Recovery of Double Knowledge: Self-Knowledge in Light of the Knowledge of God Part 1
By Dr. Jim Houston

--Welcome you again. This is our third night in the lecture series in Spiritual Formation and Soul Care. Tonight, we're going to have Dr. Jim Houston address us and encourage our hearts. Um, again, just a few announcements, um, the tapes are still available and there's uh sheets outside on the door you can get a hold of for the tapes. And you can send it into the media center, or you can hand them to the individuals at the registration desk. Um, we'll also be taking a break as normal sometime halfway through. The restroom is over in Myers Hall and beneath here. What I want to do to begin, again I want to pray and uh and ask the Lord that He would-He would use the words that are being spoken and that those words might generate something deep by the Spirit.

And as the last couple nights, I want to just encourage us now to um to kneel together, and as we kneel to, again, let our bodies inform our souls as to really the proper way to come before the Lord. And that's humble, uh servants of the Lord. So take a neighbor and introduce yourself and pray with that neighbor on your knees, asking the Lord to teach us tonight.

[Moment of silence]

Okay. I want to um, I want to introduce Dr. James Houston to you. Dr. James Houston received his uh master's degree at Edinburgh and a masters and doctorate in Oxford. He spent the next 25
years or so teaching geography at Oxford University. And through a variety of events, the Lord led him to really be the founding president, originator of Regent College in British Columbia. Um, it really is a privilege to have Dr Houston his-for us here at the institute. He's been one who has come to really give us encouragement about um how the institute can really serve our university. Some of you have read his books, Transform Friendship, In Search of Happiness, and Desires of the Heart. Uh, why don't we just welcome Dr. Jim Houston?

[Audience applauds]

Jim Houston:
Well, good evening, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great privilege to be with you on this occasion, and I rejoice in all the good things that are happening here in your community. This evening as we speak on this, as we speak on the subject of the double knowledge as the way of wisdom, it certainly has been for me, a journey in my own life. In fact, I was first introduced into this community when we had this theme of these conferences, the journey. And of all the symbols of the Christian life that we find throughout the scriptures, perhaps the most consistent theme is the halakhah, that is to say, the way of the Lord. And when we speak of discipleship, then we think of other symbols of the Christian life, like being a good soldier, or being a pilgrim, or indeed living in the desert and needing a garden of the Lord. That all these are wonderful symbols, but the overarching symbol is that life is dynamic, it needs to be progressive, and it needs involvement so that we're on the road.

I spent my youth studying in Spain, and among the Christian philosophers, Unamuno was one that was a great influence to me. And it's he who makes the distinction between those people
who see life from the balcony and those who see it from the road. It's easy to be detached in our culture. The whole mesmerism of television and of sport today is uh, not to participate directly but visually. Um, not to be on the road, but seeing it all from the balcony, or from the stadium, for that matter. And that kind of virtual involvement, it isn't involvement at all. Of course, it's something that shallows our Christian life so radically. And so one of the concerns that we have today for spiritual formation among Christians for a deepening of what discipleship is all about, is that the thing that we lament most of all about North American Christianity is that it is more than two thousand miles wide. But is it any more than half an inch thick?

And so the sheer inanity, and banality, and superficiality of so much of what goes by the name of being Christian is something that is so disenchancing, so disillusioning, so disappointing. And I'm sure many of us do despair as to really what it will mean for us to have a deeper walk with the Lord. Walk, yes, because from the very beginning, when Adam walked with God in the cool of the evening, there was that awareness, that relatedness to God is a walk with him. And as we think of Enoch, who walked with God, or indeed Noah, or indeed Abraham, or indeed how we see that after the death and passion of our Lord, that in the acts of the apostles, those that were Christians were those of the way. And we conclude in the Book of Revelation with the realization that those who truly are blessed are those who walk in the way of the lamb. And so from Genesis to Revelation, the whole theme of the Christian life is that of a walking with God.

One of the books that I used to enjoy reading by Robert Bolton, a Puritan saint of the 17th century, he calls it a comfortable walking with God. You know, that kind of friendship? You walk together, you don't need to say very much because you're communing with an unanimity of
love and unity of understanding. And you just can walk silently together. And that should be the ideal for us of the Christian life. So, yes, we're speaking about the double knowledge as the way, and the way of wisdom. Also when I was a youth, I was very--although I wasn't a poet or had a poet's heart--I was fascinated by T.S. Eliot. And so I was grabbed in his will-in his wasteland, which he wrote before he himself was a Christian in 1923, of how um, there is this uh disenchantment of modernity. Where is the wisdom that we've lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge that we've lost in information? The cycle of 20 centuries take us further from God and nearer to the dust.

