

# THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN\*

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## About the Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a daily spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556]. Ignatius encouraged fellow followers of Christ 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 the desire to become increasingly 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 might be sufficient. Also, you can spend more or less 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.

## [1] 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.

It's important to begin this practice in a calm and reflective 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.*

*Give me the wisdom and courage to live graciously with myself, others, and the world you have wonderfully made. For the sake of Jesus, who is the Author and the Finisher of our faith. Amen."*

**Take some time and focus on the nearness of God. Become aware of His presence with you.**

*"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." [Psalm 145:18]*

*"But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;  
I will tell of all your deeds." [Psalm 73:28]*

*“The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” [John 1:14]*

*[Jesus said:] “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” [John 10:14-15]*

*[Jesus said:] “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” [John 14:16-18]*

**Take a moment to write a prayer reflecting what God’s presence means to you today.**

## **[2] Gratitude**

*“. . . give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” [1 Thessalonians 5:18]*

*“Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” [Ephesians 1:3]*

- 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 focus on the goodness and generosity of God. Find encouragement and reminders of God’s goodness throughout the past 24 hours, and be thankful.

Take a moment and capture your thanks in writing, expressing words of gratitude and giving testimony to God’s generosity and faithfulness. Use the following page to record your prayer of gratitude!

## Thanksgiving and Gratitude

### **[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 to the situations you’ve been in and to notice details. The questions in this exercise should help you bring specific experiences to mind. Feel free to record your reflections below each question.

- When or where in the past 24 hours were you cooperating most fully with God’s action in your life?



## **[4] Response**

Having spent time remembering, it seems natural to want to respond in some way. Take time to write and 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?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What from the past 24-hours causes you to worship?

*“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 through the blood of the eternal covenant,  
brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus -- that great Shepherd of the sheep -- equip you with  
everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him,  
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” [Hebrews 13:20-21]*

*\*Most of the material here is taken from an article by Mars Hill Bible Church. On the next page is another simple guide to use in your time of prayer at home.*

# How Can I Pray?

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From <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com>

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this version of St. Ignatius's prayer.

**1. Become aware of God's presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

**2. Review the day with gratitude.** Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

**3. Pay attention to your emotions.** One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

**4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

**5. Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you grace for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. End the Daily Examen with the Lord's Prayer [Matthew 6:9-13].