

Practicing Prayer: The Examen

The Examen is one of the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). It is a way of reviewing one's day seeking to be attentive to God's presence. Years ago a church we knew of as well as one of my counseling professors suggested that practicing this way of prayer might be particularly helpful, especially in our society where we are overly distracted and addicted to novelty. One of the great benefits of this practice is it trains a person to be attentive to God in their everyday life. I have found that in seasons when I practice prayer in this way, I notice how I have a greater awareness of God's grace and goodness in my life in everyday moments.

Here's an example of how to pray using the daily Examen in 5 steps:

1. **Acknowledge the presence of God.** "In him we live and move and have our being" Acts 17:28 (also Psalm 139).
2. **Thank God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for who he is.**
3. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17) **Recognize one "Consolation" from the day.** Recall the experience in your mind as vividly and with as much sensory detail as you can. Receive it as a gift from your Heavenly Father.
 - *A consolation is an experience that causes you to feel fully alive, at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, connected, etc. It could be a great conversation with a friend, a hug from a spouse or child, or just a simple good cup of coffee.*
4. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." (Isaiah 43:2-3) **Recognize one "Desolation" from the day.** Recall the hard experience. Acknowledge what you felt in God's presence. Pray into it. Invite Jesus to meet you there. Remember that even in that hard place Jesus was with you.
 - *A desolation is an experience that causes you to feel drained of energy, anxious, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, alone, isolated, unaccepted, fragmented, shameful, guilty, fearful, less than your best self, etc. Often these are experiences we run from, distract ourselves from, numb ourselves to. Often these are experiences where we feel far from God.*
5. "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed" (Psalm 139:16). "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). **Envision the remainder of your day** or the next day. With all that's ahead of you, all that you must do or bear or accomplish, rest in the reality that Jesus goes with you by his Spirit. Ask for his help to receive it as a gift and to know his presence as you go.

Let me invite you to try praying this way once a day for the next week as an opportunity to grow in being awake to God's presence in the routines and ordinariness of everyday life. This prayer practice works great in the evening as a way to conclude your day, though you could easily adapt it and use it anytime of the day. Perhaps think about when it might work best for you and try to work through the 5 steps in 5 mins (or longer if you'd like).

The key to this is not to be too ambitious (I'm going to pray for 30-45 mins every day), but to try and practice it regularly (perhaps just 5 mins at some point in the day). The regularity of the practice helps you grow in attentiveness to God in all parts of the day.