It's as if you grasp for some solid hold onto what you think is sandstone and it all crumbles like sand grains in your hand. No substance, and no substantial reality about it. And so today we are all, in a sense, buried in information. But certainly how foolish we can be. And so the need for wisdom is so vital for us. It's not this evening a discourse that we're going to have on wisdom, but it is just as well to, for us to understand the geographical background, the wisdom in the Middle East. But um, when you look at the great disparity that there was between the hydraulic civilizations of the Nile and the Tigris Euphrates, on the one hand, with all the remarkable coordinated organization, what really were truly hydraulic civilizations, the massive ability to transfer water and use it as the water of life, and build resources, and build power to these empires, was so impressive that people all around them spoke about the wisdom of the Babylonians, or the wisdom of the Egyptians. Because indeed they seem to have that Know-How to be able to harness knowledge to the most fruitful forms of societal advancement.
And yet we know that they in turn, although they knew that the application of knowledge for something greater was indeed wisdom, they themselves recognized that wisdom was archetypally reaching out beyond the known into the mystery of the unknown. And so for the Egyptians, the whole lodging place, of what made Egypt wise was Maat, M-A-A-T. And their understanding of Maat was that which was—that which is ultimy—ultimately reliable and ultimately wise is a reference for everything else in human affairs. Of course, in some ways, it was a reflection of the Nile itself, because that's what was ultimately dependable. The hydrological regime of the Nile was that which provided that uh reimbursement of water for thirsty land, and which gave them such an assurance that they could totally rely upon its dependability. That was Maat too. It's a bit more uncertain with the flash floods from the Tigris Euphrates. There wasn't that same awareness within the cosmos that there was such a reliable source. Life was a bit more fickle.

But what we find in both of these uh cultures and civilizations and religious systems is that they were seeing that life consists of correspondence to something else. They were what we might call religions of correspondence. It's in a sense, what we find in China as well in its civilization. This awareness that you do on Earth, as is done in heaven, and that you seek to apply what you think is the wisdom of the heavenly to the practice of the earthly. And when you have that conjunction, then you're wise. And so to walk in the way of wisdom was to walk in the way of correspondence. How different is biblical faith? In biblical faith, there is the awareness not of the inscrutability of the cosmos, not of the um impersonality of the fates that we are all subject to. But there was the awareness of the personalness of Yahweh. And so the faith of Israel stands out in the darkness of these systems.
Does that which enables us to walk with the Lord, that companionship, that mutuality, that reciprocity, that means that we have a companion through life. Indeed, he's the kind of God, the Bible declares, that we find God in mystery unless we associate Him with man, and we find man in mystery, unless we associate him with God. Immanuel is the kind of God that we only know as the God of the Bible. But man, man and woman, are themselves mysteries unless we realize their relatedness to God. And so really, our theme tonight about walking in the way of wisdom is in the exercise of this double knowledge, which is the awareness that without theology, there's no anthropology, but that without anthropology there is no theology. And of course, there's a great split in the dualism of our thinking, so that one of the tensions that we have as Christians is that theology and psychology have gone their separate ways. And how we can integrate them together is one of the great tasks of the 21st century.

So that's what we have in mind when we speak about this this evening. And I hope you'll bear with me because the first half of this lecture is going to be perhaps more historical than some of us who are modern are impatient with. You see, if you say, how do I know if I'm modern? Well, the answer is, if you're very modern, you're very ignorant of history.

[Audience laughs]

Jim Houston:
You're like Henry Ford that at the beginning of this century, he said, "History is bunk." And when you've got the conveyor belt, that's all you need for reality. That's what he thought. Well, how foolish we can be, because we can also add, as uh has been said so wisely, that uh he who is
not prepared to know the lessons of the past is condemned to repeat those same errors and, and um, be way-mislaid in the future. And so, having historic consciousness is what gives us wisdom. We begin to see why we're in the mess we're in. We begin to understand the why and the wherefore of the things that influence our culture, and therefore influence ourselves. And therefore, we gain wisdom by having a historical referent for our understanding. Blaise Pascal in his Pensées, perhaps explains to us right at the beginning of our talk why it's so important to have a knowledge of ourselves in the light of the knowledge of God. This is what he says, "To know God, and yet know nothing of our wretched state, breeds pride."

In other words, you claim to know God, but you're ignorant of yourself. You're bound to fall into pride. But to realize our misery, in other words, to know the mess we're in, with that self-knowledge, and know nothing of God is mere despair. And that's what we do. We oscillate between arrogance and despair. But if we come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, there we find our true equilibrium, for there we find all human misery and God. We find that in the cross of Christ, there is God's understanding of man, and therefore the understanding of ourselves. But there we find the doorway into a knowledge of Himself as well. And so my appeal this evening is that our Christian lives will become very much wiser when we rediscover this double knowledge. As you've heard, my first profession was as a geographer, and I was always chastened by one proverb, which you'll find in the book of Proverbs, Chapter 17, verse 24. "The eyes of a fool are on the ends of the Earth."

[Audience laughs]

Jim Houston:
That seemed to me the final condemnation upon my profession, until I began to see that Augustine interprets this curiosity rather differently. Because in his confessions, Augustine notes, "How strange," he says, "is the tendency of mankind to look speculatively and outwardly on the external world, rather than to focus inwardly upon oneself before God." And so really, what uh, the great protest than he's the great uh protagonist of this double knowledge, is Augustine. Now what Augustine is saying is how stupid can you be?

