

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Central to the practice of prayer is the awareness of God's presence in and around our lives. However, the busier our lives become the more difficult identifying God's presence can be. And it has been that way for most of time—so much so, that when Saint Ignatius of Loyola developed a work called *The Spiritual Exercises* in 1522-1524 C.E. he included a prayer to be prayed even when the necessities of life made other forms of prayer impossible.

This prayer, the *Prayer of Examen*, is meant to serve as a moment of refocusing our lives, a dedicated time to retune our hearts and souls. It is an opportunity to reflect on our day, to find God in the midst of every-day life, and to assess our motives, desires, struggles, and opportunities.

Richard Foster said, "(The Prayer of Examine) has two basic aspects, like two sides of a door. The first is an examen of *consciousness* through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. The second aspect is an examen of *conscience* in which we uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and healing."¹

The prayer length can vary, based off the time you want to put into it, but can generally take place in about 10-15 minutes. Evenings are generally best for this type of prayer, as your day will still be fresh on your mind. Find a quiet space, where you won't be disturbed, turn off your phone (or any other distractions), and sit comfortably. Allow yourself to relax and soak in a moment of silence before you begin.

1. RECALL YOU ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

As you sit in silence, renew your awareness of God's love for you as your one true and perfect Father. Try to make yourself attentive to his presence and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your heart and mind as you pray.

2. REVIEW YOUR DAY WITH GRATITUDE

This is the central (and longest) part of the prayer. Review your day from beginning to end—identifying and being thankful for God's presence throughout.

Process your day's high and low points. Search for encounters and experiences where you showed grace and your heart was at peace, and those where you did not. Recall things that were life-giving and things that drained you. When were you most joyful? When did you fail to live in the joy of Christ? Were there times where you sensed connection with God? Were there times you did not, or rejected his presence in a situation or relationship?

¹ Foster, Richard. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 27-28.

You may ask questions like:

- For what/who am I most grateful for?
- For what/who was I least grateful for?
- Where did I show God's love and heart to others?
- Where did I fail to show God's love and heart to others?
- What do I need to be thankful for?
- What do I need to repent of?
- What action, mindset, or rhythm should I try to repeat with intention?
- Is there anything, or a relationship with anyone, where I need to take a step toward restoration tomorrow?
- Are there patterns (or habits) that made me more like Christ today?
- Are there patterns (or habits) that made me less like Christ today?
- Is there anything God is asking me to (1) start doing, (2) stop doing, (3) start believing or thinking, (4) stop believing or thinking, (5) to commit to, (6) or to stop committing to?

Take time to review your heart and motives. Respond to God in joy for his presence and love for you. Respond in repentance where you have not lived in step with his Spirit.

3. RENEW THE GOSPEL IN YOUR HEART AND LIFE

As you recall actions you'll find yourself naturally thankful where you have lived a holy life and naturally convicted where you have not. The good news (gospel) is that, although you are guilty and unworthy, through Christ you are fully accepted and loved. This prayer is not about establishing a "tab" with God where you daily reconcile good and bad to find out if you're ahead or behind.

If you have placed your faith in Christ, you're reviewing your life from a place of love and acceptance. In other words, you're not trying to earn his approval or acceptance (and you never could)—but because Christ has gained acceptance for you, you have the pleasure of responding in gratitude to his grace.

4. LOOK FORWARD WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER

This is how Jesus taught his followers to pray—and in this prayer we join with hundreds and hundreds of years of Christians, from all around the world, together before Christ.

Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.