

THE DAILY EXAMEN

Based on the prayer technique
developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola



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®THE DAILY EXAMEN

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WHAT IS THE EXAMEN?

In our fast-paced world, it can be challenging to pause and reflect before launching into the next day. With so many forms of prayer out there, finding one that fits schedule and serves as a meaningful tool for introspection can be a task both daunting and discouraging. How do we find time to examine our conscience regularly without having to wait on seasons like Lent and Advent? Is it possible to make room in our demanding schedules to pray and ponder?

The answer to both is a resounding yes!

Over the years, the Examen Prayer derived from the Spiritual Exercises of the “Ignatian Spirituality” has gained much popularity owing to its practical and pragmatic style of contemplation. Saint Ignatius believed that he received a gift from God that not only enriched his own Christian life but was meant to be shared with others. The gift was a “method,” a way to seek and find God in all things and to gain freedom to abandon one’s will to God.

The Ignatian Examen, or the Daily Examen, is a contemplative form of prayer led by memory. This way of praying allowed St. Ignatius to discover the voice of God within his own heart and to experience growth in discerning God's will. At the heart of the Ignatian Examen is discernment, an interior awareness of God's Presence and a deep seated knowledge that the Lord of the Universe desires to usher into our routines with kindness and mercy, transforming them in surprising ways. The more we adapt to the Examen, the more we will become familiar to His voice, the more we will grow in trust and obedience.

Think about how we approach the examination of conscience – isn't it more often through the lens of faults and failure? The Examen is so much more than just cataloging our sins. The Latin word *conscientia* doesn't just mean conscience which judges right from wrong, it is also consciousness, which is an awareness of all that is going on inside our hearts. Beyond a moral application, the Examen enables us to grow in charity towards our neighbor. The more we discover God, the more we discover ourselves. The more we love ourselves, the more we desire to become a vehicle of blessing for others.

The Examen can be made anywhere: on the beach, in a car, at home, in the library. Many people make the Examen twice daily: once around lunchtime and again before going to bed. There are five simple steps to the Examen, which should take 10-15 minutes to complete, and what follows is just one interpretation of these five steps in discerning the movement of God's Spirit through your day.

Before you begin:

- Try to be in a place where you are least likely to be disturbed.
- You might light a candle or change the lighting when you pray.
- Sit comfortably and still yourself; relax.
- Be aware of your breathing, your body and how you are feeling.



THE DAILY EXAMEN

Based on the prayer technique by St. Ignatius of Loyola

REMEMBER

Growing In Gratitude

Gratitude is the antidote to negative thinking, offering a paradigm shift to see things from God's perspective.

RESPOND

Movements Of The Spirit

The Holy Spirit desires to enter without condemnation so He can begin His work of renewal and restoration.

REVIEW

Reflect On Your Day

An invitation to gently look into our fragile heart with the Lord, so we can be strengthened to respond to His Grace.

REPENT

Ask For Forgiveness Of Sins

Pray for sorrow and shame, for a deep interior knowledge of sinfulness and lack of response to God's offer of life.

RESOLVE

Make Ammendments

Demonstrate that sin is serious through genuine repentance and restitution, which are the surest pathways to revival.



REMEMBER

Growing In Gratitude

When was the last time you were captivated with the sheer beauty and magnificence of your life? When was the last time you intentionally paused to thank God for ordinary joys showing up throughout your day? A timely phone call. A bird chirping at your window. That highway without traffic. The smell of food in the oven.

Very often our tendency is to approach the examination of conscience with everything gone wrong. But by only focusing on negative events, we can become blinded to the more fundamental goodness that God is unraveling in our routines. In a world that has gone wild and weary with uncertainty, developing gratitude and delighting in small things can seem challenging and unnecessary.

What can we do to change grumbling into gratitude? St. Paul reminds us, *"Give thanks in all circumstances."* (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Gratitude really is the antidote to negative thinking. It offers us a paradigm shift to see things, not from human perspective, but God's. Our lives take on greater meaning with love and gratitude.

For example, a father has a choice to grumble about the taxes he pays or he can offer thanks because he is employed. A son has a choice to moan about cleaning windows or he can delight in the fact that he has a home to feel safe in. These examples show us that the choices for freedom, for virtue, for excellence unravel each day and in the most ordinary moments of our life. How we respond to them changes everything.

Gratitude is a choice.

Think about also how you talk to your inward-self. Are you kind or condescending? It is hard to be a person of gratitude if you are constantly talking down on yourself or repeating lies that diminish your worth. Having awareness and slowly replacing lies with life-giving words from Scripture will transform us into a people of gratitude. The more we grow in gratitude, the more we experience joy.