[Audience laughs]

Jim Houston:
And of course, some of you have seen this in Walter Percy in-in uh Lost in the Cosmos. How extraordinary, we can, with such accuracy, uh locate the orbit of a spacecraft into outer space, and uh put that uh spacecraft in a position that has such remarkable accuracy of a split second, and in fact just a few yards off course for what's intended to be. And yet the person who sent such a spacecraft into space can be clueless about themselves. That's the discrepancy. And Augustine was fully aware of that challenge to us. The double knowledge was pro-uh, no doubt, was first developed by the early Christian Fathers as a polemic against the Delphic uh maxim "Know yourself." We know that this uh saying that we associate with Delphi, um has occurred at least before the fifth century BC. And of course, Delphi was the kind of CIA of the ancient world, because everybody that had a problem went to the oracle, any uh conqueror, or would be a military officer, would go to the Oracle and ask whether those battle plans or okay.

Um, and uh and this whole question of seeking to scrutinize the resources that you have for what you're about to do, if you're a ruler of a state, no doubt gave Delphi a network of intelligence that
was second to none in the ancient world. And the spread of this Delphic knowledge, we know, under the third century B.C. in the reign of Alexander the Great was spread so that there are actually fragments of the Delphic oracle found on the banks of the river Oxis in Central Asia. In fact, it's evidenced on the borders of China, as well as in northern India. So such is the dissemination of this Hellenistic culture that spread this knowledge. And only fragment of the writings of Heraclitus actually discusses this. And Plutarch expounds quite strongly about the need for this. And those of you who are philosophers will know that Aristotle discoursed fully about this self-understanding. Indeed, it became basic to the philosophy and ethics of the Stoics.

We haven't time tonight to go into all the intrigues of what "Know yourself" uh was elaborated to be. But at least there are seven different ways in which this Socratic, as it became called, the Socratic an-a-a-an-a an inducement, or encouragement, to know yourself developed. First of all, know your own measure. That's to say know your limitations. So if you know your own limitations, then you're not going to be blinded by ambition on the one hand, nor are you going to be moved and persuaded by flattery on the other. So, in other words, uh this self-realism is what gives you a grounding, that keeps you stable when the world around you is very ambitious. And when there are many flatterers who want really to manipulate you in the process. The second thing that was understood by this was know what you can and you cannot do. Don't overestimate your own ability. Well, that's very close to the first one. But most of us really only understand this as we're getting older.

My wife and I are doing a crazy thing, I'm returning home tomorrow evening, and then we're swinging around, packing on Tuesday night, then we're off to Japan on Wednesday afternoon.
And my wife has been calling me and saying, "You're mad. For a 77 year old, you couldn't be more stupid."

[Audience laughs]

Jim Houston:

In other words, learn to know your limitations, you see. And so I agree with her, this is the last time I'll do anything so stupid.

[Audience laughs]

Jim Houston:

But, you know, it's taken a long time, if I have to wait seventy-seven years before I discover my limitations. But you do begin to discover your limitations as you get older, you begin to falter in your step, and you begin to wonder whether you've got the same gray matter, and you begin to wonder all sorts of other things. So, yes, it's very important. And the sooner we learn it, the better. Don't wait till you're 77. The third thing is, know your place to be virtuous. So that uh there was a desire, certainly on the part of the Stoics, that the good life was the virtuous life, and to be virtuous, then you need to have moderation in all things, neither to be high minded nor to be of low self-esteem. So knowing yourself was really, have a symmetry about your life. Keep it balanced.

And then fourthly, know the limits of your wisdom so that you don't claim too much knowledge. Uh, that uh you have a moderate esteem of uh how much you really understand, know. In other words, it does help to keep us humble. And then fifthly, know your own faults, and the only way
you can know about your own faults is by being free of self-love. You see, the more narcissistic we are, the blinder we are about ourselves. And this is a very narcissistic culture. So, of course, it intensifies cluelessness in our culture. So it's by recognizing your own faults. In other words, learn to distinguish between the beam in your own eye and the mode that you're criticizing in somebody else's. And not reverse them round and think you have the mode and they have the beam.

Then sixthly, know that you're human. You're mortal. Yet your soul is divine and immortal. So there was a um a tension among the classical uh thinkers that we live dialectically between earth and heaven, and that we live with uh, an imprisonment that they thought of, of the soul imprisoned within our earthly body. So we live with the tension between what we aspire to and who we actually are. Uh, heads may be in the heavens, but our feet are full of clay. And then finally, number seven. Know your soul as your real self. And so, know yourself in terms of your addictions, of your appetites, of the tyranny of bodily sensuality. Learn to control your body and your senses.

Now, you see, when you look at this list of the seven things, we're not talking about Christians. We're not talking about people who understood biblical ethics. We're talking about pagans. This is what they had. This is their wisdom. That is very impressive. So that really is a summary of the kind of consequence of Delphic self-understanding could bring. It brought a lot. And so they assumed that this self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. It's a beginning of philosophy, and indeed, it is an elitist pursuit that is difficult for ordinary people, so perhaps it's
left to philosophical athletes, Olympians in their reflectiveness. And we find that various writers had various uh emphases to give about this Delphic adage.

