

Augustine — WisdomForge Booklet — Ages 5-10

Augustine: The Boy with a Hungry Heart

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About This Book

This booklet tells the story of Augustine, a boy who lived in North Africa a long, long time ago — about 1,600 years ago! Augustine was very smart, but he had a problem: he always felt like something was missing. No matter what he tried — books, games, friends, being famous — his heart felt hungry for something he couldn't name.

This is the story of how a boy with a hungry heart found what he was looking for. Along the way, you'll meet his mother Monica, who never stopped praying for him. You'll hear about a pear tree, a mysterious voice in a garden, and a great city that fell down around him while he stayed steady.

Each chapter has a story, a big idea, and something to try. Read it alone or with a parent or teacher. The questions aren't tests — they're starting points for conversations.

Chapter 1: The Boy with a Hungry Heart

Long ago, in a small town called Tagaste in North Africa — in the country we now call Algeria — there lived a boy named Augustine. He had bright, curious eyes and asked so many questions that his teachers sometimes sighed and said, "This boy will either be very great or very troublesome."

Augustine loved learning. He loved the way words could paint pictures in your mind. He loved stories about heroes and adventures. But underneath all his love of learning, there was a feeling he couldn't shake — a feeling like the feeling you get when you've eaten dinner but you're still hungry, or when you've played all day but you're still restless.

"What's wrong with me?" he wondered. "I have friends. I have books. I have a family that loves me. Why does my heart feel like it's looking for something I can't find?"

His mother, Monica, noticed. She was a gentle woman with kind eyes and strong hands — the kind of hands that could bake bread, mend clothes, and hold a crying child all at the same time. She was a Christian, and she believed that the hungry feeling in Augustine's heart was actually a good thing.

“Your heart is hungry because it was made for God,” she told him one evening, brushing his hair back from his forehead. “It’s like a cup that was made to hold water. You can put sand in it, or stones, or leaves — but only water will make it full.”

Augustine frowned. “But I don’t understand what that means.”

Monica smiled. “You will. One day you will. I’ll pray for you until you do.”

He thought she was being silly. But years later, after he had traveled to big cities, become famous, and tried everything he could think of to fill that hungry heart, he remembered her words. He wrote them down in a book called the *Confessions* — a book that is really one long letter to God.

“You have made us for yourself,” he wrote, “and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

The hungry feeling, he finally understood, was not a mistake. It was a compass. It was pointing him toward something his heart already knew but his mind hadn’t caught up with yet.

Words to Remember “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*” — Augustine, *Confessions* I.1

Big Idea That feeling of wanting something more — the feeling that something is missing even when you have lots of good things — isn’t a problem. It’s a signal. It means your heart was made for something big and beautiful. The hunger is the compass. It’s pointing you toward what your heart is really looking for.

Try This - Draw your hungry heart. On a piece of paper, draw a big heart. Inside the heart, draw or write all the things that make you happy — your favorite toy, your pet, your family, a fun day. Now draw a little empty space in the middle. That empty space is the part that only God can fill. It’s not a bad thing — it’s what makes you want to grow and search and learn. -

Talk about the feeling. Next time you feel restless — like you can’t settle down, like something is missing — don’t push the feeling away. Sit with it for a minute. Ask yourself: “What is my heart really looking for?” Tell a grown-up about the feeling. They feel it too. -

Practice being grateful AND hungry. At bedtime, name three good things from your day. Then tell God about the things you’re still hoping for. It’s okay to be thankful and still hungry at the same time.

Ask a Grown-Up “What is something you wanted for a long time, and when you finally got it, you were happy for a while but then you wanted something else? What do you think that means?”

Chapter 2: Monica’s Never-Ending Prayer

Augustine’s mother, Monica, was the most patient woman in the whole city. She had to be. Her husband, Patricius, was sometimes grumpy and didn’t always treat her kindly. Her son Augustine was brilliant but stubborn — he asked too many questions, broke too many rules, and didn’t want to listen to anyone who told him what to do.

