

Examen



The Ignatian Examen is the prayer practice developed by one of the greatest mystics of the Christian Tradition – St Ignatius of Loyola. He felt these prayer practices should be the most important 15 minutes of a person's day. St Paul tells us that we should “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) The Examen prayer practice offers the opportunity to think through the nitty gritty of life in the presence of God – to take time to hear how God might be speaking into one's life, and to seek consolation and forgiveness.

Resources

This booklet includes a template for the traditional daily Examen, as well as 5 additional Examen reflections for you to try this week, from the book *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen*, Mark E. Thibodeaux SJ, Loyola Press, 2015. The book contains 34 Examen prayers. The SPACE Contemplative Community (Heidelberg, Melbourne) used this book for their Lenten Discipline in 2018 and found it a very useful practice.

If you find the Examen a useful prayer practice that you would like to explore further, another useful resource is the “Examen” iPad App which includes a different Examen daily. It is a free download.

Five-step routine of Examen Prayer

- 1. Give thanks:** Give thanks for all the things you are grateful for today. Allow your mind to wander and notice all of the ways that God has blessed you – big and small this day.
- 2. Ask for the Spirit:** Look at the moments in your day that have not gone so well in your day. Ask for God's strength to be honest with yourself so that you can reflect without denial, self-loathing or self-pity.
- 3. Review and Recognise failures:** Look back at your day and ask God to point out how I have failed, in big ways and small. Spend time reflecting on these.
- 4. Ask for forgiveness and healing:** Spend time asking for God's forgiveness and healing with regard to things you have done, or any harm that may have been caused. Ask for wisdom as to how you might better handle tricky moments in future.
- 5. Pray about the next day:** Spend some time praying for the day ahead. Imagine what you will be doing, who you will be with and decisions you will be mulling over. Ask for help with any moments you foresee as difficult. Especially ask for help in moments where you might be tempted to fail in the way you did today.

A simple way to remember the five steps

- Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts you have today.
- Request the spirit to lead you through your review of the day.
- Review the day.
- Repent of any mistakes or failures.
- Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well.

Examen 1: Traditional Ignatian Examen

St Ignatius himself recommends these five steps; Relish the good, Request the Spirit, Review the day, Repent from any wrongdoing, and Resolve to live well tomorrow.

First, I relish. I ask God to reveal to me all the gifts and graces he has given me this day, from the really big ones (my life, safety, love) to the really small ones (a good night's sleep, an affirming phone call from a friend a task completed, a compliment paid to me). For each gift that comes to mind, I spend a moment giving thanks and praise.



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Second, I request. Knowing that I need God's help to see my darker side realistically but from the perspective of God's merciful love, I ask God to fill me with his Spirit. I ask God to be the leader and initiator of this prayer time, rather than letting me make it an obsessive brooding over the things I don't like about myself.

Third, I review. Going hour by hour, I review my day. In my imagination, I relive each significant moment of my day. I linger at the important moments, and I pass quickly through the less relevant ones.

Fourth, I repent. As I review my day, I continue thanking God for all the gifts that I find in it. But now, I Pause at any of the difficult moments of the day – when I had a bad thought – said something I shouldn't have, or did something inappropriate. I also pay attention to any missed opportunities, such as when I could have acted in a more Christian manner but didn't. When I find moments in which I was not fully the person I'm called to be, I stop and ask forgiveness from God. I try to sense his healing mercy washing over me, making me clean and whole.

Fifth, I resolve. With what I have learned during this prayer time about myself and my life, I ask God to show me, concretely, how he wants me to respond, or what he wants me to do tomorrow. Perhaps, more important, I ask God to show me what kind of person God is calling me to be tomorrow. I resolve to be that person. I might even make some sort of commitment to that effect. I ask God for the help to be the person I'm called to be.

Examen 2: Spiritual freedom

We are spiritually free when our spiritual and emotional state of being is healthy. We are spiritually free when we are emotionally well-balanced and desirous of being a faithful, hopeful, and loving person. We are spiritually unfree when our negative emotions and temptations have gotten the better of us, when we are too angry, sad,

tempted, or scared to think straight. We are unfree when we are lethargic and not inspired to be more faithful, hopeful, and loving. We are unfree when we don't feel God's presence at this moment, and we either don't care or are too panicky to handle the situation well.

In this Examen you may explore the question, "What was my most unfree moment this morning?" By that we mean: When was I in a bad mood? When did the unfaithful, unhopeful, unloving side of me take over? When did I let my strong negative emotions control my thoughts and actions?

You may then explore the question, "What was my most free moment?" By that we mean: When was I in a really good mood? When did the most faithful, hopeful, and loving side of me run the show? When was I thinking clearly and objectively, thinking good and loving thoughts and making good and loving decisions?