So, Lucien, for example, he says, "The great advantage of this self-knowledge is that you won't get tripped up by flattery." And especially when you live in the life of the court. You can be so easily caught up with flattery. As my wife, when we often went to Washington D.C., would teasingly say to earnest young aides on the Hill, "You're talking about the Hill, what hill are you talking about?" She was wanting to bring them down, you see, chop them up, because they were so obsessed by life on the Hill. But the life on the Hill is a life of fantasy. It's a life of uh, really imaginative ambitions. Barrages, perhaps. So then, there's Philo, who was a Jew but Hellenized in as a kind of contemporary of the apostle Paul in the first century AD, Philo says that to know yourself is to really enter into a life of self-purification.

This is a purgative uh way of uh cleansing yourself. And of course, this false imaging of ourselves is something that all of us are besieged by. We've all found ourselves chasing will of the wisps. Aristotle uses self-knowledge in a very deep way uh, to express the importance of friendship. But the purpose of cultivating friends is that they probably help us to have more self-understanding than we could ever have unaided. And it's true. Friends, uh we know that they don't threaten our identity, th-they don't shake our sense of significance and security, wonderful advisers and pointing things out gently to us. You know, "Don't you realize how vain you are?" "Oh, my goodness, is that true?" "Yeah, well, it is!" So Aristoyle-Aristotle's friend can help you to point out your Achilles heel. Help you to see things that you think are covered, and things that
you're denying. And we all have an instinct to deny bad news about ourselves. So we need a friend to point it out to us.

And then there's Stoics. They took this knowledge in a different direction. They said the whole world is rational. The cosmos is expressive of the logos. That's to say, the intelligence, the infinite intelligence of uh, of the universe. So be in tune with the rationality of the cosmos. In other words, the Stoics were the first cognitive therapists. Uh, have right thinking, and then you'll have right living. And so their approach uh was of this nature. Well, these are some of the ways then in which this uh created a remarkable continuity. So geographically, it spread into Asia and into India. Covered the whole of the Middle East as well as the Greek world. And it has, of course, lasted right up until the present time. We still have that great heritage of Delphi. Now, it's the Christian apologists, and we'll see who they are, but Augustine, to get to the man who speaks more strongly about this, um he faces this and he says, "But all that Stoic--all this kind of uh self-understanding does for you is simply intensify you as an autonomous agent."

And that's one of the traits of, of course, we've inherited from the Enlightenment that uh, I have the right to my own thinking. I am free in my own thinking. And I can think what I like. In fact, unless I have that freedom, I can't be an authentic thinker. This is what Augustine would say to us. In a Meditation that he writes on First Corinthians chapter two, verse eleven, he says, "Oh You, Lord, are my judge. For even if no man knows the being of a man except the spirit of man, which is in him," quoting, of course, from the passage, "Yet there's something of the human person which is unknown even to the spirit of man which is in him. But You, Lord, know everything about the human person, for You made humanity. What I know about myself, I know
because You have granted me light. And what I do not know of myself, I do not know until such
time as my darkness becomes like the noon day before your face."

Well, in that passage, what Augustine is protesting is: no, there is no valid self-knowledge. There
is no real knowledge of ourselves unless we have that in the light of God's revelation to us. But
it's He who provides us with a true self understanding. And so we go back to the third century, or
actually the end of the second century, because Clement of Alexandria died in the 215, and he's
one of the first of the Christian fathers to come to, polemically, the maxim know yourself. He
does it in the Stromateis, so his Miscellanies as they're sometimes called. And he believed that it
was probably one of the Greek sages who learnt this know yourself from Abraham. He said it's
not from Delphia that we get this knowledge of ourselves, it's from Abraham. Uh, now, of
course, he's got no evidence for saying so, but uh he was trying to indicate that it was rooted in
something that was much more biblical.

But what he was also recognizing is that the reason why we can only know ourselves in the light
of God is because God has created us in His image and likeness. In other words, it's the doctrine
of the Imago Dei, which so grounds us that God has made man as His covenant partner. And it's
because man is identified with God in an irrevocable way, a way that the Psalmist in Psalm eight
wonders about when he says, "When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon
and the stars, which Thou hast ordained, why man?" Why have You chosen man for this Imago
Dei? Is the way that the early fathers translated what the Psalmist is saying. You know, God,
You could have chosen any of these marvelous creatures, You could have taken any sun, any
solar system, uh any star in the heavens. You could have chosen any of these bright luminaries as
your companion. Why did you choose puny man? It's a-it's a ceaseless---so it's a wonder when
we have a wonderful friendship and we say, why did you love me? Why did you choose me?

And so the early fathers said, no, there is no isolated autonomous agent. There is no such thing as
self-understanding, because God is the kind of God that we can know Him without relating Him
to man. And man is such a creature now that we can understand him, can understand ourselves,
without relating it to God. And so it was adoption of the Imago Dei that bound for the early
fathers this double knowledge. So in other words, to have an exaggerated self-estimate is really a
demonstration of self-ignorance. People who are walking around with pride, and have
overweening ambition, and and all those kinds of things are only showing how clueless they are
about themselves.