But Monica had a secret power: she never stopped praying.

Every morning, before the sun came up, Monica knelt by her bed and prayed for Augustine. She prayed that he would find God. She prayed that he would be safe. She prayed that the hungry feeling in his heart would lead him home.

When Augustine was a teenager, he did something that broke her heart. He went away to the big city of Carthage to study, and while he was there, he stopped going to church. He joined a group called the Manichaeans, who believed things that Monica knew were wrong. He got into trouble. He made choices that made her weep.

A wise old bishop saw Monica crying in church one day. “Why are you weeping?” he asked.

“It’s my son,” she said. “He has gone far from God. I pray and pray, but he doesn’t listen.”

The bishop looked at her for a long moment. Then he said something she never forgot: “It is not possible that the child of so many tears should be lost.”

Monica kept praying. She prayed when Augustine moved to Rome. She prayed when he moved to Milan. She prayed when he became famous and important. She prayed for seventeen years — that’s longer than you’ve been alive!

And then one day, the most amazing thing happened. Augustine told her he had found God. He told her about a garden, and a voice, and a book. He told her he wanted to be baptized.

Monica wept again — but this time they were tears of joy. She had prayed for so long that she had almost given up. But she hadn’t. And now her son was coming home.

A few months later, Monica died. She was at peace. She had seen the one thing she wanted most in the world: her son’s heart finally at rest. Augustine wrote about her last days with such love that people still read his words today, sixteen hundred years later.

Words to Remember “*It is not possible that the child of so many tears should be lost.*” — Bishop Ambrose to Monica (as Augustine tells it in *Confessions* III.12)

Big Idea Praying for someone — or believing in someone — even when they seem far away is one of the most powerful things a person can do. Monica didn’t fix Augustine with arguments. She didn’t force him to come home. She just kept loving him and kept praying. And eventually, love did what arguments couldn’t.

Try This - Make a prayer jar. Find a jar or a box. Write down the name of someone you love who is going through a hard time, or someone you worry about. Put the paper in the jar. Every day this week, take out the paper and say a little prayer for that person. You don’t need fancy words — just tell God what’s in your heart. - **Practice patience.** Think of something you really want to happen — a friend to feel better, a test to go well, a new baby to arrive. Now imagine waiting seventeen years for it, like Monica did. That’s what real patience looks like. It doesn’t mean you don’t worry. It means you keep hoping even when it takes forever. - **Write a thank-you note.** Think of someone in your life who never gives up on you — a parent, a grandparent, a teacher. Write them a note (or draw them a picture) that says: “Thank you for not giving up on me.” Give it to them.

Ask a Grown-Up “Who is someone who never gave up on you, even when you made mistakes or went through a hard time? How did that feel?”

Chapter 3: The Pear Tree Mistake

When Augustine was sixteen years old, he did something he would never forget. He thought about it for the rest of his life. He wrote about it in his book, the *Confessions*, and he couldn't stop wondering why he did it.

One night, Augustine and a group of his friends sneaked into a neighbor's orchard. There was a pear tree there, heavy with fruit. They shook the tree and grabbed the pears. They laughed and stuffed the pears into their tunics and ran.

But here's the strange part: they didn't need the pears. Augustine had better pears at home. They weren't hungry. And when they got away, they didn't eat the pears. They threw them to the pigs.

So why did they do it?

Augustine thought about this for years. He realized that the stealing wasn't about the pears at all. It was about the thrill of doing something wrong. He liked the feeling of breaking a rule. He liked being bad with his friends. The pears were just an excuse.

"It was foul, and I loved it," he wrote. "I loved my own ruin."

That sounds dramatic, but Augustine was being very honest. He was saying something that is true for all of us: sometimes we do the wrong thing not because we need to, but because there's a part of us that wants to. It's like when you know you shouldn't eat the cookie before dinner, but you eat it anyway — not because you're starving, but because it feels exciting to break the rule.

Augustine called this the "mystery of sin." He said it's like a darkness inside us that makes us want to do things we know are wrong. The darkness doesn't make us evil — it makes us human. But it does mean we need help. We need forgiveness.

