

“What Does Jesus Want Done?”
The Examen Devotional Practice

Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

- Prayers from Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 76

One definition of Spirituality: the way we understand our connection to each other, to creation, to our creator, and how we honor and express that connection.

The Examen¹ is a 400-year-old tradition of prayerful mindfulness, introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola. It’s a spirituality that sees God in all things—not just in scripture, liturgy, sacraments—but also in human history and in other people.

God certainly makes Godself present directly (appearing to Moses and the prophets, walking the earth though Jesus, etc.). But God more often reveals Godself indirectly—in manifestations, little epiphanies, tell-tale signs, God’s traces.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to [behold] the face of Christ, not only in sacred icons that adorn our walls, but also in the faces of our siblings around us. God is to be found in churches, in daily living, in ourselves, and in the other.

Ignatius encouraged his followers to use a particular prayer, The Examen, where the person of faith would recall those moments in the day when they felt God’s presence, and also those times when they felt they might have drifted from God. This prayer is essentially a review of how you have been aware, or conscious of, God’s presence in your day. This prayer form teaches us to be mindful of God’s active presence in the ordinariness and the extraordinariness of our day. It also reminds us of where we have been navigating off course, bearing away from our true selves and away from God.

In addition to help us refine our skills of discernment (making right choices in important matters), The Examen also keeps us in touch with the movements within our heart that are reinforcing what God’s true desires and hopes for us are—what is life-giving and ultimately fulfilling (and aligned with what God wants of us). It is like asking the question:

“What does Jesus want done?”

¹ This description adapted from: <https://www.educatemagis.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/2014/01/Examen-2017-Ross-Jones-SJ.pdf>

How-To Guide for The Examen

As you begin, remember that we are always in the presence of God. Take a moment to let that reality fill your head, spirit, and heart. Breathe deeply. Follow these prompts as you reflect on the day:²

- Give thanks for something—some blessing you received today. Hold that image in your mind. Pray, “God every breath I take is a gift. You have filled my day with so many gifts. Thank you, God” or similar words of gratitude that resonate with you.
- Review the day. Pray for God’s guidance—that you will see what you need to see. Where did you feel like you were “in-step” with God, doing what reflects God’s love and mercy? What behaviors, actions, thoughts, responses reflected God’s peace, presence, love, or light? When were you an instrument of God?
- When were there things you feel you could have handled differently, or ways in which you think you could have been more present, or more loving, or more patient? Hold those moments in your mind, but do not beat yourself up. Instead, simply ask for forgiveness and receive God’s grace.
- With those reflections in mind, ask God what you are meant to learn from the day.
- Close by looking forward to the day to come. Pray: “God, thank you for helping me to see who you have made me to be and who you are helping me to become. Help me to see what your vision is for me” or something similar to that. Ask yourself: what action would you like to take tomorrow to step toward God’s vision for your life? Pray silently on that on that as you breathe deeply and prepare to rest.

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² Adapted from a Cross Ministry Group handout on Examen