REMEMBER

Growing In Gratitude

- How are you feeling at this moment? Pay attention to what's consuming you or feeding your soul.
- What sights or sounds can draw you to become more grateful today?
- Recall moments in the day – that moment of difficulty, that hard conversation; a conflict or misunderstanding, that help that came your way, a particular moment while driving or at work, that moment with family, that time with a colleague at work. How did you respond?
- Pick a few difficult areas of your life where you need to replace grumbling with gratitude.
- How might gratitude lead you to become more aware towards teachers, grocers, healthcare workers, social-service providers, delivery truck drivers, postal workers and people around you?
- How can gratitude transform the way you see your spouse, your kids, your boss, your parents, and your friends? Now, turn your heart towards gratitude and let yourself be captivated with the goodness of our Saviour.
- Journal these thoughts, if applicable.



RESPOND

Movements Of The Spirit

As we reflect with gratitude, we seek the light of God to become more aware of the movements of the Spirit within us. Sin blinds us and prevents us from seeing our faults. Sin escalates our needs over the needs of our neighbor, making us more self-centered than selfless. Saint John Paul II reminds us that “only in Divine Light which is revealed in Christ Himself, and which lives inside the Church can we clearly see our faults”.

Although the efforts to recall our sins lie primarily on us, we cannot remember everything. We need the light of the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds and reveal our forgotten memories. We need the Holy Spirit to expose corners of our hearts that are hidden and harrowed. We need the wind of the Spirit to sweep away veils that prevent us from seeing ourselves fully.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13)
The Holy Spirit inspires us to see with growing freedom the development of our life story. The Spirit gives us courage to look inward, into those hard and heavy places we have locked away in hurt and humiliation. And He desires to enter without condemnation so He can begin His work of renewal and restoration. The more we lean on His wisdom, the more we are freed to deepen our knowledge of self and our relationship with God.

What do we do when we cannot remember the events of our day? We simply petition the Lord, let me see my day as you see it. With such a petition, we open our hearts to the movement of the Spirit. We move forward in trust. We move forward towards freedom.



RESPOND

Movements Of The Spirit

- Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day - Boredom? Excitement? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence?
- What is God saying through these feelings?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important.
- As you sense faults and failures, thank God for His Grace to be able to see them.
- Pray about it.

REVIEW

Reflect On Your Day

When Saint Ignatius invites us to review our day, he asks us to be intentional, be fully conscious, and be fully open to the opportunities for a fruit bearing life.

Think about opportunities in the day that could foster faith, hope, and charity. Did we take advantage of these? Perhaps we could have let a shopper with a small order go ahead of us? Perhaps we could have walked away from gossip at work? Perhaps we could have chosen not to win another argument at home? When we reflect on the opportunities we did or didn't act with God's grace, we can become more in tune and sensitive to developing habits of virtue.

Every situation in our path is a pathway to blessing. We can see the events of our day as obstacles or opportunities. Reviewing the day teaches us to notice what we do, how we react to various situations, and what patterns of thought or actions we have developed. Do waves of sadness hit us a lot lately? Why has this pattern developed? Can I find the root of it—such as a shift in relationship I have not yet fully processed? Do I need to make time to bring that specific sadness to God—at a time and in a place where I can cry for an hour if need be?

Many situations show us that our heart is divided—wavering between helping and disregarding, scoffing and encouraging, listening and ignoring, rebuking and forgiving, speaking and silence, neglecting and thanking. Remember, this is not a time to dwell on shortcomings; rather, it is an invitation of Grace, a time to gently look at our fragile hearts with the Lord, so we can be strengthened to respond to God's gifts.

The psalmist cried out in *Psalm 25: 4*, “*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.*” Reviewing the day through the lens of God's Word enables us to simplify our life, eliminate distractions and create healthy margins to enjoy the abundant life Christ died to give us.



REVIEW

Reflect On Your Day

- Recall the events of your day. Explore the context of your actions. Did you see those as an obstacle or opportunity?
- Ask yourself: why did you respond that way? How do you feel about this person? Why was this temptation too strong to overcome? In your responses, were you drawing closer to God, or further away?
- Take a few minutes to prune your social media feed or your news sources or listening apps and pay attention to the kind of messages you're feeding yourself. Are you listening to the truth or are you listening to a lot of negativity?
- Notice where you acted with virtue. See where you chose freedom. How does that make you feel?
- Journal these thoughts.



