



MARCH 2014

SAINT AUGUSTINE ON PRAYER

BY TIM KELLER

Anica Faltonia Proba (died AD 432) was a Christian Roman noblewoman. She had the distinction of knowing both St. Augustine, who was the greatest theologian of the first millennium of Christian history, as well as John Chrysostom, who was its greatest preacher. We have two letters of Augustine to Proba, and the first (Letter 130) is the only single, substantial treatment on the subject of prayer that St. Augustine ever wrote.

I had the chance to read the letter over the Christmas holidays and was impressed with its common sense and some of its unusual insights. Proba wrote Augustine because she was afraid that she wasn't pray-

ing as she should. Augustine responded with several principles or rules for prayer.

The first rule is completely counter-intuitive. St. Augustine wrote that before anyone can turn to the question of *what* to pray and *how* to pray it, they must first be a particular kind of person. What kind is that? He writes: "You must account yourself 'desolate' in this world, however great the prosperity of your lot may be." He argues that no matter how great your earthly circumstances they cannot bring us the peace, happiness, and consolation that are found in Christ. The scales must fall from our eyes and we must see that—if we don't all our prayers will go wrong.

Second, he says, you can begin to pray. And what should you pray for? With a bit of a smile (I think) Augustine answers you should pray for what everyone else prays for: "Pray for a happy life." But of course, what will bring you a happy life? The Christian (if following Augustine's first rule of prayer) has realized that comforts and rewards and pleasures in themselves give only fleeting excitement and, if you rest your heart in them, actually bring you less enduring happiness. He turns to Psalm 27 and points to the Psalmist's great prayer: "*One thing have I desired of the Lord, one thing will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the*"
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GOTHAM FELLOWSHIP: SEEING THE CITY WITH NEW EYES

Being a part of Gotham this year has begun to change the way I view the world. It's helped me to realize how everything—my faith, career, relationships, pursuits—is interconnected. And this holistic transformation is leading me to become more involved in

the world around me.

Before Gotham, it felt like I was staring at a city through a set of stationary binoculars. In the distance, the buildings, each standing alone, their contents compartmentalized. I viewed my life and world in this same way. My job was distinctly par-

BY GLENN SPARICO, GOTHAM '14
titioned off in one section, in another my faith, in another my leisure time, and so on.

But through the theological training, spiritual formation, and community development emphases of Gotham, I have been able to step back from
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PUBLIC FAITH: CLASSROOM, CROSSWORD PUZZLES AND A MAY/DECEMBER FRIENDSHIP

BY JOSH GOTWALT

A year and a half ago I was taking a class on social issues in education. I was given an assignment to write a paper “defining what virtue means to me.” I decided to write what I really thought.

I wrote about how the real problem of ethics is grounding it in something supernatural, something outside of the

If there is nothing that admirable about me, why should anyone listen?

human sphere. Our morality must be endowed or discovered, otherwise it is of no ultimate significance. However, the problem with grounding ethics in an unnatural source is that it leads us to divide people into us and them, the

good and the bad and, if we are really thorough about it, we often find ourselves on the wrong side of this divide. At the end of the paper I suggested the gospel as the most compelling and elegant way of reconciling this predicament.

I handed my paper in, and a week later, my professor invited me to stay after class. She was intrigued by my paper and asked me about it, but mostly told me about her life. Dr. Rose Harrison is in her 80s. She babysat for Woody Guthrie,

walked in the 1963 March on Washington, and worked her way through graduate school at Columbia. At the end of it I couldn’t help but say, “You are such an interesting person. I want to be your friend.”

After the semester, we went out to dinner and it turns out we have things like bridge and the NYT crossword puzzle in common. Later, she was reading Heidegger and asked me to help explain it to her, but the conversation quickly became more personal. In a transparent moment she shared the fact that she had been on the brink of suicide for months. I shared about my own pain and told her I had found answers in Christianity. I struggled really hard to find the correct wording to communicate what Christianity is to her. But after I failed, I made a bargain with her that, if she gave me the time, I could get her to the point of seeing Christianity as so beautiful that, whether she believed it or not, she would wonder who could have ever come up with it.

There was a lot of ground to cover though, because although she was Jewish, Rose had little religious background and in fact belonged to an atheist society. We traded some books

and began a weekly routine of making cocktails and listening to sermons (but I called them speeches so as to not trigger any bias). I began with open forum lectures because they point to the gospel, but are very accessible. In one recording in particular, called *The Secret of Our Discontent*, she heard her unhappiness described in a way no one ever had. She heard the idea that her unhappiness went deeper and that what she really wanted in life was bigger than she ever dared consider. She has listened to this talk dozens of times since and she jokes that she could have saved tens of thousands of dollars in therapy if she heard this 40 years ago.

Six months later she asked to join me at church and she hasn’t missed a Sunday since. The church has welcomed her with such open arms. I asked Rose to tell me what the past year has mean to her and she said, “being at Redeemer was the first time in many, many years that I felt a sense of love and belonging. That “void” or “abyss” I had experienced last year has almost vanished. My journey has made a true change in my perspective and optimism about life itself.”

