



## ***The Confessions by St. Augustine***

### ***Reading Group Discussion Guide***

*The Confessions* is a statement of what Augustine had done during his life and what he had now become. It is not only a confession of sins but also of temptations and an acknowledgment of God's grace by which he was saved. True to the meaning of the word *confession*, this is a three-fold confession of sins, of faith and of praise to God.

In the midst of his degradation, Augustine had a sense that his life was being lived on the wrong path, and he had a desire to rise above his error. But his will was not in line with his desire. A famous line from his work is "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet!" The struggle was difficult and long. He persisted, and not only did he rise above his sins of the flesh, but his will and intellect were also converted.

*The Confessions* has three distinct divisions. Books I-IX are the story of Augustine's life from birth to his conversion and his mother's death. They cover the first 33 years of his life. Book X describes his state of mind and is an examination of conscience about present problems. Books XI-XIII are a study of *Genesis* and a meditation on eternity.

The book is written as a prolonged meditation addressed to God. Though addressed to God, *The Confessions* speaks to every human heart. These study questions are for Books I-X only.

#### **Book I**

1. How does Augustine begin *The Confessions*?
2. What are some of Augustine's questions of God?
3. What motivated Augustine in his disobedience?
4. Was Augustine baptized as a youngster? Why?

#### **Book II**

1. Why did Augustine's parents desire his education in preference to a wife for him?
2. What did Augustine steal, and why?

3. Augustine thanks God for all he has been given, and for what else?

### **Book III**

1. To what does Augustine attribute his lust?
2. What does Augustine say about Cicero's work?
3. Why did the Scriptures fail to "speak" to Augustine?
4. What was Monica's dream?
5. What final words did Bishop Ambrose have for Monica?

### **Book IV**

1. What practice of the soothsayers did Augustine abhor?
2. Whom did he consult?
3. Why was Augustine overcome with sadness?
4. What gifts did Augustine have?

### **Book V**

1. Why was Augustine disappointed when he finally met Faustus, the "great teacher?"
2. Why did Augustine want to go to Rome?
3. How did Augustine deceive his mother?
4. Who was in Milan who would greatly influence him?

### **Book VI**

1. What did Monica do which was forbidden by Bishop Ambrose, and why was it forbidden?
2. In a nutshell, what was Epicurus' philosophy?
3. What did Augustine dread as punishment for his sins?

### **Book VII**

1. How did Augustine perceive God to be at this time?
2. What is the Christian explanation of evil?
3. What did Augustine spend much time trying to discover?
4. What books of Scripture did Augustine begin to read first?

### **Book VIII**

1. What two wills in Augustine were in conflict?
2. Why could he no longer use the excuse of ignorance?
3. While he was weeping, what did he hear?
4. What did he do?

### **Book IX**

1. What did Augustine resolve to do?
2. How did Monica's maidservant teach her moderation?
3. What policy of behavior did Monica have toward her husband?
4. What did Monica tell Augustine at Ostia about what she had wanted in life?

### **Book X**

1. What answer did Augustine understand when he asked God, "Who are you?"
2. Besides images, what else does the memory encompass?
3. What does Augustine say is necessary to desire in order to have happiness?
4. Since Augustine learned about God, where has God resided?
5. What is "that threefold concupiscence?"
6. The wages of sin is death; what is the wages of justice?

For further thought:

- Would you feel free to approach your bishop with your concerns as St. Monica did? Why or why not?
- There have been heresies throughout the history of the Church. What are some current heresies and how are they manifest today? (Hint: modern movies and books)

These questions are excerpted from ***Ancient Rome*** by Fran Rutherford. Used with permission of the author.