And so the classical scholars themselves used to think as the archetypes of their self-ignorance.
L.C. [unintelligible], who was an overweening, arrogant tyrant. And also they must have also felt
the indictment against Alexander the Great, who, with his vast ambitions, was a stark example of
somebody who didn't know himself. But in fact, the very fact that these uh tyrants who are
surrounded by such flattery indicated how ignorant they were. And so is Diogenes, who says of
Alexander the Great, "You are your own worst enemy." Did you ever wonder where that phrase
came from? Well it came from, the indictment of Diogenes against Alexander the Great. What
that means is that Alexander the Great had ignored the reality that his own character did not
match up with all his military victories.
So uh, when Cicero, as a stoic, is advising his brother to make the best of what abilities he does have, he's also encouraging, and this is the other side of it, there are some of us who don't rise to our potentials. And so he's arguing that if you have more self-understanding, you will see perhaps that you have more potentials than you're utilizing. So it works both ways, you see. It knocks some people down, and it helps to lift other people up, if we have this kind of un-of self-understanding. Origen, who is a pupil of Clement, uh in the middle of the uh third century, often criticized the philosopher's misunderstanding of wisdom, as unaware of its salvific and transformative purpose. And uh, he uh, makes a great point of a text that was to become the prevalent text throughout the Middle Ages for understanding ourselves in the light of God. It's not a text that you and I would have chosen.

So if you turn to it, you'll see that it seems a strange text, but it's in the song of songs. And it's chapter one. And it's verse, um, eight. "If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep, and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds." Now what this lack of ignorance, this lack of knowledge, that the uh woman that becomes the bride in the bridal mysticism of the song, uh infers, is obscure. But Origen suggests that this is the cal-challenge for the Christian, to seek self-understanding in the light of being loved of God. That as the bride of Christ, we should take ourselves seriously and learn to know ourselves in the light of His knowing of us. And of course, His knowing of us is a covenant love. That He knows us as we speak of sexually. To know somebody else in that sense is to be totally united with that person. And so if God is so united Himself in love to the bride, then the purpose of the bride is to learn to know herself in the light of the knowledge of God's love for the bride.
Um, and so this became the great theme, as we'll see later in the high and late Middle Ages. Ambrose, who lived in the latter part of the 4th century, and became bishop of Milan, and became the mentor to Augustine, is already preaching probably as vociferously as anyone to that point on the need for the double knowledge. And the basis for his understanding of knowing ourselves in the light of knowing God is taken from the Psalter as the primary source. He also looks upon the book of Deuteronomy as another great text for this double knowledge. And what he is emphasizing, is that to know ourselves in the sight of God, is to heighten one's sense of the dignity of being human. Indeed, of the beauty of God's purpose for our life. At the same time, to realize that is a cathartic realism with which we know ourselves, because we learn to know ourselves to be profoundly so inadequate, that we are so sinful.

And this is sinfulness of man before God that is something that the philosophers were totally oblivious about. And today, when we speak about sin, we have to recognize that sin is a theological category, that those in the world who don't know themselves as God knows them don't understand. So to be a sinner is to exercise double knowledge. Because I am only a sinner if I relate to my lack of appropriate standing before Him, that I've come short of the glory of God. And that knowledge of coming short, of missing the mark, of being perverted in the purposes that God may have for my life, is an expression of the double knowledge. So we can only be sinners when we are aware of the double knowledge. And that's the argument that Aug-uh Ambrose is uh calling for us to have. So he gives us uh four basic ideas uh that help to uh--or three basic ideas that help us to summarize what had been learned so far by the early fathers.
He says, "To know ourselves is, first of all, to know that we've been created in the image of God." That, and of course, this is often misunderstood what that means. But the early fathers were quite aware that to be made in the image of God is to recognize God's intent of having our companionship in covenant life. That's the purpose of being made in the image and likeness of God. To be companionable with God, to be able to walk with Him, like um—the purpose—

[Audio cuts out]

Jim Houston:

That's the Imago Dei. It's not facultative in terms of how clever we are compared with the animals and all those kinds of other speculations that we're left with today, but it's that we've being given a distinctive election, a distinctive calling, to be God's covenant partner. Secondly, that we at the same time know that we're sinners, that we've fallen short of the glory of God. And therefore, as sinners, this self-knowledge will therefore induce repentance, that we should live repentant lives when we have self-understanding. But then thirdly, it's also to know our destiny. It's to know that we are immortal, that God has an eternal purpose for our future. And so this is the way that, very helpfully, Ambrose led uh Augustine to have this kind of basic understanding.

But when we come to Augustine, who um has been influenced by Ambrose, and now we're talking about uh the end of the fourth and into the first three decades of the fifth century, Augustine takes the theme to a new intensity. And so he bursts out right in the very beginning of his writings, one of his first writings is called The Soliloquies, and his opening prayer is, "Let me know Thee oh God, let me know myself. That is all." And you can imagine how this can become a new pulse beat for our life. A new prayer that can dominate all our life. Let me know Thee oh
God. Let me know myself. That is all. And his confessions were written with the elaboration of this prayer in mind. So he introduces the book by saying, "Can anyone become the cause of his own making? Or is there any channel through which being and life can be drawn into us other than what you make us Lord?"