REPENT

Ask For Forgiveness Of Sins

As we review the events of the day, we are awakened to the many ways we have not always acted out of charity and compassion. We have not always acted in love. We have not always been mindful of temptations and distractions that compete for our attention.

We come to the humbling awareness that we are sinners, that we have been ungrateful and unfaithful. We have failed to respond to God's offer of love by failing to love our neighbor and love God above all. Sin is not simply the things we do but also the things we fail to do – failure to recognize everything as a gift to be cherished, fostered, and shared.

This realization leads us to sorrow. Saint Ignatius invites us to pray for sorrow and shame, for a deep interior knowledge of our sinfulness, our ingratitude and lack of response to God's offer of life. This sorrow leads us to contrition and repentance — a turning towards God, whom we have offended. We realize that we have distanced ourselves from the only One who loves us without measure.

The prodigal son after squandering his inheritance cried out "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*" (Luke 15:21) He acknowledged his sinfulness and his deep need for forgiveness. He understood that hiding from the Father only meant more pain but returning to him, even if in sorrow and shame meant total freedom. Only when we know the depth of our sin do we know the depth of God's mercy. Though we place limits on His mercy, God is always steadfastly faithful to us, forgiving us when we repent.

Practicing the step of asking forgiveness helps us to develop a deep awareness that the Lord is always near and waiting. Like the father who embraced his son without explanation, God waits to embrace our day with His Presence. The more we become aware of the Light of God's Presence, the more clearly we are able to see our day as it truly unfolds.



REPENT

Ask For Forgiveness Of Sins

- Express sorrow for sin, for all the times you resisted Gods' light today.
- Call your sin out. Give it a name. Pay attention to its frequency and its gravity.
- Recall ways you neglected grace through sins of omission.
- Remember charitable acts you could do but didn't.
- Ask God to forgive you, give thanks for His Grace and in faith receive His forgiveness.
- Express your joy in your journal.



RESOLVE

Make Ammendments

The final step of the Examen is to propose amendment of our lives relying on the grace of God. God doesn't merely want us to confess our past wrongs; He wants us to live in the power of the Spirit. He wants us to live victorious. This is called repentance. In Greek, the word is *metanoia*, which means change of mind. To *repent* therefore, means to turn the other way, a new way, to have a different view of past misdeeds, and to determine to do what is right in the future. Repentance also means we stop choosing sin. It means we start choosing sainthood.

However, true repentance is incomplete without restitution – a virtue the Church teaches we should embrace to demonstrate that we are serious about our repentance and are willing to do whatever it takes to be transformed.

You may remember how Zaccheus repented of his past life and told Jesus, *“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”* (Luke 19:8) This means that Zaccheus was willing to make amendments and have a different inner attitude which included a generous spirit toward others. He was willing to make restitution even if it meant the costly price of losing half of his belongings.

Like Zaccheus, we may have to choose to give up what we love. Sometimes restitution can cost us more than just physical belongings. It may mean renouncing a relationship or giving up a job which breeds immoral behavior. Making restitution for past sins may require sacrifice, but these are never in the absence of God's Grace.

Saint Ignatius wants us to have an awareness of the movement within our heart, to search secrets and staggering places where we have settled, where repentance is merely remorse and where our choices hinder the victorious life in Christ.



RESOLVE

Make Ammendments

- Ask God to help you as you look forward to a new day tomorrow.
- Resolve to cooperate and trust the loving guidance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- What actions do you need to make amendments in your relationship with God? What changes do you need to make in your relationship(s)? What do you need to deny? What do you need to embrace?
- Whose support do you need as you resolve to repent and make restitution?
- Finish off with prayer.





ABOUT SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Saint Ignatius of Loyola helped to form the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1539. Saint Ignatius had a tremendous conversion to faith while recovering from an injury from a cannon ball received in battle, where he had only two books to read: one on Jesus, one on the Saints. He was captivated by the idea of being a knight, but his concept of whom he would serve had completely shifted.

After his recovery, Ignatius began study for religious life. His instruction to early Jesuits was to go out and “find God in all things.” Jesuits are known for their long history of missionary work and education, but most especially for spiritual direction and retreats.

Saint Ignatius’ well-known work, *The Spiritual Exercises*, has guided the faithful through retreats and discernment for hundreds of years. Included in the text is a daily practice of examination known simply as the Examen. It can be used anywhere and by anyone, but it is intended to be implemented each day in an effort to reflect on the ways that an individual was able to find /may have missed opportunities to find God in all things.



Since the object of our love is infinite,
we can always love more and more perfectly.

SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

