

Confessions

Augustine of Hippo

Book III: Simplified Outline

- ◆ Young man, Big City, No purpose
- ◆ Awakened by a book
- ◆ Rejects parent's faith
- ◆ Joins a cult
- ◆ Prayed for by his mother



The challenge of biography/history.

Book III: Detailed Outline

- ♦ Chp. 1 - The Skillet of Outrageous Love
- ♦ Chps. 2-4 - A Love Affair With Sorrow
- ♦ Chp. 5 - Distant Mercy and Enslaved Freedom
- ♦ Chp. 6 - The Demolition Men



Chp. 1 - The Skillet of Outrageous Love

- “I came to Carthage, to the center of a skillet where outrageous love affairs hissed all around me. I wasn’t in love yet, but I was in love with the prospect of being in love, and in my more latent need, I hated myself because that need wasn’t greater. I looked for something to love, lover of loving that I was, and I hated my safety and my path free of mousetraps, since my real hunger was inside me, and was for a more inward food—it was for you, my God.
- But I didn’t feel that starving need; I didn’t desire that nourishment that wouldn’t rot—not because I was full of that, but because the emptier I was, the pickier I was.
- Therefore, my soul was in bad shape and hurled itself, festering sores and all, out in public, wretchedly insatiable in scratching up against objects of the physical senses. But if these didn’t have a soul, they wouldn’t do as objects for love. To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and more so if I could enjoy the body of someone who loved me.
- That meant I was in the habit of polluting the shared channel of friendship with putrid rutting, and clouding its pale purity with a lust from hell. Though I was revolting and degraded, I nevertheless yearned—in my overflowing inane emptiness—to be fashionable and sophisticated. I swooped recklessly into love, only panting to be its prisoner. You my God, who are my mercy, with how much gall did you sprinkle that sweet taste, and how good you were to do it— because I was loved in turn, and on the sly I made my way to the shackles of gratification, and was gleefully trussed up in those afflicting bonds, so that I could be flogged with the fiery iron rods of jealousy and bouts of paranoia and anxieties and rages and brawls.”

Chps. 2-4 - A Love Affair With Sorrow

- Love of Theater
- Why do we enjoy watching tragedies?
- How do we feel if they are acted poorly?
- Have you ever watched a movie that made you cry? Have you ever watched that movie again? Why?

Chp. 5 - Distant Mercy and Enslaved Freedom

- “Your mercy, faithful from a distance, was hovering above me.”
- “Placing altogether too much faith in my own stiff-necked will made me retreat far from you, because I loved my paths and not yours, because I was in love with the ‘freedom’ of a runaway slave.”
- What does Augustine mean by the “‘freedom’ of a runaway slave”?
- Illustration of the prisoner who throws his tray to demonstrate his freedom.

Chp. 6 - The Demolition Men

- “The demons who pull their pranks unseen laugh at them while leading them by the nose—which is the exact way they love to treat their own victims.”

Book III: Detailed Outline

- ♦ Chp. 7-8 - Augustine's First Conversion
- ♦ Chp. 9 - The Mediocre Bible
- ♦ Chps. 10-18 - The Manichaean Snare
 - ♦ Chp. 10 - A Platter of Phantasms
 - ♦ Chp. 11 - The Superiority of Poetry and Tragedy to False Religion



Chps. 7-8 - Augustine's First Conversion

- Augustine, devoid of purpose, finds a vision for living for something greater than pleasure through reading Cicero's *Hortensius*.
- Frequent top 10 recommended books today:
 - Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*
 - Yuval Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*
 - Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*
- Were you significantly impacted by any non-christian works prior to salvation?

Chp. 9 - The Mediocre Bible

- What did Augustine find lacking in the *Hortensius*?
- What did he think of the Scriptures when he read them?
- Looking back, why does he say he viewed them the way he did?
- "And lo and behold, the subject matter wasn't "factual" in pretentious people's opinion, or laid straightforwardly bare for children's eyes, either, but lowly when I stepped toward her, of lofty dignity when I came up close, and veiled in mysteries. But back then, I wasn't the sort of person who could enter into her, or bend my neck submissively to follow her own strides."
- Is this the first time Augustine has read Scripture?
- How regularly was Augustine taken to church as a child?

Chps. 10-18 - The Manichaean Snare

Chp. 10 - A Platter of Phantasms

- Who are the Manichaens?
 - Spiritual = good; Material = bad; Sometimes spiritual beings get trapped in material bodies

Chp. 11 - The Superiority of Poetry and Tragedy to False Religion

- Earlier, Augustine seemed to disparage tragedy and stories.
- Why does he say he would have been better off studying poetry and tragedy than becoming ensnared by the false religion of the Manichaeans?

Book III: Detailed Outline

- ♦ Chps. 12-18 - The Susceptibility of Biblical Ignorance
 - ♦ Chp. 12 - Theodicy, Anthropomorphism, & Situational Ethics
 - ♦ Chps. 13-17 - The Faultlessly Correct Law of the All-Powerful God or A 10-Stringed Harp
 - ♦ Chp. 18 - Manichaean Twaddle



Chps. 12-18 - The Susceptibility of Biblical Ignorance

Chp. 12 - Theodicy, Anthropomorphism, and Situational Ethics

- What were the three areas of theology used by the “idiot confidence men [Manichaeans]” to lead Augustine away from the truth?
- Theodicy: The problem of evil
 - How can God be just and evil exist?
 - Where did evil come from?
- Anthropomorphism: The Bible speaks of God’s feet, arms, breath, etc.
 - Does God have eyebrows? Fingernails?
 - What do we make of Scripture where it speaks of God having physical attributes?
- Situational Ethics:
 - Does the standard of righteousness change from age to age or place to place?
 - Is polygamy sinful? Always? Everywhere? What about the patriarchs?

