

ANNUAL EXAMEN

A Prayerful Exercise of Remembrance



CURATE MINISTRIES

PRACTICING THE ANNUAL EXAMEN



Each year brings with it a breadth of experiences: peaks and valleys, joys and sorrows, to be sure—but also the ordinary, mundane, and day-to-day moments. God is present in them all. The Annual Examen is a prayerful exercise that invites us to remember and reflect upon significant moments and experiences of the last year, intentionally focusing upon God’s presence and movement, as well as our own spiritual growth and formation into the image of Jesus.

Based upon Ignatius of Loyola’s daily Examen, this exercise helps us to notice God in unexpected ways, and it prepares us to become more attentive to His presence and voice in the coming days. It includes four specific movements: Gratitude, Illumination, Review, and Renewal.

You’ll find that the Review section is the longest and most extensive, inviting you to review your year through seven categories: General, Body, Mind, Heart, Relationships, Vocation, and Spirit.

Helpful Tips:

- Go slowly, and don’t rush. Linger, reflect deeply, and allow yourself the necessary time to do so.
- Grab your calendar or journal, if it helps you to recall significant events and experiences of the last year. If your calendar or journal become distracting, trust that the Holy Spirit will help you to remember what He wants you to remember.
- If the space provided isn’t enough, feel free to use a journal or notebook.
- Feel free to skip, add, or reword any questions. This is for you and your life with God!
- Share your responses with a trusted friend or your spouse, as this is an exercise that becomes all the more meaningful when shared in relationship and community.

01

Begin the Annual Examen with a posture of gratitude before God.

GRATITUDE

What did the past year bring that I'm grateful for?

Where did gratitude come easy? Where was it difficult to be grateful?

How did I intentionally cultivate gratitude?

02

ILLUMINATION

Pay attention to how you are coming to this time of Examen.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to remember what He wants you to remember from the last twelve months: events, experiences, relationships, desires, losses, hopes, challenges, moments of grace, moments of struggle, etc.

Write a brief prayer to help you enter in to this time.

REVIEW

This is the most lengthy section! Be sure to give yourself enough time to complete this part of the exercise, section by section. You may even want to come back to this part of the Examen in more than one sitting. As new memories or thoughts come to mind, be sure to jot them down.

General

Thinking over the last twelve months, what significant moments or experiences come to mind? What are the most significant events of the past year? If it helps to think through the year chronologically, make note of any significant dates.

General Cont'd

When did God feel near over the last year?

When did I feel the most known and loved this year? When and how did I offer love this year?

When did I experience beauty? Wholeness? Peace? Hope?

When did God feel distant or far-off over the last year?

What is one word that I might use to describe the past year?

Where did I experience the most stress? the most joy?

REVIEW CONT'D

Body

What choices have I made over the past year that have had an impact on my health?

How did I rest? Enter into Sabbath?

What do I need to pay attention to or take seriously regarding my physical health?

What were life-giving experiences?

Mind

What has received the most air time in my thoughts over the past year? What holds the majority of my attention?

What have I learned in the past year?

What do I notice about how my interaction with technology is shaping me and my thoughts?

REVIEW CONT'D

Heart

What were my dominant emotions this year?

How did I express and process strong emotions this past year?

When did I experience the most most sorrow this year?

When did I experience joy, delight, or the sense of feeling the most alive this year?

Relation- ships

Who were my closest relationships this year? Spiritual Friends? Friends in need?

How did I experience community? How did I experience church?

What longings and hopes surface as I think about my relationships?

Vocation

What words describe my vocation, or my sense of call in this world?

What did I find satisfying in my vocation? What was frustrating?

How have I utilized my resources (time, attention, money, energy, talents/gifts, material possessions, etc.) in the last year?

What do I wish I had given more time to? Less time to?

Spirit

What was my relationship with God like? How did I experience God?

What passages of Scripture have been significant over this year?

What practices for prayer and engagement with God were meaningful?

If I could ask God one question, it would be:

What is my deepest longing in my life with God?

FORGIVENESS AND RENEWAL

Read through the previous sections, and pay attention to any common threads, themes, new insights, or awareness. Write down what you notice below.

For what do I need to repent and receive God's forgiveness, as I reflect on the past year?

How will I pursue living out my vocation (sense of call) in the coming year?

What is one word that I might carry into this new year?

How can I be intentionally attentive to God's presence in the coming year?

Share this exercise with a trusted friend or your spouse. Note any new insights that the Holy Spirit brings, and look ahead with prayerful grace to the year ahead.

The Daily Examen

The Examen was originally written as a daily prayer by Ignatius of Loyola more than 500 years ago, and it has been prayed by followers of Jesus ever since.

Below is a daily version of the Examen. The beauty of this prayer is that you can do all five movements, or just one or two—it's flexible, and it's a wonderful way to end the day with the Lord. You can also pray the Examen with your roommates, spouse, kids, or grandkids. It is, without question, one of the most transformational prayer practices we've experienced, and we hope it blesses you as much as it has blessed us!

Step One: Gratitude. Note what you are grateful for. It can be as simple as fresh coffee, as grandiose as God's great love, or anything in between.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!" (Ps. 100:4)

Step Two: Illumination. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh and illuminate your heart as you review your day.

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (Ps. 139:7-8)

Step Three: Review. With God, review the day. Note the moments when you felt most connected to God (consolation) and most disconnected to God (desolation). Review your choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar." (Ps. 139:1-2)

Step Four: Forgiveness. Ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God, particularly in areas of brokenness, sin, or times you missed His presence.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." (Ps 51:1)

Step Five: Renewal. Look toward tomorrow. Anticipate His presence in the day to come, and plan to live in accordance with His guidance.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Linger in God's presence as you end this prayer of Examen.

"I DO NOT CEASE TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU, REMEMBERING YOU IN MY PRAYERS, THAT THE GOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF GLORY, MAY GIVE YOU THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND OF REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM, HAVING THE EYES OF YOUR HEARTS ENLIGHTENED, THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH HE HAS CALLED YOU, WHAT ARE THE RICHES OF HIS GLORIOUS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS, AND WHAT IS THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE, ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS GREAT MIGHT THAT HE WORKED IN CHRIST WHEN HE RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD AND SEATED HIM AT HIS RIGHT HAND IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES,"

EPHESIANS 1:16-20 ESV

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