

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

430

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will be about answers to a mother's prayer and the power of the Scriptures. We will illustrate this by the life of a famous man named Augustine. He was born in Thagaste, North Africa in A.D. 354. His father was a pagan who worshiped Punic gods but his mother was a zealous Christian. Sadly, Augustine spent his youth wallowing in sexual sin and debauchery. He was so depraved and sinful that he was thrilled by simply doing something that was forbidden.

At age 17 he went to school in Carthage. There he was intrigued by the writings of Cicero and of Manichaeian philosophers. His secular education led him to renounce any Biblical teaching he had ever received from his Christian mother. Manichaeism is a pagan philosophy, based on the teachings of a Persian named Mani. It was a corruption of Christianity. When Augustine completed his studies he returned home to teach rhetoric and Manichaeism. He tried to hide his heresy from his mother, whose name was Monica, but she found out about his unchristian views and threw him out of the house.

Monica, like the godly mother she was, continued to pray for the conversion of her wayward son. When he was offered a professorship in Rome she begged him not to go. He promised her that he wouldn't, but the depraved young man was lying. As soon as she left to go home he defiantly boarded a ship for Rome.

After a year in Rome, Augustine moved to Milan and became a professor of rhetoric. His mother's prayers, however, were starting to take affect. A change in Augustine began and he started attending the cathedral to hear the powerful oratory of a preacher named Ambrose. His mother finally caught up with him there and encouraged him to straighten out his life. Among other things, Augustine had a concubine whom he deeply loved. She had given him a son but he would not marry her because it would have ruined him socially and politically.

Augustine, however, was now struggling with his carnal nature. Reflecting on the thrill of stealing pears as a young man he wrote: *"Our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden. The evil in me was foul, but I loved it."* One afternoon while wrestling within himself about such matters, he heard a child's voice saying, "Take up and read!" He turned and saw a table containing a collection of Paul's epistles. When he picked them up the first thing he saw were the inspired words of Romans 13:13-14: **"Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites."** He later wrote, *"No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."* Truly, his mother's prayers were powerful, and the Word of God is alive and active and sharper than a double edged sword (Heb. 4:12).

Augustine's conversion revolutionized his life. He resigned his professorship, wrote a note to Ambrose relating his conversion, and retreated with his mother and friends to a country villa in Cassiciacum. Later he returned to Milan to be baptized by Ambrose. By the time he returned to North Africa he had lost his mother, his son and one of his closest friends. Thankfully, his mother lived to see that her prayers were answered and her wayward son had received Christ as Lord. In A.D. 391 Augustine became the bishop of Hippo which was a port city on the Northern coast of Africa.

Augustine became one of the most famous Christian leaders in history. His 22 volume work *The City of God* contains 1,184 pages and has been described as the cornerstone of Western thought. It took him twelve years to write. It refutes paganism, and deals with such theological controversies as to why the righteous suffer, the existence of evil, original sin, and the conflict between free will and divine omniscience.

Augustine was a prolific writer. A contemporary Augustinian scholar estimates that the volume of his books, letters and sermons, would be equivalent to "*approximately that of writing a 300-page printed book every year for almost 40 years.*"

Augustine did not write the following tribute to his mother. It was written years after his death by an unknown author. It seems, however, to represent the profound gratitude of every godly child.

*“To my mother: She carried me under her heart and loved me before I was born.
She took God’s hand in hers and walked through the Valley of Shadows that I might live.
She bathed me when I was helpless; clothed me when I was naked; and fed me when I was hungry.
She rocked me to sleep when I was weary, and sang to me with the voice of an angel.
She held my hand when I learned to walk; suffered with my sorrow, and laughed with my joy.
She glowed with my every triumph, and while I knelt by her side she taught my lips to pray.
Through all the days of my youth she gave me strength for my weakness,
courage for my despair, and hope to fill my hopeless heart.
She was loyal when others failed; she was true when tried by fire,
she was my friend when my other friends were gone.
She prayed for me through all the days, whether flooded with sunshine or saddened by shadows.
Though we lay down our lives for her, we can never repay the debt that we owe to our mother”*

Please thank God for your mother!

Grandpa Boyce