And how important it is to ask that question today. Because now that we've entered postmodernity, the question of postmodernity is: do I make my own identity? We're living in a society that is seeking to create its own identity. Yesterday, we took the clothes down from the wardrobe and had a new dress for today, or a new suit. Now--then we began to have lifestyles instead, that changed every now and again. But now, literally, people are beginning to say we can have a new identity every day. Well, now if you're so self-making, you must be so fragile. You must be so insecure as to who you really are. And so, the neurosis of postmodernity is the neurosis of so much self-identifying and self-making. And of course, it only intensifies the fear of such self-knowledge, or lack of it, that we may have to ever enter into such an enterprise.

So one of the most remarkable documents in the history of English literature, of Bri-of uh European literature rather, because of course, he wasn't English, he was a Italian or North African, really. He was half Berber. Augustine writes the Confessions. Now, one of the ways that I think Augustine helps us in writing the Confessions, is that we will not have self-understanding through our profession. Augustine was a rhetorician by profession. And the professional posture of a rhetorician is showbiz. It's not to show yourself at all, but to express uh, in a kind of heroic style, what a clever chap you are, what a command of language you have, uh how clever you are
with words, and how you can rouse the masses emotionally. It's showbiz. And watch the Confessions, it's the antithesis.

Some years ago, I was in Shanghai, and I had the privilege of meeting a Chinese pastor who had been in solitary confinement for more than 20 years. I said, "How did you survive?" He said, "Well, as a pastor, I imagined that I had my flock to feed every day. And so I would spend half the day or more preparing my sermon that I was going to give to them that day. And then I would preach it. Rehearse it and preach it. And then I tried, whenever I had a piece of toilet paper, to write some of it down." Well, one of his sermons that he did have the privilege of--the opportunity of having smuggled out of prison, um I actually got a copy of it and had it translated. And it's the story of Jesus in the House of Simon. And it's the story of the woman who was a um, a prostitute. Her stock in trade was to have her ointment between her breasts for the art of seduction. And she smashes her stock in trade at the feet of Jesus as she weeps. And then she wipes um His feet with her hair, and anoints Him with the ointment.

And how we anoint Jesus is smashing our profession at His feet. Because that's not the source of our identity. That's not true self understanding. Our understanding is in the light of His love for us. Now, I think this is what Augustine does in his Confessions. He's a bishop. He's already been a bishop ten years. The last thing that uh Christian leaders do, if they're political, as most are, is to ever share their really-their true feelings. But this bishop, who's anti-political, ant-rhetorician, is the one who pulls it all out, as he does in the Confessions. One of the passages, and if those of you who've never explored this and would love to do so, then concentrate on Book Ten of the
Confessions, because it's all about this double knowledge. And there he um, he writes a passage that deeply was to move and uh profoundly affect Petrarch later in the renaissance.

"Oh," he says, "people are so moved to wonder by mountain peaks, by the vast waves of the sea, by the broad waterfalls and rivers, by the all-embracing extent of the ocean, by the revolution of the stars, but in themselves, they are uninterested." What an incongruity, is really what Augustine is really saying. In other words, we go back to Proverbs 17, "The eyes of the fool are on the ends of the Earth." Their whole life is lived by externalities. And they may be very clever, they may be brilliant scientists. And one of the things that, of course, sobered me in my own career track at Oxford was that there were people that I knew who were world-renowned sometimes for their exploits professionally. But some of them, not all by any means, some were very wise, but there were a few that were really rather emotionally blithering idiots. You could be a brilliant mathematician, and yet you could be crazy about your relational life.

So it doesn't go that uh professional skills, uh exploration of the external world, helps us in any way to know our internal world, or to open it up and explore it. But exhaustively, Augustine explores his own emotions, his own attitudes, and leads his readers into his new method of Confessio. And his conclusion is, "Man himself is a vast deep, whose hairs you oh Lord have numbered. And in you, none can be lost." And he's making a reference, of course, to Matthew 10, verse 30, where our Father in heaven counts the very hairs of our head. He knows the fall of a sparrow. But then Augustine goes on rather shrewdly to say, "But it's easier to count his hairs than to know all the passions and emotions of the heart." Do you know yourself in terms of all your emotional swings? All the range of all your passions? I don't. How much self-ignorance
there is! And so Augustine says, "Like the prodigal, man wanders far from his own heart. You
were right before me, but I had moved away from myself. I could not find myself. How much
less, then, could I find you?"

Yes, exposure of one soul was a traditional theme among even the pagan philosophers,
contemporary, or predecessors of Augustine, but it was still uh remarkably unusual to insist as
Augustine did that no one could ever sufficiently search his or her own heart. So mysterious is
our own being. And so it's in the light of this that he prays, "I know myself less well than I know
You. I beseech You, my God, show me myself so that to my brothers who will pray for me, I
will confess what wounds I'm discovering within myself." This is one of the things that is so
salutary for us today. We are surrounded by fallen leaders, people that were put on pinnacle's that
were quite unreal. This adulation, especially in our American culture, on leaders, this whole
focus that is pursued by leadership magazine, and institutes of Christian leadership, is a lot of
nonsense. If you go to Australia, you cut down all tall poppies. Leadership magazine would just
be like a lead balloon in its population circulation.

