

TOOL: Prayer of Examen

Prayerful reflection three times a day • Daily



Introduction

God often comes to us in the form of our life.

This statement shares the idea that God uses our life to be the primary way in which He teaches us, forms us, and redeems us. If this is true, wouldn't we want to live with faith-filled awareness and reflection of what happens in our days?

So much of modern living is focused on the future. The next appointment, the next day, the next experience. We are people looking forward, and we rarely pause to reflect on our lives- considering how God has been active in our midst. Reflecting on life experiences helps us to grow in relationship and communication with Jesus who is ever-present with us. There is never a minute of our day where Jesus is absent or apathetic. Instead, God desires to continue revealing himself to us in everyday life through the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Prayer of Examen is a way to prayerfully reflect upon our day with God. This form of prayer was originated by Spanish priest Ignatius of Loyola in *The Spiritual Exercises*, and it has guided Christians for centuries. Ignatius expected that God would speak through our deepest feelings and yearnings, what he called "consolation" and "desolation." Consolation can be described as whatever helps us to connect in relationship with God, others, and ourselves. Desolation is whatever creates a sense of disconnection in these relationships. Ignatius is one among many who have emphasized encountering God through daily life experiences.

As we develop the habit of enacting the Prayer of Examen, not only will we learn to see a deeper story that is taking place through our daily lives, but we also will learn to live differently. It will inform how we live differently and experience God's presence throughout our lives. The Examen is a prayer practice that reminds us of God's immanence, God's presence with us.

Pause and consider

- Where is your attention usually placed – in the past, in the present moment, or in the future?
- What is lost when we live without reflection or examination to our days?
- Spend a moment and envision how your life would be different if you reflected upon your days with God in prayer?

Practice

The Examen can be done in various ways: alone, in groups, and in families. The Daily Examen most commonly is used at the end of a day and guides someone through several prayers. By following these simple steps we encounter the God who, scripture tells us, “is not far from each one of us.” The prayer of Examen reviews our life and our day to see God’s presence and hand in our life.

Still yourself with a time of silence becoming aware of God’s loving Presence. Become aware of the Spirit’s presence with you. You may spend a few minutes saying hello to God, or simply focus on breathing in and out to quiet your inner spirit.

After a couple moments, begin the prayer.

- Begin by **asking God for understanding**. “God, I want to see my life through your eyes.”
- **Review**. Pick a recent time to review in the presence of the Spirit. A good suggestion is the past 24 hours. But you may also consider something smaller, such as a portion of your day that day, or a longer time, such as this past week. In a spirit of gratitude, review this time period. What happened? Where was God?
- **Give thanks**. Review the time period with gratitude. Pay attention to your emotions as you prayerfully think through the events of the designated time period. Recall God’s gifts in your life. For what are you most grateful?
- **Choose one feature/event** from the time period and pray about it. Ask the Spirit to direct you to something God thinks is important from your day. Spend some time talking with the Spirit about the event, your emotions during it, and God’s presence in it. Pray however led.
- **Face shortcomings**. Recall what did not go well. Ask yourself, “What do I need to confess?”

- **Receive God's gift of forgiveness:** *"For there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* **Romans 8:1** God, in Christ, has forgiven you. Forgive yourself. Forgive others.
- **Look ahead.** Mentally look over the events coming up tomorrow. Ask the Spirit to guide you in your thinking about the events to come. Ask for wisdom and all that is needed to walk with the Spirit tomorrow. When praying the Examen at the end of your day, this final step is particularly helpful.
- **Rest in the Spirit.** Close your time of prayer resting in the Spirit's presence. Finish your time with gratitude for the One who was, who is, and is to come.

Debrief your experience

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?