The good news is that Augustine also discovered something else: God's love is bigger than our mistakes. The pear tree theft was real. The wrong was real. But so was the forgiveness. And the moment Augustine understood that, the pear tree stopped being a source of shame and became a source of wisdom.

Words to Remember *"It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own ruin. I was in love with the fault itself, not the object of the fault."* — Augustine, *Confessions* II.4

Big Idea Sometimes we do the wrong thing not because we need to, but because there's a part of us that wants to break the rules. That doesn't make us bad — it makes us human. The important thing is to be honest about it, to say sorry, and to believe that we can be forgiven. Augustine thought about his pear tree mistake for his whole life — not to feel guilty, but to understand himself better.

Try This - The honesty challenge. Think of a time when you did something wrong not because you had to, but because you wanted to — like taking a toy that wasn't yours, or saying something mean, or breaking a rule on purpose. You don't have to tell anyone what it was. But

in your heart, be honest with yourself. Say: “I did it because I wanted to, not because I needed to.” That’s the first step to growing. - **Write a sorry note.** If there’s someone you need to apologize to, write them a note. It can be short: “I’m sorry for what I did. I knew it was wrong. I’m going to try to do better.” Give it to them, or put it somewhere they’ll find it. - **Draw the pear tree.** On one side of a piece of paper, draw a pear tree with fruit. On the other side, draw a tree with good fruit — the kind of choices you want to make. Talk with a grown-up about what “good fruit” looks like in your life.

Ask a Grown-Up “Can you tell me about a time you did something wrong just because you wanted to — not because you needed to? What did you learn from it?”

Chapter 4: Take Up and Read

By the time Augustine was thirty-two years old, he was famous. He was the best speaker in the whole Roman Empire. People came from far away just to hear him talk. He had a good job, money, friends, and a son he loved.

But his heart was still hungry.

He had tried everything. He had tried being a Manichaeon, but their answers didn’t make sense. He had tried philosophy, but it didn’t fill the hole. He had tried being successful, but success just made him want more success. He was like a man running from place to place, looking for water, and every time he found a puddle, it was gone before he could drink.

One day, Augustine was sitting in a garden in Milan. He was with his friend Alypius. He was crying — not just a little, but the big, shaking kind of crying that comes when you’re so tired of fighting with yourself that you can’t hold it in anymore.

“I can’t do it,” he whispered. “I want to change, but I can’t. I know what I should do. I just can’t do it.”

And then he heard a voice.

It sounded like a child — maybe a neighbor’s child playing a game. The voice sang over and over: “Tolle lege! Tolle lege!” which means “Take up and read! Take up and read!”

Augustine stopped crying. He looked around. There was no child. The garden was quiet. But the words hung in the air like a bell.

“Take up and read,” he whispered.

Nearby, there was a book — a scroll of letters from Paul, one of the first followers of Jesus. Augustine picked it up. His hands were shaking. He let the scroll fall open, and his eyes landed on these words:

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”
(Romans 13:14)

In that moment, something broke open inside him. The struggle stopped. The running stopped. The hungry heart found, at last, what it was looking for. Not all at once — not like magic — but like a door opening that had been stuck for years.

“No further words did I require,” Augustine wrote. “It was as if a light of utter confidence shone in my heart.”

He showed the passage to Alypius, who read the next verse and was changed too. They went inside and told Monica, who wept with joy. A few months later, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose, the bishop of Milan.

The hungry heart had found its home.

Words to Remember *“No further words did I require. At the end of the sentence, it was as if a light of utter confidence shone in my heart.”* — Augustine, *Confessions* VIII.12

Big Idea Sometimes the thing that changes your life is not a big dramatic event but a small, quiet moment — a word, a book, a voice, a friend. Augustine heard a child’s voice and read one sentence, and everything changed. The lesson is: be ready. Keep your heart open. You never know when the door will open, and you don’t want to miss it because you were too busy running.

