

Self-Examination From St. Augustine's Prayer Book

Practical Exercise

St. Augustine lived in the fourth century after Christ. He wrestled with his sinful nature and his inability to overcome the flesh, particularly sexual immorality. His conversion to the Christian faith and the infilling of the Holy Spirit enabled him to successfully break his old sinful habits and behaviors. After his conversion and baptism in A.D. 378 he became the Bishop of the church in Hippo. He successfully stood against three major heresies of his day, the Donatists, the Peligians, and the Manicheans. He authored two books that are still in print today, Confessions and The City of God. His influence on western Christianity was enormous and continues to this day.

One great gift St. Augustine left us was his SELF-EXAMINATION, a thorough and penetrating way to look at our lives in light of God's holiness. This tool helps us to see our sinful nature and the weakness of our flesh, thus providing a healthy self-evaluation and opportunity to "humbly confess our sins against almighty God and our neighbor."

Pride

Pride is putting oneself in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation.

- Irreverence. Deliberate neglect of the worship of God every Sunday in his Church or being content with a perfunctory participation in it. Disregard of other Holy Days or of additional opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately.
- Disrespect for God or holy things by deliberately treating them, in thought, word or deed, in a profane, contemptuous, or over-familiar manner. Use of holy things for personal advantage, or the attempt to bribe or placate God by religious practices or promises.
- Sentimentality. Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God's will.
- Presumption. Dependence on self, rather than on God, results in being neglectful of the means of grace-sacraments and prayer. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we

are superior people. Satisfaction or complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes, or techniques. Foolish optimism.

- Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation, or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let him act in and through us. Failure to regularly offer conscious to God in intercession, the persons or causes that have or should enlist our interest and support.
- Distrust. Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence, and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity (disorderliness), or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism, astrology, fortune telling or the like. Magic or superstition.
- Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty or suffering. Surrendering to feelings of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful, and hopeful.
- Disobedience. Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate (and therefore divinely ordained) laws, regulations or authority of the Church, state, husband, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfill responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us.
- Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in Scripture, expounded in instructions or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation, or the reading of religious books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy, or interest for the things of God.
- Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts. Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.
- Impenitence. Refusal to search out and face up to our sins, or to confess and admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretense that we are better than we are. Self-justification or discounting our sins as insignificant, natural, or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others.
- Refusal to accept just punishment or to make do reparation when possible. Deceit or lying to escape the consequences of our sins or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrendering to God in humble penitence.

- Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our sins make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than sorrow for what sin is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can forgive our sins, or failure to use the means of getting assurance of his forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.
- Vanity. Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, and good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or adequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults we excuse in ourselves.
- Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money, or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others, or deliberate slovenliness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring, or relishing flattery or compliments.
- Arrogance. Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, and obstinate.
- Snobbery. Pride over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

Anger

Anger is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire are to eliminate any obstacle that prevents us from being self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

- Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept or fulfill God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents, abilities, or opportunities he has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint in the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals, the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

- Pugnacity. Attack upon another in anger. Murder indeed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing, or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing.
- Retaliation. Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness, or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain because we have not gotten our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

Envy

Envy is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others.

- Jealousy. Offense at the talents, success, or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.
- Malice. Ill will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiating, collecting, or retailing of gossip. Arousing, fostering, or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing or bullying.
- Contempt. Scorn of another's virtues, abilities, shortcomings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions, or ideals.

Covetousness

Covetousness is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the use of other people for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power, or security at their expense.

- Inordinate ambition. Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting self or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate to get ahead. Intrigue or conspiracy for self-advancement.

- Domination. Seeking to use or possess others. Over-protection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideals for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command, abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale.
- Respect for people. Favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfill duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting, or encouraging another to sin.
- Avarice. Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school, or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.
- Prodigality. Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others' money. Expenditure on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.
- Penuriousness. Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interests or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have a claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give due proportion of our income to Church and charity, or of our time and energy to do good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to the Church or charities, when able to do so.

Gluttony

Gluttony is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food and drink, and by extension the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

- Intemperance. Overindulgence in food, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or dilettantism (shabbiness). Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

- Lack of discipline. Negligence in keeping the days of fasting or abstinence, or failure to use other needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health-not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

Lust

Lust is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

- Unchastely. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.
- Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress, or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories.
- Prudery. Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.
- Cruelty. Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

Sloth

Sloth is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service, or sacrifice.

- Laziness. Indolence in performing spiritual, mental, or physical duties, neglect of family, business, social obligations, or courtesies. Procrastination of disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading, and the like. Waste of employer's time or doing shoddy and inadequate work.
- Indifference. Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards, or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Christian principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for, or to treat justly those in our employ.

Ignoring the needy. Unwillingness to minister to the needy, lonely, or unpopular people in our own or the church family. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfill our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part in the effort to make the church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

