

# The Prayer of Examen

*Know Thyself – Socrates*

## About the Prayer of Examen

“An unexamined life is not worth living”  
(various ancient philosophers)

The Prayer of Examen is a daily spiritual exercise typically credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], who encouraged fellow followers to engage in the practice for developing a deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognizing and receiving the assistance of the Holy Spirit. “In the examen of consciousness we prayerfully reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our days to see how God has been at work among us and how respond.” (Richard Foster, *Prayer; Finding the Heart's True Home*) Without apology and without defense we prayerfully reflect on our day, inviting God's Spirit to show us where God was at work and where God was speaking to us and how we responded.

## Practicing the Prayer of Examen

This Prayer of Examen is based on the *Three Simple Rules* of Methodism: 1. Do no harm, 2. Do good and 3. Stay in love with God. One is invited, through three portions [presence, 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 could be sufficient, and you could spend more 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.

## **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 and His unashamed love for you. Consider praying for the Holy Spirit to help you be attentive to God's presence. To become more focused, it might be helpful to repeat a simple phrase during this time, like "Be still and know that I am God" [Psalm 46:10]. It's important to begin this practice in a calm and centered 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 grace, and give me the wisdom and courage to live gracefully with myself, others, and the world you have wonderfully made. For the sake of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Amen."

Take some time and focus on the nearness of God. Open yourself to His presence.

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

"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O Lord; your saints will extol you." [Psalm 145:9-10]

## **Review**

Over-packed lives can rob us of the opportunity to learn from the past, to see how yesterday might inform today. Here we can benefit again from taking time to look back over the past 24 hours. By intentionally reviewing how we kept or did not keep the

*Three Simple Rules*, 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 the situations you've been in and to notice details. The questions in this exercise should help you bring specific experiences to mind.

Did I harm someone by word or thought or deed?

Did I do good to all I met?

What were my prayers today?

Did I read, study, meditate on or memorize scripture?

Did I reflect Christ's love to everyone I met?

"Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul...Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." [Psalm 143:8b,10]

## **Response**

Having spent time remembering, it seems natural to want to respond in some way. Take time to journal or 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.

How can I do better at keeping the *Three Simple Rules* tomorrow?

"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."

"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 for ever and ever. Amen." [Hebrews 13:20-21]

## **Prayer of Examen (Short Version)**

Finding the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we review our day.

### **Recognize the presence of God**

[Be still and know that you are with God.]

### **Review your day**

How did I keep the Three Simple Rules?

Do no harm

Do good

Stay in love with God

### **Response**

Seek forgiveness

Ask for direction

Share a concern

Express gratitude

Resolve to move forward

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