son, who became man, and through the ministry of your preacher.*

Theme of *Confessions*: "...because you made us for yourself, and our hearts find no rest until they rest in you."

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*Q: A bold statement about the human condition. Is this true of me? Of all people? Of other beings?*

*Q: If so, what are the implications?*

*If this is true, are all human beings "without excuse"?*

*Q: What else stands out to you about this reading, hearing it read aloud?*

"Ordo Salutis" in Romans 10:14-15: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

*Chapters 1-5 of Book 1 set the stage for the rest of the book by telling some universal truths, in the light of which Augustine will recount his own life.*

- *Most central of these is "you made us for yourself..."*
- *He will then show how he found no rest outside of God*
- *Then his conversion story, which the Devotional Classics book picks up*

Book VIII, chapter 12 (what's in Foster), conversion story

I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrung its pitiful secrets from it, and when I mustered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears. ... Somehow I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes, the sacrifice that is acceptable to you. ... For I felt that I was still the captive of my sins, and in my misery I kept crying ‘How long shall I go on saying “tomorrow, tomorrow”? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?’

I was asking myself these questions, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain ‘Take it and read, take it and read’.

At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall.

...

So I hurried back to the place where...I had put down the book containing Paul's Epistles. I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: *Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites.*

I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled. I marked the place with my finger or by some other sign and closed the book.

You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer ... placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith....

*How do you respond to that conversion story? What do you think of it?*

*What about his picking a passage at random?*

Questions from *Devotional Classics*:

“A strong force that works against our inner unity, writes Augustine, is that we are weighed down by habit. What role have habits played in your struggle of commitment to God?”

“ In the final section, Augustine asks himself, “How long shall I go on saying, ‘Tomorrow, tomorrow’? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?” How would you answer that question?”

***Close in prayer.***