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REDEEMER REPORT

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Office: 1359 Broadway, 4th Fl., New York, NY 10018-7102

(212) 808-4460 (T) (212) 808-4465 (F) www.redeemer.com

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STORM DAMAGE REPAIRED: RECONCILIATION DIVINELY ORCHESTRATED

BY MINFEI KEVIN YU, GRACE CITY CHURCH, TOKYO

Typhoon Haiyan, known to Filipino locals as Yolanda, touched ground on the island of Leyte on November 8, 2013. Storms are expected annually in the Philippines, but never one of this magnitude, which boasted the strongest wind speed ever recorded. Moreover, no one was prepared for the tsunami-like waves that followed suit, flooding entire cities and plowing cargo ships across multiple neighborhood blocks. By the end of its course, Haiyan had left 11 million people in the Philippines affected or homeless. The death count is 6,200 and counting.

The decision to send a relief team from Grace City Church Tokyo was a simple one. My roommate and I had been following the progress of Haiyan from our home office via BBC.

Going to the Philippines made sense for multiple reasons. Members of our community present in Japan during the Tohoku disasters of 2011 remembered the same exact devastation at the time. Those who were beneficiaries of aid, whether physically or emotionally, now embraced the opportunity to provide the same help to a neighboring country in need. Also, being an extremely young church with many new Christians, it was a blessing to be able to show members that they were part of a larger outward facing movement, one that had a biblical responsibility to react to such occurrences.

Aside from all the positive energy, it was obvious that

churches, whose pastors had undergone intensive church planting training together at Redeemer CTC in New York.



The collaboration was a natural fit, and the opportunity to work alongside a church within the same network that shared the same vision was very exciting. Early on, we recognized the potential of our cooperation as a catalyst that would spur on a trend of City to City churches working together in the future. Yet neither of us would realize the spiritual importance of us coming together until much later.

We arrived in Tacloban on Wednesday January 15 via a less than comfortable plane, ferry and van, carrying four hundred kilograms of medical supplies, construction tools, food, and tents. We got to work, and over the next four days our medical team treated over 450 patients, and our makeshift construction team repaired four-and-a-half homes. Meals were prepared in

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The same night we proceeded to draft a trip proposal to the rest of the church staff team, who responded with green lights all around.

with Pastor Zuriel Bernardino of Heroes Church in Fort Bonifacio, Global City, Manila. Gary had been instrumental in the development of both

STORM DAMAGE REPAIRED... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

the dark under candlelight and bucket showers were taken outside by the water pump.

At night we worshiped together with the local church, United Church of Christ in Tacloban, which headed up all of our relief activity coordination, and slept in the wall-less sanctuary under mosquito nets. Daily instances in which we encountered homes beyond repair and crowds of displaced families asking for help continued to remind us of our lack of control and inability to provide help despite our earnest intentions. However,

the main objective of the trip continued to be the spiritual support and encouragement of the Filipino Church, its workers and the long term gospel-centered relief that they were committed to. On Saturday afternoon, we left behind our tents and our tools, and carried with us expectations to return someday soon.

Before returning to Tokyo on Sunday, our team spent our last hours worshipping at Heroes Church. Pastor Zuriel came up to bring the service to a close, and began to share his thoughts regarding the past week. He described his visit to the memorial of American General Douglas MacArthur in Tacloban, and proceeded to share about the Japanese oppression during WWII.

Zuriel, being a student and lover of Filipino history, spoke about his heart turning cold towards the Japanese at a young age. However, after eating, drinking, traveling and working with our team throughout the week, he found himself finding



joy with Japanese people for the first time. In seeing a congregation of Filipinos, Japanese and Americans worshipping in the same room, he recited Psalm 133:1 “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people dwell together in unity.”

Heroes Church was by no means in any position to make any national political statements and nobody was expecting one. But Zuriel decided that on behalf of all the Filipinos, he wanted to forgive the Japanese for all the pain that they’ve caused, and also to apologize for the all the sins of the Filipinos against the Japanese. The entire church was in tears, and we cried together for the millions who died throughout our past, and for the hatred that continued onward.

For those of us present, everything had come to a climax at that moment, in the small room of thirty people behind a McDonalds off of Rizal Drive in Global City. From the very beginning, we had questioned the meaning and effectiveness of our trip to the Philippines. Neither of us could have comprehended the magnitude of the spiritual reconciliation that God was starting through our two churches. It felt like we wanted to fix houses, and He wanted to fix us.

Haiyan was a wake-up call that revealed to us a suffering that was much deeper than the damage visible above ground. 70 years ago, the Japanese were forced out of the island of Leyte in a manner that had crippled both sides both physically and spiritually. I like to think that after 70 years, a small group of Christians from Japan, with more to follow, were brought back to Leyte by a force greater than ourselves, to share in a common brokenness and to stand together in watching it heal by renewal of God’s kingdom.

Kevin Yu is a Chinese-American member of Redeemer Presbyterian Church who is currently spending a year in Tokyo, working with Grace City Church, a plant of Redeemer’s that launched in 2010.

