

# EXAMEN

## DEFINITION

Created by St. Ignatius of Loyola, examen prayer is a reflective exercise. It is a way to recognize the presence of God as you think about the day past and to ask for his help in the day to come. To practice examen, come before God in prayer. Review the events of your day, noticing the feeling that surface as you do so. Talk to God about these feelings. Then, look forward to the day ahead, inviting God into any emotions that might arise as you do. God cares about your every moment of your every day; include Him in it all. (Ignatianspirituality.com; Spiritual Disciplines Handbook)

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Examen was created as one of the “Spiritual Exercises” of Saint Ignatius Loyola (AD 1491-1556). Ignatius was a Spanish theologian and mystic, but before this he fought as a soldier and was seriously wounded in the battle of Pamplona (1521). He broke his leg, leaving him bedridden for many months. During his recovery he discovered Christ and spent the rest of his life deepening his relationship with him. It was during this period that he wrote the Spiritual exercises, an intensive of prayer, contemplation, and meditation to cultivate greater intimacy with God. In the 1530s he created the “Society of Jesus” later known as the Jesuits – a catholic religious order. After leading the order for over two decades, Ignatius died in 1556.<sup>i</sup>

Saint Ignatius’ contribution to the faith is large. From the time of its creation, the spiritual exercises continued to be used by the Jesuits and Catholic church for centuries. Today, the exercises have expanded beyond the walls of the Catholic church and into the lives of any believer looking to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

## BENEFITS

It’s possible, even likely, that you’ve never heard of the practice of Examen prayer until now. That’s ok. Don’t let unfamiliarity stop you from gaining incredible things from this new discipline. Here are some of the benefits of Examen:<sup>ii</sup>

- You learn to go to God with the little things. As this practice is intended to help you walk through the details of your day with God, it will become habit if you do it frequently enough.
- You process your feelings quickly, meaning nothing is left to fester. Whether it is anger, frustration, or sadness, you bring all of it to Jesus at the end of the day.
- You learn to be thankful in all circumstances! Examen has an emphasis on gratitude. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- You notice God’s presence in the busy moments of life. He is everywhere and it is so sweet when you begin to sense his company in places you otherwise would have missed!

## ENCOURAGEMENT

- Stick to thoughts of today and tomorrow. It is important to not let your mind wander too far into the past or future.
- If you struggle with identifying your feelings, try having a “feelings wheel” next to you while completing this exercise. It will help you put words to emotions.
- Make time and space at the end of the day to complete this exercise. You will spend about 15 minutes, but always have the freedom to use more time. Put it in your calendar or clear time to do with this your spouse. If you don’t prioritize it, it will never happen.

## HOW TO PRACTICE EXAMEN

1. Come before God in prayer. Spend time dwelling on his love for you.
2. Review the events of your day with gratitude. Go hour by hour or event by event. As you think about each moment, thank God for his presence in those moments. Slow down and consider how you felt throughout the day. Where did you find the most life? What was draining or exhausting?
3. Talk to God about any feelings that have surfaced. Did you feel overwhelmed? Joyful? Apathetic? Sensitive? Disappointed? Stressed? No matter what it is take those feelings to God. Explain why you felt this way, or if you don't know then ask God to help you process it.
4. Look forward to the day ahead. Consider what you have going tomorrow. Walk through each part of your day and notice how you feel about it. Ask God for help in whatever you might face and however you might feel.

## EXAMPLE

I had just gotten the kids to bed. I was exhausted, tired from a hectic day. I looked at my calendar and "Examen" was scheduled for tonight. I certainly didn't want to do it but asked my husband for about 15 or 20 minutes to spend with the Lord and went to my room. I left my phone in the living room to be away from distractions. Then I got started with the steps:

1. *Come before God in prayer.* Lord, help me focus on you. To let go of distractions and be in your presence. I know you love me. 1 John 4:16 says, "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Let me experience the fullness of that love in this moment.
2. *Review the events of your day with gratitude.* Today I woke up to a message that my babysitter for the afternoon cancelled. It wasn't how I wanted to start the day, but I got myself and the kids ready as we were meeting a friend at the park. We spent a couple hours at the park, and while I spent most of that chasing my littlest one around, I still got some good chats with my friend. Thank you for that Lord. She is a kind and faithful presence in my life, one I am grateful to share life with. After this we went home so the kids could eat lunch and nap. Amazingly I got about an hour of work done in the quiet, something that rarely happens. I see your provision here, caring for me in ways I didn't expect. We then just spent the afternoon at home. Once my older son woke up, we spent time just the two of us. We did the laundry and prepped dinner. It was productive yet quality time together for which I am grateful. When my other son woke up it was a series of breaking up fights and dealing with tantrums. Luckily, my husband arrived home from work a bit early and we enjoyed the evening together as a family. Playing games on the trampoline, eating dinner on the deck, and talking about our days. The weather was beautiful, and the laughs were in full. We got the kids to bed a bit early, and I was able to work once they were asleep. Again, you provided! Thank you, Lord, for this day. I see your presence in so many moments; I see the way you care for me and love me.
3. *Talk to God about any feelings that have surfaced.*
  - This morning when my babysitter cancelled, I immediately became frazzled, unsure of how I was going to get some work done that I had planned for the afternoon. I was short with my husband. God forgive me for not trusting in you in this moment, for not believing that you can help me when I feel overwhelmed.
  - This afternoon I got angry at my sons. I struggle so desperately for control in these moments, believing if they don't listen that it reflects poorly on me as a parent. God, help me to turn toward you in my anger and to reorient my thoughts around parenting. My heart should always be to show them you.
4. *Look forward to the day ahead.* Tomorrow my husband leaves on a work conference for three days. I feel a bit anxious, knowing this is the first time I will be left with two kids by myself. I take this to you God, believing you are good and will help me in moments where I feel alone or overwhelmed.

I am so glad I took the time to walk through my day with the Lord. I not only notice his presence and prevision more but was able to talk through some feeling with him I likely would have just brushed off. He is so good!

**SOURCES:**

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.jesuits.org/stories/the-life-of-st-ignatius-of-loyola/>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/what-are-the-spiritual-exercises/?\\_gl=1%2A1yx3084%2A\\_up%2AMQ..%2A\\_ga%2AMTM2MzYyNDA4Ny4xNzcwODAzNjkz%2A\\_ga\\_GPPPSJT7KX%2AczE3NzA4MDM2OTIkbzEkZzAkdDE3NzA4MDM2OTIkajYwJGwwJGgw](https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/what-are-the-spiritual-exercises/?_gl=1%2A1yx3084%2A_up%2AMQ..%2A_ga%2AMTM2MzYyNDA4Ny4xNzcwODAzNjkz%2A_ga_GPPPSJT7KX%2AczE3NzA4MDM2OTIkbzEkZzAkdDE3NzA4MDM2OTIkajYwJGwwJGgw)

