

Prayer



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Formation in the way of
Jesus

Examen

“The practice of the examen- a prayer of discernment at the end of each day, helps us to see the ways we have sensed God’s presence or felt distant from him in our daily life. This prayer of attending to God’s presence, when practiced regularly, opens our eyes to new ways of recognizing God’s interruptions, God’s attempts to catch our attention through our day. It is a prayer that sharpens our awareness and clears our vision so that we learn to discern where God is in our lives every day.” - Julie Benner, Contemplative Vision

“The Examen makes us aware of moments that at first we might easily pass by as insignificant, moments that ultimately can give direction for our lives.” Dennis Linn

When we practice the prayer of Examen we are primarily asking ourselves two questions as we allow the Spirit to take us back through our day. Choose the set below that feels most like it was written by you and apply it to the suggested exercises:

- For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?
- When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love today?
- What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-thwarting part of my day?
- When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?
- Where was I aware of living out of the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit?
- Where did I experience desolation? Where did I find consolation?

Suggested Exercises for the Examen

1. **Find a quiet place to reflect.** Ask the Lord to take you back through your day as if you are watching a movie scene by scene. Start from when you woke up. Ask Him to shine a gentle light and show you evidence of His presence with you. Notice where you felt the most alive today. Notice where you felt the most drained today.
2. **Make a list of feelings words.** For example: accepted, anxious, apathetic, confused, defeated, disgusted, ecstatic, enraged, paranoid, weak, undecided. Then begin to ask yourself the examen questions. Let these words help you articulate what drains or saps you and what gives you life. Let this knowing inform your choices.
3. **Find a quiet moment to reflect on your day or week.** Open your palms and ask the holy Spirit to show you the moment for which you are least grateful. What made that moment difficult? Be with your feelings; don't try to change them or make them acceptable. Offer them up to God. Talk to him about them. Where was God in that moment? You may want to thank God that he is always ready to be with you and talk to you.
4. **Look back over the past year.** List the things that brought you life and the times you were able to truly give and receive love. Make another list of the life-thwarting moments. What do you discover about yourself? How can this self-awareness help you choose a healthier, God-directed life.

Recommended Books:

The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius in Daily Life - Kevin O'Brien

Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Exercises of Saint Ignatius - Larry Warner

Sleeping with Bread - Dennis Linn, Sheila Linn

Pray-As-You-Go prayer tools www.prayasyougo.org

Breath Prayer

Breath prayer, or prayer of the heart has been practiced by Christians for centuries. From Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, by Adele Calhoun: *“Breathing is an unconscious thing. And breath prayer reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe him in all day long.”*

Acts 17:28 “For in him we live and move and have our being.”

This form of praying connects our mind with the reality that God is as close as the breath we breathe, and reminds us that our words need only be small.

Examples of breath prayer

Breathe in: “Abba”

Breathe out: “I belong to You”

Breathe in: “Healer”

Breathe out: “Speak the word and I shall be healed”

Breathe in “Shepherd”

Breathe out: “I have all I need”

There is also an adventure in discovering your own breath prayer! Ask the Lord to identify what is most true about you right now or what is most true about your desire to be with Him in this moment. Ask Him for a word or short phrase that will express that as you breathe it in and out. Let this prayer be your breath prayer until the Lord shifts or changes your own longings and desires.

Recommended Books:

Sacred Rhythms - Ruth Haley Barton

The Breath of the Soul: Reflections on Prayer - Joan Chittister

The Way of the Pilgrim - translated by Helen Bacovcin

Writing a Personal Prayer of Lament

[Note: This process may take some time. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your expression of lament. We have time! Try sitting with the things you are bringing (disappointment, sadness, loss, anger, frustration, doubt etc) for a while and not rushing through to where you “think you should be” in trust and praise. Let God sit with you as you look at your feelings, and emotions together.]

“**Prayer is a long loving look at what is real.**” Imagine yourself AND your real feelings and emotions as being in the long loving gaze of God. Remember that what you're bringing is not a surprise to Him. You cannot shock Him with your candor. He knows better than you do the depths of your emotions, and the sources of your lament. His longing is for you to know yourself-what is most true about you-as Beloved of God.

Application steps (adapted from Ann Arbor Vineyard Church):

Take some time and reflect on how the last week (or a time frame of your choice) has been for you. Make note of the predominant emotions you have been feeling during this time, in particular the more negative ones. Reflect on a particular situation or recurring theme that you know has been causing you distress, pain or anxiety and that you feel is beyond your control. Imagine that God is with you and that He has given you complete freedom to lay it all out, to complain fearlessly without judgment, in order to get it all off your chest.