Chps. 13-17 - The Faultlessly Correct Law of the All-Powerful God or A 10-Stringed Harp

- Are there certain things that are always lawful in every age and place?
 - What two things does Augustine identify in this category?
 - “It can’t be, can it, wrong at any time or at any place to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself?”
- Are there certain things that are always wrong in every age and place?

- What sin does Augustine identify in this category?
- “In the same way, shameful acts that are contrary to nature—such as those committed by the people of Sodom*22—are reviled and punished everywhere and always. If all nations did these things, they would all be arraigned for the same crime by the divine law, which didn’t create humankind to have intercourse in this way. This is because the critical bond that ought to be between us and God is outraged when the human nature of which he’s the source is sullied by this twisted libidinousness.
- What enduring standard of righteousness does Augustine point to in this section and where is that standard chiefly expressed?
 - God
 - The Decalogue
 - “In any event, these are the principal pustules of evil that break out from a penchant for primacy, or for ogling, or for physical sensations—one or two of these, or all three together, and it’s a bad life in defiance of that sum of three and seven, your harp with ten chords, the Ten Commandments given by you, God, the highest and sweetest being.”
 - Why does he say the sum of three and seven?

Chp. 18 - Manichaeian Twaddle

- “In my ignorance of all this, I ridiculed those holy slaves and prophets belonging to you. But what was I doing in ridiculing them, if not making myself an object of ridicule to you as, gradually and by tiny degrees, I was drawn into that Manichaeian twaddle I wrote of above, into believing that a fig weeps when it’s plucked, and that its mother the tree sheds lacteous tears? And there’s more: that if some ‘saint’ gobbled the fig—provided that plucking it was somebody else’s crime, not the saint’s!—he could then exhale the angels he’d concocted in his guts—no, wait: it would be little crumbs of a god coming out whenever he groaned or belched in prayer. The selfsame tiny morsels of the true god on high would have been tied up helpless in that piece of fruit unless released by the grinders and the belly of the chosen saint. I had the misfortune to believe that greater pity must be on hand for the earth’s produce than for the human beings because of whom the produce came into existence. If a starving person asked for some, and he didn’t happen to be a Manichaeian, then you were supposed to be condemning to capital punishment whatever you gave him to munch on.”

Book III: Detailed Outline

- ♦ Chp. 19 - The Tears of a Committed Christian Mother
- ♦ Chp. 20 - A Chaste, Pious, Sober Widow Lighthearted by Hope
- ♦ Chp. 21 - A Deeply Learned, Unwilling, Annoyed Pastor



Chp. 19 - The Tears of a Committed Christian Mother

- How did Augustine describe his father in Books I & II?
- How does he portray Patricius in Book III?
- How did he describe Monnica in the first two books?
- How does he describe her in chp. 19?
 - “...my mother, your committed Christian, was weeping in your presence for me more than mothers weep for the death of their children’s bodies. Through the faith and the spirit she possessed from you, she saw my death, and you gave ear to her pleas, Master; you listened to her and didn’t look down on her tears. When in every place she prayed the water gushing out of her eyes drenched the ground, you listened.”
- What impression do we get concerning Monnica’s development between Book II and Book III?
- What dream did Monnica have at this time?

Chp. 20 - A Chaste, Pious, Sober Widow Lighthearted by Hope

- How did Augustine interpret his mother’s dream?
- How did she respond?
- Did God immediately answer Monnica’s prayers?
- What was the effect of this dream on Monnica?
 - Hope and perseverance
 - “...she submitted to living with me and sharing the same table in the house? (She was on the verge of unwillingness, in her disgust and loathing for the blasphemies inherent in my delusion.)”
 - “Around eight years followed during which I rolled around in the mud of that deep pit and in the darkness of that lie, often trying to rise out of it but

always taking a more forceful plunge back in. She, meanwhile a chaste, pious, and sober widow, such as you love, was already more lighthearted with hope, but she didn't slack in weeping and groaning; she didn't cease, in all the hours of her prayers, to beat her breast before you, and her pleas were granted an audience with you; and yet you left me to wallow and be swallowed in that darkness."

Chp. 21 - A Deeply Learned, Unwilling, Annoyed Pastor

- Why did Monnica seek out her local pastor (bishop)?
- What was his response?

Book III: Application

- ♦ What lessons can we draw from this chapter?
 - ♦ The need for instructed children in Biblical truths.
 - ♦ The impact of a praying parent.
 - ♦ The need for perseverance in prayer for our loved ones.
 - ♦ The best time to get serious about our children's eternal destinies is yesterday. The second best time is now.

Note that Augustine knew Monnica prayed for him not b/c she told him she did, but b/c he saw her weeping and heard her pleas.

Questions?