

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

About the Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a daily spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], who encouraged fellow followers to engage in the practice for developing a deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognizing and receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the practice is increasingly becoming aware of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's movement throughout your day.

Practicing the Prayer of Examen

This Prayer of Examen is primarily an exercise in remembering. One is invited, through four portions [presence, gratitude, review, and response], to concentrate on experiences and encounters from the past 24 hours. The beauty of the practice is its simplicity; it is more a guide than a prescription. If some portion feels especially important on a given day, feel the freedom to spend all or most of your time in that portion. The purpose is to increase awareness and sensitivity, not to finish or accomplish a task.

For this practice:

- A comfortable and relatively quiet location is likely most conducive for reflecting.
- The experience doesn't need to be a certain length—as little as ten minutes could be sufficient, and you could spend more time on certain portions compared to others.
- It might be helpful to journal your thoughts and recollections or to write out what you notice during your times of prayer.
- Consider sharing your experiences: allow encouragement and insight from others to influence you and cheer you on, and when appropriate give the same, together striving to be an ever-faithful "community of solitudes".

PRESENCE

Begin this practice by recognizing the presence of God. Remind yourself of God's presence with you and His desire to be with you. Consider praying for the Holy Spirit to help you be attentive to God's presence. To become more focused, it might be helpful to repeat a simple phrase during this time like, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

It's important to begin this practice in a calm and centered state. There may be days when you'll need the entire time to remember and focus on the nearness of God. Don't rush past this portion. Take the necessary time to wait and find comfort in God's presence.

"Gracious God, in these moments please remind me of your presence and generosity, and give me the wisdom and courage to live gracefully with myself, others, and the world you have wonderfully made. For the sake of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Amen."

Take some time and focus on the nearness of God. Open yourself to His presence.

- "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." (Psalm 145:18)
- "The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!" (Psalm 145:9-10)

GRATITUDE

"If the only prayer you say in your entire life is 'Thank You,'" wrote Meister Eckhart, "that would suffice."

Look back over the past day, the big and small aspects of life, and recognize what reasons you have to be grateful. Focus on these experiences and encounters, helping your mind and spirit center on the goodness and generosity of God. If you're using a journal, consider capturing your thanks in writing, expressing words of gratitude and giving testimony to God's generosity and faithfulness.

Find encouragement and reminders of God's goodness, and be thankful.

- Looking back over the past 24 hours, for what are you most grateful? What makes you feel thankful?
- Using simple words, express your gratitude to God.

"Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 1:3)

REVIEW

Over-packed lives can rob us of the opportunity to learn from the past, to see how yesterday might inform today. "Where did the time go?" we ask ourselves, often struggling to remember what we did just a week ago.

Here we can benefit again from taking time to look back over the past 24 hours. By intentionally reviewing our interactions, responses, feelings and intentions, we can avoid letting days speed by. We can pause to learn more about ourselves and about God's activity in our lives.

Try to look back objectively as you review. Rather than interpreting, justifying, or rationalizing, the intent is to observe and remember. Allow your mind to wander the situations you've been in and to notice details. The questions in this exercise should help you bring specific experiences to mind.

- When or where in the past 24 hours were you cooperating most fully with God's action in your life?
- When were you resisting?
- What habits and life patterns do you notice from the past day?

"Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul... Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground." (Psalm 143:8b,10)

Ask yourself:

- What habits and life patterns do I notice?
- When did I feel most alive?
- When did I feel most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging?
- When did I feel most alone?
- When did I give love?
- When did I receive love?
- When did I feel most fully myself?
- When did I feel least myself?
- When did I feel most whole?
- When did I feel most fragmented?

RESPONSE

Having spent time remembering, it seems natural to want to respond in some way. Take time to journal or pray, expressing your thoughts on the actions, attitudes, feelings, and interactions you've remembered as a part of this exercise. You might need to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, or resolve to make changes and move forward.

Allow your observations to guide your responses.

- Beginning today, how do you want to live your life differently?
- What patterns do you want to keep living tomorrow?

"Ever-present Father, help me to meet you in the Scriptures I read and the prayers I say; in the bread I break and the meals I share; in my investments at work and my enjoyments at play; and in the neighbors and family I welcome, love, and serve, for your sake and that your love and peace may reign now and forever. Amen."

"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us¹ that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)