Lord to behold the beauty of the Lord.” This is the fundamental prayer for happiness. Augustine writes: “We love God, therefore, for what He is in Himself, and [we love] ourselves and our neighbors for His sake.” That doesn’t mean, he quickly adds, that we shouldn’t pray for anything else other than to know, love, and please God. Not at all. The Lord’s Prayer shows us that we need many things. But if God is our greatest love, and if knowing and pleasing him is our highest pleasure, then it transforms both what and how we pray for a happy life.

He quotes Proverbs 30 as an example: “Give me neither poverty nor riches: Feed me with food appropriate for me lest I be full and deny you...or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain.” Ask yourself this question. Are you seeking God in prayer in order to get adequate financial resources—or are you seeking the kind and amount of resources you need to adequately know and serve God? Those are two different sets of motivations.

In both cases the external action is a prayer: “Oh, Lord—give me a job so I won’t be poor” but the internal reasons of the heart are completely different. If, as Augustine counseled, you first became a person “desolate without God regardless of external circumstances”—and then began to pray, your prayer will be like Proverbs 30. But if you just jump into prayer before the gospel re-orders your heart’s loves, then your prayer

will be more like: “Make me as wealthy as possible.” As a result, you will not develop the spiritual discretion in prayer that enables you to discern selfish ambition and greed from a desire for excellence in work. And you will be far more crestfallen if you have financial reversals. A Proverbs 30 prayer includes the request that God not give you too much, not only that he not give you too little.

The third rule was comprehensive and practical. You will be guided, he said, into the right way to pray for a happy life by studying the Lord’s Prayer. Think long and hard about this great model of prayer and be sure your own appeals fit it. For example, Augustine writes: “He who says in prayer... ‘Give me as much wealth as you have given to this or that man’ or ‘Increase my honors; make me eminent in power and fame in the world,’ and who asks merely from a desire for these things, and not in order through them to benefit men agreeably to God’s will, I do not think he will find any part of the Lord’s Prayer in connection with which he could fit in these requests. Therefore, let us be ashamed to ask these things.”

The fourth rule is an admission. He admits that even after following the first three rules, still “we know not what to pray for as we ought in regard to tribulations.” This is a place of great perplexity. Even the most godly Christian can’t be sure what to ask for. “Tribulations...may do us good...and

yet because they are hard and painful...we pray with a desire which is common to mankind that they may be removed from us.”

Augustine gives wise pastoral advice here. He first points to Jesus own prayer in Gethsemane, which was perfectly balanced between honest desire “let this cup pass from me” and submission to God “nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” And he points to Romans 8:26, which promises that the Spirit will guide our hearts and prayers when we are groaning and confused—and God will hear them even in their imperfect state.

Anicia Proba was a widow by her early 30s. She was present when Rome was sacked in 410 and had to flee for her life with her granddaughter Demetrias to Africa where they met Augustine. Augustine concludes the letter by asking his friend, “Now what makes this work [of prayer] specially suitable to widows but their bereaved and desolate condition?” Should a widow not “commit her widowhood, so to speak, to her God as her shield in continual and most fervent prayer?” There is every reason to believe she accepted his invitation.

See Augustine’s Letter 130 (AD 412) to Proba found in Philip Schaff, ed., “Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,” First series, vol. 1, 1887. Christian Classics Ethereal Library pp. 997-1015



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these bifurcated lenses, and take in the whole of the city. It's implored me to realize how everything I had seen through the glass is actually incredibly linked together—a skyline that had always been there, but I had never seen it before. As we look through the prism of the gospel at our motivations for work, our relationships at work, and the goals for the work itself, I've begun to see things much differently. Now I can see how the Bible is much more than a collection of individual stories. Now I can see how a minor, yet sinful, reaction in the workplace is rooted in destructive desires.

The curriculum has been

instrumental in helping process these realizations. I've been introduced to readings, concepts, and theologians that have expanded the understanding of my faith. Daily devotionals bring to front and center the yearnings of my heart. And the Gotham community has experienced these changes with me, encouraging one another each step of the way.

The last few months in Gotham have been a blessing, and yet the transformation is still ongoing. I'm no longer content to view the brokenness of our city at a distance; now I'm drawn towards it to engage it. When I'm reminded that

Christ wasn't content to view the brokenness of this world at a distance, but physically entered in to bring renewal, I'm encouraged and find myself asking "How can I be salt and light in this city, and particularly in the work to which I've been called?"

The Gotham Fellowship is a 9-month intensive leadership development experience focused on faith & work integration. Applications are now open through March 31 for the 2014-15 class! For details: www.faithandwork.org/gotham.

PUBLIC FAITH... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

Sometimes, I hesitate to share my faith. I fear that I will have no credibility with someone who is more sensitive, mor-

al and spiritually aware. If there is nothing that admirable about me, why should anyone listen? But with Rose, I've found that

it's actually when I am transparent about my pain, sin, and things I struggle with, that I most clearly point to Christ.