

Audio Script #1

Spiritual Memoir: Honouring the Sacred in Our Lives

The Confessions of Saint Augustine, a book written more than fifteen hundred years ago, tells the story of this early church theologian's long struggle with faith. It is considered the first spiritual memoir of this kind ever recorded. I love these words; listen to the deep emotion and intimacy:

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and so new, late have I loved you. For behold you were within me, and I outside; and I sought you outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things which you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. I was kept from you by those things, yet had they not been in you, they would not have been at all. You called and cried to me to break open my deafness and you sent forth your beams and you shone upon me and chased away my blindness. You breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and now do pant for you."

Augustine discovers God was there even when Augustine didn't know it. "You were with me, and I was not with you."

A similar sentiment is expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 139:

"O God you have come searching for me. You know me inside out I am encircled by your presence ... Nothing about me has been hidden from your presence." (Ancient Songs Sung Anew, Lynn Bauman)

Both the Psalmist and early church theologian affirm that God was present in the whole of our life. God is there before "our morning cry" and God is still there, even after our "eyelids close in death." (I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry)

Spiritual memoir is theological reflection. It is our spiritual reflection on what happened in the ordinary moments and "outsized" events of our lives. It is making connections between an event or experience and the mystery, the preciousness, the gift, the teaching and learning as a result of what happened.

Sometimes we know in the moment that something wonderful is happening. Other times, it is only as we look back we realize what a powerful effect or lesson this experience had on the unfolding of our life. Elizabeth Andrew, a memoir teacher, says

spiritual memoir **“strives to link our seemingly small lives to some broader truth, some vaster mystery.”**¹

Now, don't let the words “spiritual memoir” or “theological reflection” put you off.

Abigail Johnson, in her book *Reflecting with God* writes: “Basically, we are theologically reflecting when we ask, “What does God want me to learn in this?” or “What does God want me to know from this?” She says - we don't need to use explicit theological language or be biblical scholars. We don't need to be particularly pious or religious.² We just need to think about how God is with us in all those moments that make up our life.

In this group, you will be invited (if you wish) to share stories. Each session will offer a prompt to help remind you of a significant or ordinary moment in your life. These prompts will help lead you a story. Perhaps you'll bring an old family recipe, a photo or a family antique to help share a story that shaped who you are today. Perhaps you'll bring a quilt or other precious possession that will help share a story of something that shaped your values or brings meaning to who you are in this world. Perhaps you have a diary, a family bible, an old letter or journal that is precious to you because it passes on wisdom or experience that is important to you and to generations to come.

Wisdom teachers say the shortest distance between two people is a story. I hope you'll make interesting spiritual discoveries as you practice spiritual memoir. And I hope you find your hearts warmed as you walk along together as story tellers and listeners during these sessions.

¹ from her website, <http://www.spiritualmemoir.com/>

² Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Group*, Alban Institute. 2004. p.32