In other words, you begin to view yourself through the cultural eyes of another society, and you
begin to see how crazy have we been that we've so adulated our founding fathers, that we've
assumed that Christianity depends on them. Well, of course, the hockey or the football game
does depend on those that we have adulated, you see. And that creates a kind of spectatorship for
Christian living. And what happens when they fall? And so at the moment, our evangelical
friends in Brazil are reeling because one man that they so adulated as an evangelical leader, that
they hoped that he would become in the next election the president of Rio de Janeiro, the state,
and he's fallen. And in Britain, we've just had somebody who is a kind of John Stott the Second, that he's fallen. And people say, "Wow, what's going on?"

You see, well, what's going on is we don't know ourselves. What's going on is that those dark recesses of the heart are not being explored and understood by us. That we live in a hall of mirrors with a lot of appearances, and appearances are what count. But they don't count. They are iconic, but they're distorting. So the confessions is not just an act of therapy, nor are the confessions mere reminiscences of Augustine's part life. But what he is aware of and perhaps this is too complex to go into in any detail, is that when we look into ourselves as a great, vast reservoir of what he calls memoria, or memory. If you are interested, and some of you are, in medieval culture, you're astonished to discover as you enter into the medieval mindset how strongly a component of medieval consciousness is the place of memory. It's far deeper. It's far more pervasive than anything we understand about memory today.

When we talk about somebody having a good memory, we're talking about somebody who remembers things well. But for memory, for Augustine, as he influences Western thought in the Middle Ages later, memory is the place where God's intent for man and where self-understanding meet. In other words, it's the focus for the double knowledge. And therefore, in that place of self-understanding is also the place of understanding God's intent, and indeed God's knowledge of ourselves. Notions such as we have of self-expression, or self-fulfillment, or even self-knowledge would be totally alien and foreign to the medieval mind that was saturated with the role that memory is the place where God and man meet within the soul. And yet at the same time, Augustine, having so enhanced the importance of memory, belittles it, since our memory is
no container for God, for God, is not a place in the mind. God exists in the mental activity by which a mind desires to know Him, but God also transcends the seeker after Him.

And so Augustine is made aware that memory doesn't contain God, though memory may be the encounter that God makes with us. So Augustine is uh perhaps the great-the greatest influence the West has ever had on a deepening of Western self-consciousness. He deepened the probing of the self, the questioning of the self, more than anyone before him, or perhaps anyone since. And so he's the great apostle of Western self-consciousness. But you see, the more introspection we have, the more self-understanding we seek to have, the more cavernous it does become on the one hand, but the emptier it is without God. And so basically what psychoanalysis has done in the 20th century is simply to make our lives more vacuous. To make us such empty selves, such lonely selves. So profoundly self-alienating selves.

Well, before I close on this, at least a break on this, because we'll just now look at the later Middle Ages, there are many who follow on Augustine. Gregory the Great, at the end of the sixth century is one of these, the Pope Gregory the Great, who really wanted to spend his life in a contemplated life but was forced into action to become a political figure as the pope as well. But um, he's aware that for pastoral concern of his flock, that it's also, again, so important that uh this become the art of art. He says the art of art is the guidance of souls. And for this, it is first necessary to know oneself. You know, we all realize that, don't we, to some measure. If somebody is clueless about themself, and we sense it, how in the world can we trust them with our souls? How can we really ask them to be a mentor? So if I don't know something about myself, or not willing to have humility to know myself, how am I going to know you?
And so, one of the things that generates self-ignorance uh is also alienation. They go hand in hand. The less I know myself, or willing to know myself, the more I'm repressing bad news about myself, then the less I'm capable of knowing you. And the less I am capable of knowing you, the more lonely is the life between us. And so many of us go through lives of quiet desperation because of that. I find in mentoring with young people that a great cause of resentment on the part of so many of our young people today is the feeling that father, when he came out of the war, and of course, I watched this after the Second World War. My sister was um, a coding clerk, an enigma, and her life was totally hush hush. And it was literally only about five or six years ago when the news began to break as to these great exploits of the coding that took place of the German high command or other things. She would send me a letter with an excerpt from the newspaper about this and said, "Oh, I was in hut six where all this took place." But she never told me that for 40 years.

Now, what's the result of that? I felt cheated of her companionship. And also I found that young men whose fathers were perhaps later in the Korean War, the Vietnamese war, and these horrible things their father repressed and couldn't share, that side of their life has left their family cheated of their presence. And so we all grow up with a heritage of the refusal to have self-knowledge. And because of that, we cheat our relationships. We don't intend to, but that's a consequence of it. And so Gregory the Great, although he's not talking in our modern context about these things, is nevertheless having a wise understanding of what we should be doing. But then, one of the people who in the 12th century is very much following up on the trait, the train, of uh Augustine's thought is Bernard of Clairvaux.
And he takes up this exegesis of Origen on the text of the song of songs, v-e-chapter one, verse seven and eight. "You do not know yourself, oh most beautiful among women. Then go away and follow the flocks of your friends." And making this a starting point for saying you have to pursue more self-knowledge. And uh one of his friends, uh in fact one of his pupils, became Pope uh Eugene the Third. And uh he uh, he says to Pope Eugene the Third, he said, "You know, one cause for ignorance is uh activism." "Now," he said, "you're busy with all your affairs of office, high state of office. But," he said, "if you're not careful, you'll become so busy, you'll become so clueless about yourself." Of course, the Desert Fathers had already said that business is moral sloth. It seems a paradox, isn't it? And it's moral sloth because it doesn't give self-understanding. And so in the business of our timetable, living this activist life, we have a tendency to be blind to ourselves.

