

# Legacy Leadership Collective / Spiritual Disciplines / Prayer of Examen

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## About the Prayer of Examen

- The Prayer of Examen (also known as the examination of “consciousness”) is a daily spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), who encouraged fellow followers and missionaries to engage in the practice for developing a deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognizing and receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit.
  - St. Ignatius “was concerned that missionaries in his society would know how to detect the movement of God in their lives”<sup>1</sup> with all of the duties and busyness.
- At the heart of the practice is increasingly becoming aware of God’s presence and the Holy Spirit’s movement *throughout your day*.
  - This type of examination allows us to sift through the data of the day and discern where God might be moving in a unique way. *Looking at both low and high points of the day - we’re able to see an invitation into prayer.*

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook; Practices that Transform Us* (IVP Books, 2005) page 59

- 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”<sup>2</sup>

## 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.

**Psalm 145:18** (ESV): *The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

**Psalm 145:9–10** (ESV): *The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!*

## Gratitude

*“If the only prayer you say in your entire life is ‘Thank You,’ that would suffice.”* Meister Eckhart

- As you think about the past 24 hours, what causes you to be thankful? 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.

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase comes from Parker Palmer’s, *A Hidden Wholeness*

\*\*Special thanks to Dan Allender and Elliot Grudem for yielding great leadership and for contemporizing this older practice.

**Ephesians 1:3** (ESV): *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,*

## 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 were you cooperating most fully with God’s action in your life?
    - When were you resisting?
    - For what moment today are you most grateful? Least grateful?
    - When did you give and receive the most love today? The least?
    - When did you seem most connected to God today? Others? Yourself? Least?
    - What habits and life patterns do you notice from the past day?

**Psalms 143:8b–10** (ESV): *...Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!*

*“The goal of a prayerful review of recent life experiences is not self-analysis. The point is not to peel back the layers of the onion and find some problem or meaning. Instead the goal is simply increased awareness of God in events of life and the depths of being...In general, “what” questions (such as What was I feeling, What disturbed me about that comment? What specifically made me anxious?) are better than “why” questions (Why did I feel threatened? Why did that bother me?). And avoid making demands of yourself or God. Just accept whatever comes from each experience each day.”<sup>3</sup>*

## 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.

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<sup>3</sup> David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (IV Press, 2004) page 43

- 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.”*

**Hebrews 13:20–21** (ESV): 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, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.