With a piece of paper and pen follow the steps outlined below:

1. **Address and introductory cry:** Identify the Lord as the one to whom you are addressing your complaint. Request His presence as you express what is on your heart.
2. **Complaint or Lament:** Articulate the problem you are wrestling with. Detail how it is affecting you, the pain it is causing, and ask the Lord for His help.
3. **Confession of Trust:** Verbalize your trust in the Lord. Share your hopes that He will come to your aid, that He will be present with you in your situation.
4. **Prayer for Deliverance:** Request deliverance, or God's intervention in the problem.
5. **Praise:** Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's blessings and faithfulness.

Another way to do this is through pictures, or color. As you move through each step listed above, draw a picture of what you are feeling/bringing and what is being stirred up in you. Or simply use swaths of color on the page. Cutting out pictures that you are drawn to from a magazine is another way to access your lament.

Pray through each step and allow your right brain to take over. Typically, this is the place where the cries of the soul find their voice. The left brain tries to rationalize our feelings and emotions away and has great success! But when we pick up color/art and ask the Lord to speak to us through it, we give Him the reins to unlock the depths of our emotion and feeling. The artists in our community know and live this regularly. For those of us who don't think of ourselves as artists, this is an especially powerful exercise that invites us to take the hand of God being offered and trust Him to lead us into things only He knows about us!

Recommended Books:

Finding God: Praying the Psalms in Times of Depression - Thomas Lewis
A Grace Disguised - Gerald Sittser
A Grief Observed - C.S. Lewis
Invitations From God - Adele Calhoun

Imaginative Contemplation: Prayer with the Imagination

Imaginative contemplation is a way to get to know and meet Christ in the gospels. The ultimate goal is personal encounter with Him.

The Holy Spirit makes present the mystery of Christ found in the particular passage, and helps you to explore things in a way you might not find possible through regular reading of the scriptures or study of the scriptures.

Let the events of Jesus' life in these scenes be present to you. Visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. At some point, place yourself in the scene and meet Jesus there.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going "too far," then do some discernment with how you are praying.

Where did your imagining lead you: closer to God or farther away? Is your imagining bringing consolation or desolation?

"Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize. Pray as you are able, don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions or imagination." - Kevin O'Brien SJ

Suggested passages to begin with

Luke 18:35-43

Luke 19:1-10

Luke 8:43-48

John 20:1-18

Luke 24:13-32

Matthew 14:22-33

Luke 10:38-42

John 13:1-11

John 5:1-8

Centering Prayer

A story is told about a 19th century French priest who once noticed a peasant come into the church every day at noon and stay for hours in front of the communion elements.

One day the priest asked this man, "What do you say during all that time you stand before Jesus in the Eucharist?"

The Peasant replied, "Nothing. I look at Him and He looks at me."

Spending time practicing simply sitting in the Long Loving Gaze of God, is a form of prayer that shapes and transforms us. In fact, this kind of wordless prayer is so formational BECAUSE we simply sit. We don't DO anything. We sit and submit to the presence of the Trinity and let Them DO what They DO.

Sometimes we feel something powerful during or after this form of prayer. Other times, we feel nothing. That is part of the power of it. It doesn't rely on us to make something happen, and reminds us Who prayer is really about. It's not primarily about us. Prayer is primarily about God and what He wants to do in us...because He loves us.

This kind of prayer shapes humility in us, even as it deepens our awareness of our Belovedness.

Suggested ways to enter into this practice

1. **Sacred Word:** Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your desire to let Jesus' action and presence form you. The word can be a deep desire of your heart (love, grace, peace) or a name or title of God that is dear to you (Jesus, Good Shepherd, Healer of my soul, Counselor, Devender). Become still and offer yourself and your love to God. Let this word or phrase draw you into the presence of Christ. When you are distracted, return gently to this word and to the Lord. At the end of the prayer remain still for several minutes. Throughout your day, return to your word and remind the Lord of your love for him.
2. Sit comfortably in a position that allows you to stay alert and attentive. **Read a short passage of scripture slowly out loud.** Choose a word from the text as your centering word. Then follow the directions given in #1. Let the word lead you into the presence of Jesus. When thoughts distract you, return to Christ by repeating your word. Simply be with Jesus. Offer yourself to him. Wait in his presence.
3. **Centering prayer App:** Contemplative Outreach
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org> has a wonderful free app to help us along the way in our centering prayer practice. Enjoy!

Recommended Books:

Centering Prayer - M.Basil Pennington

Open Mind, Open Heart - Thomas Keating

Beholding - Strahan Coleman

Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools - Tyler Staton