

“And How Was Your Day?”

The Examen



The regular use of The Examen can help us listen to our inner selves and learn to recognize or discern the emotional movements within us. In this recognition, our concern is not with the good or bad of our actions or feelings — rather our concern is with how the Holy Spirit is moving us deep within. We become more discerning when we listen to what seems right and brings us inner peace.

The Examen can help us to be more open to our life experiences and be more aware of where we feel consolation and desolation in our lives. The use of the Examen becomes a way of listening for God and of recognizing and responding to the Holy Spirit.

We grow in the gift of discernment: by being aware of situations that cause unwanted moods, by replacing these moods with good desires and responding in changed ways, by examining the causes of the unwanted moods and resolving to deal with them appropriately, and by trusting in the Holy Spirit. Along with our life of prayer, we also need to practice discernment in some form like the Examen. The Examen is a lingering over two questions like the following:

*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?*

*When did I feel most alive today?
When did I most feel life draining out of me?*

*When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God, and the universe?
When did I have the least sense of belonging?*

*When was I happiest today?
When was I saddest today?*

*What was today's high point?
What was today's low point?*

*What did you feel good about today?
What was your biggest struggle today, or when did you feel sad, helpless, or angry?*

*What am I most grateful for during the past week?
What am I least grateful for?*

*What do I fear will take life or vitality from me in the future?
What gives (or, in the future, could give) me life as I face this?*

*If I were very old and dying, for what am I grateful?
For what am I least grateful and wish I had done differently with my life?*

*What helped me most with my pessimism and negativity today?
What helped me least with my pessimism and negativity today?*

*When today did I ask for what I needed?
When today did I not ask for what I needed?*

*When today did I do something because I enjoyed it rather than because I should?
When today did I do something because I should rather than because I enjoyed it?*

Examen Process

Preparation: You may wish to light a candle. Do whatever helps you to experience unconditional love. For example, imagine yourself in a favourite place with someone whose love you trust, such as a friend, Jesus, or God. Put your feet flat on the floor, take a few deep breaths from the bottom of your toes, up through your legs, your abdominal muscles and your chest. Breathe in that unconditional love, and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.

1. Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus or God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you the most able to give and receive love today?

Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love?

Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

3. Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. If possible, share as much as you wish of these two moments with a friend.

Sources

Aschenbrenner, George. "Consciousness Examen," *Review for Religious* 31(1), 1972, 14-21.

Hauser, Richard, "Each Mortal Thing Does One Thing and the Same — Selves: An Approach to Christian Discernment," *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers*, 207-227.

Linn, Dennis, Sheila Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995.

Focusing Prayer Process

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Let your awareness move down into the centre of your body and notice what you feel there,

2. Get in touch with an experience of desolation (or of consolation).

3. Ask yourself if you want to listen to this part of yourself right now. Is it okay to spend some time with it? If not, care for the feeling of not wanting to spend time with this right now.

4. If it is okay to spend some time with this area of your life, take a few moments to create a loving atmosphere where it will feel safe to speak to you. For example, how would you prepare your home if your best friend were coming to visit? How would you reach out to a hurting child or a wounded pet?

5. Now let yourself down into how this whole thing feels inside you. Where in your body do you especially experience it? Perhaps you feel an ache in your chest, a lump in your throat, a knot in your stomach, shaking in your legs, etc.

6. Care for this feeling and see if it wants to tell you about itself, perhaps through a word, an image, or a symbol. Perhaps it wants to come to you as a little child. Perhaps it wants to tell you its name, its history (when and how it developed), and what it needs.

7. Whatever comes, reach out to care for it without trying to change it or fix it. Or, maybe just put your hand on that part of your body in a caring way. If you wish, as Jesus, God, or some other trusted person to come and help you care for it.

8. Tell this part of you that you will come back at another time and listen to it some more.

9. Before concluding, notice how your body feels compared to when you began. Are you now carrying this issue differently in your body?

The Examen as/in Prayer

1. Awareness/Enlightenment

Pray that the Holy Spirit will give me insight into the mystery of my daily life — my memories, my dreams, my thoughts, my feelings, my emotions, etc.

2. Thanksgiving

Offer thanks for God's grace in the people and the events of this day. Concentrate on the concrete, unique gifts that bless me.

3. Survey of Actions

Recall how my day and the people and events in it have been a response to God's calling. Think of how I have been moved and motivated by the Holy Spirit today. Aim for a reverently honest meeting with God. Reflect on what changes must be made within me. If I am really serious about God, then what aspects of me must be changed? What change or conversion is God suggesting to me in the moods and movements of my daily life?

4. Sorrow and Confession

Some sorrow may arise within me when I resist God's call to conversion. This sorrow may arise from my lack of honesty or courage in response to God's call. This contrition is not shame or depression at my weakness but part of my faith experience as I recall how much God desires to love me. After all, I am God's beloved one.

5. Hope for the Future

I prepare to face the future with hope in which I try to integrate my new awareness of myself and of God's desires for me from this time of prayer. Take the time to respond to God's call to me with faith, humility, and courage. The hope which I feel is not founded on my own self but on my being more open to God's grace to me in Christ Jesus.