1. I spend a few moments in gratitude, thanking God for one or two of the blessings, big and small, that I've received today: the good mood in which I woke up, a kind word from a friend, my undeserved good health an easy commute to work, another day with my wonderful spouse.
2. Looking back, I ask God, "What was my most unfree moment today?" That is: At what moment was I being carried away by my own fears, resentments, cravings, addictions, anxieties, or despairing thoughts? In my imagination, I return to that specific moment in my day. I imagine God and myself watching this moment together, side by side. I imagine that we can look not only at the externals, as though watching a video from a hidden camera, but also that we can look at the internal movements. In other words, God and I watch as my heart fills to the brim with the negative emotion that swept me away.
3. I speak to God about what I see. I ask God for forgiveness or maybe for healing. I allow God to show me God's perspective of the situation.



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Is there anything that I sense God is trying to tell me about this? I talk with God about this, especially acknowledging my deepest emotions about it.

4. Looking back again, I ask, "What was my most spiritually free moment today?" In which moment did I feel and act free from negativity, low and earthly thoughts and emotions? At what point did I feel most alive and most in sync with God, even if I didn't notice it at the time?
5. Just as before, I imagine God and myself watching this grace—filled moment. We replay the moment here in my prayer time. We observe not only what happened, but also what was going on deep in my heart. I speak to God about this. I allow God to show me God's perspective, We talk about it for a while. We celebrate that moment.
6. Now God and I look to tomorrow. How can I live my day tomorrow out of that freedom that I felt in today's grace-filled moment? What attitudes and behaviours will I adopt in order to avoid the pit of that unfree moment? What is God calling me to do to live in spiritual freedom?
7. I make whatever commitments I feel called to make. I ask God for help to keep that commitment.

Examen 3: Naming the Grace

I begin (my prayer) by asking God our Father for the grace that I am seeking. Here it will be...

— St. Ignatius of Loyola

The word grace is used in many different ways. In this book We are using it to mean "spiritual gift" or "virtue." I like to ask myself the question, "If I could ask God for one spiritual gift right now (courage, peace, clarity, patience strength), what would it be?"

Saint Ignatius believed that It IS important to be aware of "the grace that you are seeking — that is,

the spiritual gift of virtue that you need or want at this moment. For example, if your co-worker drove you crazy this morning, you might pray during the noontime Examen for the grace of patience. If you were hurt by something a loved one said to you this morning, you might pray for the grace of patience or peace or temperance – whatever virtue you need to keep from allowing the hurt feelings to lead you to think or act inappropriately. If you were tempted toward some particular sin this morning, you might pray for the grace of fortitude, of fidelity, or of spiritual discipline.

1. I spend a few moments in gratitude, thanking God for one or two of the blessings, big and small, that I've received today: the good mood in which I woke up, a kind word from a friend, my undeserved good health an easy commute to work, another day with my wonderful spouse.
2. I ask God to show me the greatest challenge I faced today. How did I meet that challenge? Did I respond in spiritual freedom or unfreedom? What were the consequences of my thoughts, feelings, words and actions? If I feel moved to do so, I give thanks, I ask forgiveness, I ask for healing.
3. Now. I look to my spirit at this very moment. Right now, how am I feeling about this challenge? I tell God about my feelings and listen for any response from God.
4. I ask the Lord to show me what grace or virtue I may need to meet this challenge tomorrow and in the future (for example: patience, fortitude, courage, generosity, peace of mind and heart). Looking at the past few days, I ask the Lord to show me what ways I am not being open to this grace. I ask the Lord for forgiveness and strength to be open to this grace from this moment forward.
5. I allow myself to daydream about being "filled up" with this grace. What might tomorrow be like if I have this grace with me at all times? I



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prayerfully daydream - about the joyful moment when I meet this challenge in a grace-filled way.

6. I ask God to give me the grace I need to be the person God is calling me to be. I repeat the name of this grace over and over again before God. I try to sense God quietly filling me with this grace. I praise God for the grace God bestows on me.
7. If I feel moved to do so, I make a resolution to be the kind of person I feel called to be.

Examen 4: A particular relationship

Rather than reflecting on this past day, today's Examen leads you to ponder the long-term dynamics of one particular relationship in your life.