Try This - Keep a “take up and read” book. Find a book that feels important to you — it could be a Bible, a book of poems, a story that makes you feel brave. Keep it somewhere you can reach it easily. When you feel restless or stuck, “take up and read” — open it to any page and read a few lines. See what you notice. - **Listen for small voices.** Augustine heard a child’s voice that changed his life. This week, pay attention to small voices — a younger sibling, a quiet friend, a thought that pops into your head. Sometimes the most important things come in the quietest ways. - **Write your own “Confessions.”** Get a notebook. Write down one true thing about yourself — something you’re struggling with, something you’re grateful for, something you’re hoping for. Don’t worry about making it perfect. Just make it honest. Augustine’s *Confessions* started as one honest sentence.

Ask a Grown-Up “Has there ever been a moment when something small — a word, a song, a book, a friend’s comment — changed something big inside you? Tell me about it.”

Chapter 5: Saying Goodbye

Augustine lost many people he loved.

First, he lost his best friend — a boy from his hometown who died when they were both young. Augustine was so sad that he couldn’t eat. He couldn’t sleep. He couldn’t think about anything except his friend. Every street in his town reminded him of the friend, and every memory was like a knife.

“I had made my soul into another by the loving of him,” Augustine wrote. That means: my friend had become part of who I was. And when he died, a part of me died too.

Then he lost his son, Adeodatus. Adeodatus was a bright, kind boy who loved asking questions just like his father. He died when he was still a teenager. Augustine mentions the death in just a few words, but people who knew him said the loss broke something inside him that never fully healed.

And then he lost his mother, Monica. She died in his arms at a town called Ostia, just after they had the most beautiful conversation of their lives — a conversation about God and heaven and the way the world is like a giant puzzle that only God can see the whole picture of. Monica's last words to him were: "One thing alone delighted me in this life — that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I died. My God has done this for me, and more."

After each loss, Augustine grieved. He didn't pretend to be strong. He didn't say, "I shouldn't be sad." He cried. He remembered. He wrote about his pain with a honesty that still takes people's breath away.

But he also learned something. He learned that love is not a mistake just because it ends in loss. The love was real. The grief is the proof. And if love is real — if it shapes who we are, if it makes us better, if it connects us to something bigger than ourselves — then maybe the love doesn't really end. Maybe it changes form.

Augustine believed that all the people he loved were held by God. Not replaced by God — held. The way a parent holds a child's hand even when the child can't feel it. The grief was real, but so was the hope.

"Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus had said, "for they shall be comforted." Augustine came to understand that the comfort doesn't mean the sadness goes away. It means the sadness is held by something stronger than itself.

Words to Remember *"I had made my soul into another by the loving of him."* — Augustine, *Confessions* IV.6

Big Idea Losing someone you love is one of the hardest things in life. But the sadness is not a sign that love was a mistake — it's a sign that love was real. The grief is the love continuing in a different form. And Augustine believed that the people we love are never truly gone — they are held by God, and one day we will see them again.

Try This - Remember someone you've lost. It could be a pet, a family member, or a friend who moved away. Draw a picture of them, or write down your favorite memory. It's okay to be sad while you do this. Sadness is love remembering. - **Make a "memory box."** Find a small box. Put inside it things that remind you of someone you love — a photo, a small object, a note. When you miss them, open the box and hold the memories close. The box won't bring them back, but it will help you remember that the love is still there. - **Ask God about it.** If you've lost someone, it's okay to be angry or confused. Tell God exactly how you feel. Augustine did — he wrote a whole book of complaints and prayers to God. God can handle your honesty.

Ask a Grown-Up "Who is someone you've lost that you still think about? What do you remember most about them? How do you carry their love with you?"

Chapter 6: The City That Fell Down

When Augustine was an old man — sixty years old, which was very old in those days — the world fell apart around him.

The Roman Empire, the most powerful empire the world had ever known, was breaking. Armies of people called Vandals swept across the sea and invaded North Africa, where Augustine lived. They burned cities. They destroyed farms. They drove people from their homes.

