

The Examen

"The difference between *knowing about God* and *being in a relationship with God* is the difference between reading a menu and eating the meal."

The *Examen* prayer practice was developed by Saint Ignatius, a Spanish soldier who lived in the 1500s. He came close to God during a time when he was recovering from a battle injury. The *Examen* is also known as praying backwards as it is a loving examining of the day that just happened. You can do this in the morning but often it is done as the last thing at night. Ignatius believed that this prayer form was significant because if you lost the chance to reflect on the day, then you lost the gift of that day.

Here is how to pray the *Examen*.

1. PRESENCE

Find a comfortable posture. Relax your body. Take five deep breaths. Shift your focus to God and ask God to be present to you.

2. THANKFULNESS

Call to mind something that you are thankful for.

3. REVIEW

Now begin to review the day hour by hour. Ask God to accompany you in this process. Start with how you felt when you woke up. Who did you eat breakfast with? What conversations did you have? How did those conversations go? Go through the whole of your day as if you were seeing a slide show. Be slightly detached and reflect on where God was present and where God felt absent. Ignatius calls the moments where God was present "consolation" and where God was absent "desolation." Be careful not to ruminate — that is, get stuck going over and over something that was said or done, especially hurts and recriminations. Pay attention to feelings that come to the surface.

4. COMMIT

Talk to God about the feelings and then turn your attention to the next day. Commit to living with a deeper sense of God's awareness and ask God to strengthen you for the new day.

5. LORD'S PRAYER

End with the Lord's Prayer.

Key resource: *Reimagining the Examen*

This worksheet is based on the Examen Worksheet in Revive by Dawn Davis.

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Questions to Review the Day

Ignatius believed that our everyday lives contain within them divine revelation if we would but notice. He expected God to speak through our deepest yearnings, what he called "consolations" and "desolations." When we engage in a regular review of the day, pausing at these moments, the examen makes us aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant.

The moments, however, can ultimately give direction to our lives. By noticing moments of desolation and consolation each day over a long period of time, you will notice patterns that will suggest possible directions in your life. Insignificant moments when looked at alone become significant when they are recognized as part of a larger pattern that might point to where God is opening up new possibilities.

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

When did I feel most alive today?

When did I most feel life draining out of me?

What did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, and God?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

What was today's high point?

What was today's low point?

Confession

1. Invite the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit dwells in each of us, knows us each intimately from within. The Holy Spirit wishes us to open our hearts to the grace and gifts of the Spirit. You can invite the indwelling of the Spirit in a variety of ways. One is to meditate on Scripture. Psalm 139 is particularly appropriate. Other possibilities include John 7:37-39; John 14:16-23, 25, 26; Romans 8:26-27. Meditate on these passages and listen for what the Holy Spirit has to say.

2. Record your thoughts and feelings

Making notes during self-examination will help you articulate those things you would like to confess. They appear in black and white, allowing us to move onto the next. Write in a way that is natural to you. If you keep a journal, do not use it for this purpose. The notes are never kept after confession. Times of self-examination should be no more than half an hour with a few days in between. You may find clarification as thoughts incubate over that period.

3. Divide your life into five or six phases

Beginning with early phases of life, recall experiences in each phase of your life. Reflect on any patterns that can be discerned.

4. Review each phase

In *Reconciliation* Martin Smith suggests the summary of the Law as a framework for reviewing where we have fallen short. You might use a workbook such as *Joy in Confession* by Hillary Raining.

Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Mk 12:29-31

5. Retain a sense of gratitude

Confession is a form of praise. Confession is a practice in which we give thanks to God for God's hold on us, God's tenderness and loving offering of Christ to us. You have come to be reconciled, a cause for joy!

5. Find a confessor

The natural person to choose as a confessor is the priest who is also your priest. A priest is bound by the seal of confession. As a regular part of your sacramental life, a priest can offer the opportunity of sacramental sharing to form a wholesome bond with Christ. On the day you have chosen for confession spend time in prayer, perhaps choosing to meditate on scripture that invites you to the joy of repentance such as Luke 15:1-7 (lost sheep) or Luke 18:9-14 (parable of tax collector and pharisee).

Self-Examination

Oneness of God

- Acting as if other forces in the world are more powerful than the create love of God.
- Acting as if God were confined to a particular dimension of life.
- Devoting our attention and treasure on other things that draw you away from God.

Loving God with all your heart and soul.

- Failure to deepen your love for God.
- Placing barriers against feeling God's love, particularly where there is pain.
- Keeping your true self from God, including anger, resentment and conflict
- Resisting the joy of the Spirit in Eucharist.

Loving God with all your mind.

- Avoiding the challenges of faith?
- Failure to read scripture and ask difficult questions.
- Prepared for God to change your mind.
- Openly profess your faith.

Loving God with all your strength.

- Fear of your own passion in your commitment to Christ
- Failure to follow through with a commitment to God.
- Not acting upon an experience of God's presence.
- Avoiding spiritual disciplines that lead to growth.

Loving your neighbor as yourself.

- **The Covenant Commandments**
- Respecting the radical equality of all God's people
- Caring about social justice
- The New Commandment of Love in the Sermon on the Mount
- Sinning against your own life
- Acting as a member of the Church

Source: *Reconciliation: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* by Martin L. Smith