

James Houston Prayer Course Discussion Questions

Session 16: “Augustine’s Reflections on Prayer”

- 1) God transformed Augustine’s life with a remarkable mystical experience. He then grew from the experience all the way to maturity in his old age. Previously Dr. Houston lectured on the significance of Paul’s spiritual growth after his profound encounter with Jesus. His identity continued to grow from the young man to the mature man to the wise man. Augustine was privileged to go through these stages of growth as a Christian. At what stage of growth is your Christian identity?
- 2) Augustine is an inheritor of the Desert Fathers. It was the life of St. Anthony that stopped Augustine in his tracks. He realized you have to live in the desert to find your own private inner space before God in order to have a fuller consciousness of God. His inner space was never the empty space of Zen Buddhism. It was a space filled with the love of God. Inner reflectiveness is what Augustine teaches as the only way to have a large interior space for God. Can you think of a person who has helped you find your interior space of inner reflection with God?
- 3) Augustine provides a distinctive and new emphasis on memory: memoria. He says deep within us is the memory of God. It is the memory of God that must be recovered, for we are created in His image. How is the memory recovered? By revelation, by God’s revealing grace of when and how our fear-driven choices drove us away from Him. We compromise with substitutes for God because of the fear of the unmet need of His presence in our inner being. We settle for the value of lower goods to comfort ourselves, rather than exchange them for the pearl of great price, His presence. When we exchange all our chosen substitutes in favor of Him as our highest good, our eyes are opened to see that feeling our unmet needs, our wounds, and our hurts is a testimony to how present in our inner being is His memory (Luke 15:8-10 and 11-32). The lukewarm do not have access to His memory (Rev. 3:16). Healing our wounds comes from the gradual restoration of our memory of His presence. In Him, the wounds now become our new found strength by knowing Him as He is and ourselves as we are. What kind of substitute attachments do you rely on to compensate for what is missing of God’s presence in your inner life?
- 4) The Psalms became profoundly significant for Augustine, because their inner illumination is guided by the inward reflection of the Psalms themselves. And so Augustine sees a central importance to Psalmist revelation and its therapeutic effect on the self. The Psalms illuminated his interior world. What passage in the Psalms helped you in your interior journey of knowing God?