1. I spend a few moments in gratitude, thanking God for one or two of the blessings, big and small, that I've received today: the good mood I woke up in, a kind word from a friend, my undeserved good health, an easy commute to work, another day with my wonderful spouse.
2. Looking over the recent past, I ask God to show me the person who has been on my mind and in my heart a lot. Odds are, one particular person will rise to the surface of my consciousness pretty quickly. I get a good picture of this person in my mind's eye. I hear the voice, recognize the gestures, and so on.
3. I speculate with God why this person has been so prominent in my attention lately. It might be obvious — for example, we are in the midst of an argument - or it might not be so obvious. I speak with God about this relationship.
4. I ask God to reveal my strongest emotion as I reflect on my relationship with this person. Great love? Ambivalence? Gratitude? Anger? Attachment? Hurt? Worry? Confusion? I speak with God about how I feel at this very moment, and I present this to God. I remain receptive to whatever God might say or do.
5. I ask God to give me a sweeping overview of my relationship with this person. This is not a thorough blow-by-blow analysis. It is a quiet, contemplative "backing up" so that I can see the forest of this relationship rather than getting lost in the trees of it. On the whole, what has this relationship meant to me? Regardless of what is happening now, has this relationship been life - giving or draining? Has it led me closer to God and his way or further from it? Am I more or less faithful, hopeful, and loving because of this relationship? What has been the most difficult part of being in this relationship? What has been the most enjoyable or life-giving part? Finally, is the strong emotion that I'm feeling regarding the present moment (the trees) in sync with the strong emotions I feel as I reflect on the relationship as a whole (the forest)? I speak with God about all of this, listening as much as speaking, should God choose to say something.
6. Still reflecting on the forest, I ask God to show me my own emotions and desires regarding the future of this relationship. What are my great concerns or fears about this relationship? What are my great desires? What are my hopes and dreams? I speak with God about this. If I desire something in particular, I explicitly ask God for this. For example, "Lord, help us to overcome _____ and to focus on _____."
7. Now, I go back to the trees of the present moment. Given my reflection on the forest, has my perspective shifted or have my emotions changed regarding the issues of the day? What specifically am I called to do tomorrow for or with this person? I speak with God about this. If called to do so, I make a particular commitment to think, speak, or act in a certain way. I ask God for help to keep this commitment.



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Examen 5: Hidden inner truths

If you are like me, at any given moment there are little truths about your life that lie beneath the surface of your consciousness — things you have not yet recognized or acknowledged. For me, these hidden truths are usually, but not always, a painful reality that I have trouble accepting. Sometimes there are felicitous happenings in my life that I simply haven't slowed down to notice and name. This Examen tries to dig deeply into our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and motivations to try to uncover a hidden truth or two.

1. I spend a few moments in gratitude, thanking God for one or two of the blessings, big and small, that I've received today: the good mood I woke up in, a kind word from a friend, my undeserved good health, an easy commute to work, another day with my wonderful spouse.
2. I ask God to reveal to me any hidden truths about any of the important relationships in my life. For example, "I didn't realize it, but ..."
 - I'm angry with _____
 - I'm attracted to _____
 - I'm getting along better with _____
 - I'm not so angry with _____. I seem to have forgiven
her and not noticed!
 - I'm afraid of _____'s outbursts.
 - I'm trying to impress _____.
3. If a large and striking revelation occurs to me, one that makes me go, "Wow, I hadn't noticed that before" or "Well, I guess it's time to admit the truth of that," then I remain on that one hidden truth for the rest of the Examen. If nothing big shows up when I muse over my relationships, then I move on to my subconscious thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about recent events in my life, about any attachments I'm clinging to,

and about my own relationship with myself. For example, "I didn't realize it, but ..."

- I'm sad about _____ moving away.
 - I'm not as anxious about that daunting task at the office.
 - I'm worried about our finances.
 - I'm spending more and more time on useless web browsing.
 - I'm clinging too tightly to owning _____, when perhaps God or my life circumstances call me to let it go...
 - I'm getting older and am not admitting it to myself.
 - I'm not as bad at _____ as I think I am.
 - Despite my pessimism, things are turning out OK.
4. When I have settled on the most important inner truth, I let go of all of the others and simply have a conversation with God about this one reality in my life. I summarize it in one simple statement such as one of the examples above, and I make that statement over and over again to God, letting its reality and existence sink in and not hide again.
 5. I note what emotions I am feeling as I make this statement to God. What is the strongest emotion that I feel as I name this truth to God? I now add this to my statement. For example, "Lord, I feel _____ as I admit that _____. I let myself steep in that emotion for a while and I keep presenting to God both the truth and its accompanying emotion.
 6. If I feel called to do so, I listen for God's message to me or I await his touch on my heart. I ask God, "What is it you would have me do about this? How should this truth affect who I am?" I listen for what might be an answer from God.
 7. If I feel called to do so, I make a commitment to God about this. I ask God for help to be faithful to my commitment.



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Examen 6 & 7

For the past two days of this week, either repeat one of the daily Examen practices in this booklet, or simply use the 'Traditional Examen' pattern at the start of the booklet. Alternatively, download the Examen App and follow the daily prompts.

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