And so he says, "If you apply all your experiences and knowledge to activity and have nothing for self-consideration," and by the word-the way he talks about consideration, it's a technical word for the double knowledge. It's a consideration of God, but it's a consideration of oneself before God as well. And so he says, "If you apply all your experiences and knowledge to activity and nothing for consideration, do I praise you? I do not." And so he really takes him to task. Um, that uh often today, people who are most active in Christian ministry, one has frankly to say are clueless about themselves. In fact, the state of ministry, Christian ministry today, is probably the source of the need for the greatest reformation of the contemporary Christian world. There's something terribly wrong about a great deal of Christian activism. And so it's a very salutary
thing. And if you ever want to explore this, you'll find it's translated in English, in the Cistercian publications on consideration. This great text written by Bernard to his pupil, the Pope.

And it's a very contemporary document for us to bear in mind in our generation. In the generations that followed the bridal mysticism that makes Bernard the great doctor of love and the life of the church, is um, yes, that our incentive for self-knowing is because He loves us, because we are His bride and that therefore we're in love with Him, then we need to be realistic about knowing ourselves. It's pursuing the knowledge of Him, we need to pursue the knowledge of ourselves in contrition, and repentance, and wisdom. And so uh the Anchorites and the Anchorets, for example, warn in their manual, these were women who were living in solitary, uh meditative life, but very useful for the community as spiritual mentors. They warned not to forget their espousal to Christ, which means that they don't fall into this uh ignorance about self-knowledge.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, we have a whole series of Florilegia, that is to say, devotional manuals. And they're full of this double knowledge. In fact, one of them is called the double knowledge. And um it's indicative that the consciousness of this was so strong, and perhaps where the double knowledge reaches its peak in uh the devotional literature of the West, is in the 16th century in the work of Teresa of Ávila. As you know, she lived between 1515 and 1584. And she writes very much like Augustine does when she writes her life. It's full of confession, full of self-understanding, and especially in her more theological work, the Interior Castle. And uh Teresian self-knowledge is uh a polemic against introspection for its own sake, as Ryan Williams has pointed out in his commentary on the interior castle. This is, among other things,
an attack against an interiority of an ideal self in itself, and rather alerts us to the fact that when we enter the castles, it is in order to know God.

And so it's by seeing God that we more clearly see ourselves. So in the first three of the Mansions of the interior Castle, the exploration is self-understanding. In other words, as soon as you enter into the Christian life, know how essential you are, understand how temptable you are, know the things that are most likely to trip you up, know your weaknesses of personality. Because if you don't know your weaknesses of personality, then you can be caught unawares in temptation. So learn to know your weaknesses, how temptable you are. And then secondly, as you enter into the second series of Mansions, you begin to take the Christian life more seriously and say, "Well, I need to develop more structured, habituated, more disciplined ways of life." But how do I stumble over this? Well, know yourself again, you see.

So just don't accept spiritual disciplines blandly and ignorantly. You'll be frustrated if you do. Enter into a more disciplined life with self-understanding before God. And so the result is that we then enter into the third series of mansions where it sounds as if we've become very mature Christians. And when we think we've really arrived, then we realize we haven't even started. And so when you go into the fourth series of mansions, it's like leaving one island and plunging into an abyss of an ocean beyond your ken. Entering into a life that becomes increasingly more mystical, but at the same time increasingly more illuminated by His presence and the realism of who we are before Him. You see, the ultimate that uh Teresa understands, which is so biblical, is the ultimate of self-knowledge is not self-knowledge. The ultimate is to be willing to be known even as we are known.
The conclusion of the perfection of love in First Corinthians 13 is to enter into that state where we're knowing, as we're known. So it's the same state that Bernard speaks about when he talks about four levels of love. The first level of love is that we love God for our own sake. You know, give me this and give me that, and we're looking for the cookie jar where we're knowing God. And the second state of love is when we begin to love God for His own sake. And then the third state of love is when we love God with God's own love, and that—we wonder what that means. You see, well, how can we rise above anything else? But Bernard says, oh, there's a fourth stage. And that is loving ourselves as He loves us. Wow. What does that mean? It means freedom from all our addictive patterns of behavior. All our false self-imaging that we have of ourselves. It means seeing ourselves from God's point of view and God's intent.

And so, in the interior castle, where there's this imagery of being betrothed to the beloved and then the marriage ceremony, of union and communion that's eternal with the beloved. That final state is knowing, even as we're known. So, Teresa, for those of us who never explored her, will find it very useful indeed. Well, I have overstepped the mark. So let's have the break now. And how long do we have? 15 minutes? Yes. So let's return at 25 to uh, to 9.