

**Leader's Guide for
RELIGIOUS CLASSICS WITH FATHER MICHAEL HIMES**

Augustine of Hippo: *Confessions*

Opening Prayer: Lord, our hearts are restless. May we search for you and may you be our only home. May our hunger be for you. As we search for you, open our minds to new insights and new challenges. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Do you share Father Himes' enthusiasm for Augustine's ideas? Why or why not?
- The young Augustine stole the pears just because he wanted to. Have you ever done something similar? What did you learn from it?
- Like Augustine, do you "picture" God? What do you think of his insight that God is like a light that helps us to see reality for what it truly is?
- Have you ever freely made yourself unfree? Have you ever experienced grace setting you free once more?
- What do you think of Monica? Do you know anyone similar?
- Augustine has a unique way of describing "transcendence." Is this a new idea to you?
- Do you identify with the description of a scattered life? How could you create a space in your life for remembering?
- Imagine that Augustine is your spiritual director. What would he say to you?

Closing Prayer: Lord, the music of your wisdom plays in our hearts. As we leave this place help us to rest in you. Gather our scattered lives and make them whole and meaningful in you. Amen.

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For use with:

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Julian of Norwich: *Shewings of Divine Love*

Opening Prayer: Jesus, you protect us with a mother's love. Let us experience that protection and that love as we search for your wisdom. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Julian lived a “narrow” life with tremendous depth. Do you know anyone like her?
- Why do you think it took Julian twenty years to write down her revelations?
- God told Julian, “All shall be well.” Do you believe this? Why or why not?
- What do you think of Julian's opinion about the “great deed” the Trinity will do on the last day?
- Julian says our “deeper will” is for the good. When have you experienced conflict and listened to this “deeper will”?
- What did Father Himes mean by “Plan A” and “Plan B” in terms of incarnation and salvation? What is your opinion of this?
- Julian has much to say about the motherhood of God and the motherhood of Christ. Are you comfortable with this concept? How does it impact your image of Christ?
- According to Julian, everything exists because God loves it. How do you experience the love of God in your life?

Closing Prayer: Lord, you have created us to love us. As we leave this place, we put our lives, our worries, our desires in our care. We trust you. Amen.

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Ignatius of Loyola: *The Spiritual Exercises*

Opening Prayer: Jesus, Ignatius loved you with single-hearted devotion. As we gather, fill us with that same devotion. Help us to look for you in the words said here and in the people who say them. Send us your Spirit. Amen

Discussion Questions

- Do you know any Jesuits? How have they manifested the spirituality of Ignatius?
- Have you ever made an Ignatian retreat? What was it like?
- Ignatius' insights are very practical. Did you gain any practical insights viewing this video?
- This video offered several meditations. Which did you find to be the most helpful?
- What do you think of the image of Christ as "commander-in-chief"? Do you find that military image helpful? The experience of being wounded by a cannonball led Ignatius to conversion. Have you ever had a "cannonball" experience?
- In the "discernment of spirits," anxiety is seen as resulting from a poor decision and peace is the result of a good decision. Have you experienced that in your life?
- Ignatius invites us to reflect on the "patterns" in our lives. Could you articulate a "pattern" which you are experiencing now? If you could ask Ignatius a question, what would it be?

Closing Prayer: Jesus, you are with us now and always. Help us to seek your Spirit in all that we do. You are all around us. Help us to discern your ways. Amen.

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Jonathan Edwards: *Treatise on Religious Affections*

Opening Prayer: Lord, open our hearts and minds to your wisdom. May this be a time of “awakening” for us. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Have you read *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*? Did this description of Edwards surprise you?
- Could you foresee a “great awakening” happening again in this country?
- What do you think of the “bizarre” phenomena that happened at that time? Edwards took a neutral position. Do you agree?
- Edwards provides twelve “marks” or “signs” of conversion. Which made the greatest impression on you?
- “Spiritual” people have an “extra” sense about reality. (Recall the “honey” example.) Do you agree? How could you nurture this sense within you?
- Name a person in your life who manifests some of these signs of conversion.
- If Jonathan Edwards could be here now, what would he say to this group?

Closing Prayer: Jesus, we thank you for your presence among us tonight. Fill us with the passion for you that Jonathan Edwards had. Guide us in expressing our love for you in genuine Christian practice. Amen.

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Leader's Guide for
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Friedrich Von Hügel: *The Mystical Element of Religion*

Opening Prayer: We gather together as a people searching for the balance which leads to true growth. May we take in the wisdom of each person here as a way to experience that balance and that Spirit which leads to growth and transformation. Lord, open us to your wisdom. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Before viewing this video, had you ever heard of Von Hügel? Why do you think he is so unknown?
- What insight of Von Hügel's made the greatest impression on you?
- Of the three "elements," which is the strongest in you? Which is the weakest?
- Who "complements" the weakest element in you? In our local church, which element is the strongest? Which is the weakest?
- Where in your life do you experience the "fringe of feeling" that Von Hügel writes about? How do you convey that to others? Have you ever experienced a friend attempting to convey to you the "fringe of feeling" and you simply missed it?
- If you truly believed Von Hügel's First Law that everything begins with God, how would it affect your life right now?
- Do you agree with the Second Law that the goal of integration is for the betterment of others? Or is there another way to see the journey of growth?

Closing Prayer: Jesus, we know you want to be involved in every part of our lives. Open our hearts to let you in. Take away our fear. Give us the courage to travel with you. Amen.

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Teresa of Avila: *The Autobiography*

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, you have surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses. Grant that we, encouraged by the strength and wisdom of Teresa, may persevere in running the race that is set before us. With Teresa, may we run confidently, guided by your Spirit. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Much of this program considers the historical context of *The Autobiography*. How did that context influence this and other works by Teresa?
- Teresa's spirituality must be considered within the context discussed in the previous question. How does the context of our church today and our world and national situation influence your walk with God?
- In what ways does your journey connect to that of Teresa? In what ways is she dissimilar?
- Teresa was influenced, both for good and for ill, by her spiritual directors. What is your experience of spiritual direction? Do you have a way right now to engage in healthy spiritual direction?
- Teresa's life manifests both humility and great confidence in God working in her soul. How does this dynamic tension work out in your life?
- Father Himes mentions John of the Cross. What do you know about him? Of the many insights of Teresa, which do you choose to learn more about?

Closing Prayer: Almighty God, you gave to your servant Teresa special gifts of grace to understand and teach the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Through this teaching of a great "Doctor of the Church" may we come to know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent to dwell among us in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

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