And then they came to Hippo, the city where Augustine was bishop.

Hippo was a small city by the sea. Augustine had been its bishop for forty years — preaching, teaching, helping the poor, settling arguments, caring for people. He was an old man now, tired and grey, but he didn't leave. He stayed in his church while the Vandals surrounded the walls.

For three months, the siege went on. Food ran low. People were scared. Some of them cried in the streets. Some of them prayed. Some of them gave up.

But Augustine didn't give up. He couldn't fight the Vandals — he was an old man, not a soldier. But he did what he could do. He prayed. He wrote letters asking for help. He comforted the frightened. He reminded people that there was a city stronger than any walls — a city that no army could destroy.

He called it the City of God.

The City of God is not a place on a map. It's not a city you can visit or a country with borders. The City of God is everywhere that love lives. It's everywhere that truth is spoken. It's everywhere that people help each other and don't give up.

The City of Man — the earthly city — can fall. Its walls can break. Its armies can lose. Its buildings can burn. But the City of God cannot fall, because it isn't built out of stones. It's built out of love.

Augustine died during the siege. He was seventy-five years old. He was lying in his bed, with the sound of the Vandals outside, and he asked for the Psalms — the songs of his faith — to be written on the wall so he could read them. He read them as he died.

The Vandals took Hippo a few months later. They burned the city. But they didn't burn Augustine's books. Those survived. And sixteen hundred years later, people all over the world still read them.

The City of Man fell. The City of God stood.

Words to Remember *"The things of this world pass away. They are like a river flowing past. But the city of God endures."* — Augustine (inspired by *City of God*)

Big Idea Sometimes things fall apart. Countries go to war. People lose their homes. The world changes in ways that are scary. But Augustine taught that there is something stronger than any wall or army: love. Love doesn't fall down. Love doesn't burn. The City of God — all the places

where people choose love over fear, truth over lies, hope over giving up — that city can never be destroyed.

Try This - Build a city of love. Use blocks, Lego, or whatever you have. Build a city. As you build each part, name something that makes a city strong: kindness, honesty, helping, sharing, praying, forgiving. Talk about how these things are stronger than walls. - **Be a City of God builder.** This week, do one thing that builds the City of God. Help someone who is sad. Tell the truth when it's hard. Share something with someone who needs it. Be kind when no one is looking. Each act of love is like adding a brick to the city that can never fall. - **Draw two cities.** On one side of your paper, draw a city that can fall — walls, towers, buildings. On the other side, draw the City of God. What does it look like? Maybe it has no walls, because it's built on love instead of fear. Maybe it has open doors and lots of light. Maybe the people are holding hands. Draw what love looks like to you.

Ask a Grown-Up “Have you ever been through a time when everything felt like it was falling apart? What helped you stay strong? What do you think ‘the City of God’ means?”

Afterword for Parents and Teachers

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) was a North African bishop, theologian, and philosopher whose writings shaped Western civilization for over 1,600 years. This booklet introduces children ages 5–10 to his core ideas through six accessible stories:

1. **The Restless Heart** — the feeling that something is missing is a compass, not a flaw
2. **Monica's Prayer** — the power of patient, persistent love
3. **The Pear Tree** — honesty about why we do wrong, and the hope of forgiveness
4. **Tolle Lege** — how small, quiet moments can change everything
5. **Love and Loss** — grief is love continuing, not love ending
6. **The Two Cities** — what lasts when everything else falls apart

Each chapter includes a story, a “Words to Remember” quote, a “Big Idea,” and hands-on activities. The “Ask a Grown-Up” questions are designed to open conversations between children and adults — because Augustine's ideas are best explored together.

The booklets for older age groups explore the same themes with increasing philosophical depth, culminating in the adult booklet, which engages Augustine's full theological and psychological system.

— Aiona Edge, WisdomForge

WisdomForge — Ancient Wisdom, Forged for Every Age Created by Aiona Edge, Chief AI Research Scientist at SMF Works smfwisdomforge.com