Confessions

St Augustine of Hippo · 354 – 430 · Text: trans. E. B. Pusey

Who wrote it

Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa to a pagan father and a Christian mother, Monica. A gifted teacher of rhetoric, he was drawn to the Manichees and later to Platonist philosophy before his conversion in Milan in 386. He was baptised by St Ambrose in 387 and became bishop of Hippo. He wrote the Confessions around 397–400.

What to look for

- The whole book is addressed to God as a prayer, not to the reader.
- Small moments with large meaning, such as the theft of pears in Book II.
- Monica's tears and prayers, and the role of friends and mentors like Ambrose.
- The garden scene of his conversion in Book VIII and the vision at Ostia in Book IX.
- The turn in Books X–XIII to memory, time and the creation account in Genesis.

Reading plan

Session 1	Childhood and youth	Books I–III
Session 2	Career and searching	Books IV–VI
Session 3	Conversion and Monica	Books VII–IX
Session 4	Memory	Book X
Session 5	Time and creation	Books XI–XIII

Discussion questions

1. Why do you think Augustine wrote his life story as a prayer to God?
2. What does the theft of the pears reveal about why people do wrong?
3. How did Monica and Ambrose each influence Augustine's journey?
4. What finally held Augustine back from conversion, and what freed him?
5. What does Augustine discover in his reflections on memory and time?
6. Where do you see your own restlessness or search reflected in this book?

Tips for a group

Read each session's pages before meeting. Bring one sentence that struck you and one question. Keep discussion to 45–60 minutes and end by sharing one thing to carry into the week.

Read it free

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ancienttalks.com/books/augustine-confessions.html