

EXAMEN

DISCIPLINE EQUALS FREEDOM, WEEK 12

I. OUR CALL TO DISCIPLINE

Luke 9:23-25

II. OUR MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

III. EXAMEN EXPLAINED

The Examen is a spiritual discipline where we give some focused thought to the day that we have just lived. It's kind of a meditation on our own experience, with the goal of seeing, with God's help, our high points and low points that day. Too often our days (and weeks and months) just fly by with no reflection on our part. Where were we present with God? Where did we stumble? Examen can be practiced at night before bed, or in the middle of the day, or both. It should include a confession of sin. The Examen also works well with the spiritual discipline of journaling.

“In the sixteenth century, Saint Ignatius wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*, instructing his readers in a series of activities to more deeply connect with God. The Examen was one of the most basic, and most important, in this series.

The Examen is a simple way to reflect on your day and become aware of God's presence in your life. Ignatius expected that God would speak to us through our deepest feelings and longings, through what he called “consolation” and “desolation.” Consolation can be defined as whatever draws you close to God, fills you with life, and makes you feel that all is right in the world. Desolation is its opposite: these are things that pull you away from God, alienate you from yourself and others, and drain life from you” (Ann Boyd, <https://thewell.intervarsity.org/spiritual-formation/examen>)

The Original Method of Daily General Examen (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 1522-1524)

1. **First Point.** The first Point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits received.
2. **Second Point.** The second, to ask grace to know our sins and cast them out.
3. **Third Point.** The third, to ask account of our soul from the hour that we rose up to the present Examen, hour by hour, or period by period: and first as to thoughts, and then as to words, and then as to acts, in the same order as was mentioned in the Particular Examen.
4. **Fourth Point.** The fourth, to ask pardon of God our Lord for the faults.
5. **Fifth Point.** The fifth, to purpose amendment with His grace.

[Pray the Lord's Prayer]

IV. THEMES OF EXAMEN IN THE BIBLE

Lamentations 3:40

Jeremiah 17:10

Psalm 17:1-3

Psalm 32:3-7

Psalm 139:23-24

Proverbs 20:5

Proverbs 28:13

1 Corinthians 11:28-31

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR EXAMEN

If you research this spiritual discipline, you will see that almost every source you read has a different take on the details of how to do it. But while there is great variety in how this process is envisioned, the core of the practice remains the same. *The heart of the Examen is a prayerful reflection on how you lived your day.* Different sources will suggest different ways to do this. But the essential practice turns your daily experience into a source of spiritual learning and growth. So whatever variation you end up using, remember this central intention—to learn from your own experience with God, today.

Here are some modern variations of Examen, all based on Ignatius' original.

Variant 1

<http://immersed-in-jesus.org/060.html>

1. Recognize that you are in the presence of God
2. Look at your day with gratitude
3. Ask for help from the Holy Spirit
4. Review your day
5. Reconcile and resolve

Variant 2

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/rummaging-for-god-praying-backward-through-your-day/>

1. Pray for light.
2. Review the day in Thanksgiving.
3. Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.
4. Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

Variant 3

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/16935-practicing-the-examen/day/1>

1. Tune into God's presence. *God, be with me as I reflect on my day.*
2. Review your day. *What gave me joy today? What troubled me today?*
3. Notice your emotions. *What made me feel most strongly?*
4. Discern. *What are you asking me to notice, God?*
5. Look ahead. *What guidance do you have for me?*

Variant 4

<https://thewell.intervarsity.org/spiritual-formation/examen>

1. Sit quietly and relax. Light a candle if you'd like.
2. Think back over the last 24 hours and look for your moment of consolation. You can use one of these questions as a guide:
 - For what moment today am I most grateful?
 - What experience of the day felt most life-giving to me?
 - When today did I feel most contented, most like myself?
 - When did I sense God's presence most fully today?
3. Think again through the last day and look for your moment of desolation. You can use one of these questions as a guide:
 - For what moment today am I least grateful?
 - What experience of the day drained life from me?
 - When today did I feel the most discontented, uncomfortable, and the least like myself?
 - When did God seem absent in my life today?
4. Spend a moment in prayer, thanking God for your consolation, and asking for help with the desolation.

Variants 5-10

(See the "Spiritual Exercises" on page 6 of this handout)

There are also online resources to help with a guided practice of Examen:

YouTube:

https://youtu.be/Kafkh_SQ1RI <https://youtu.be/JVItxNMrNnw> <https://youtu.be/apbNOXvsx6k>



Phone App:

"Abide Bible and Sleep Meditation": <https://abide.co/>

→ Topics → Search → "Examen" (you will find four results)



TRAINING PLAN

“What’s the hack? How do you become stronger, smarter, faster, healthier? How do you become better? How do you achieve true freedom? There is only one way. **THE WAY OF DISCIPLINE.**”
–Jocko Willink, *Discipline Equals Freedom*, 3.

Circle the Level of Engagement You Are Committing to This Week

All four are good choices, and you don’t need to pick the same level every week.

First Steps:

- At least 2 days this week practice the Examen using one of the variants provided. Do this either at the end of your day before bed, or in the middle of the day, whichever seems best to you.

Hit Harder:

- At least 2 days this week practice the Examen using one of the variants provided. Do this either at the end of your day before bed, or in the middle of the day, whichever seems best to you.
- During this series we are processing our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. Use *Discussion Guide Week 12* (bottom of this page) to guide your conversation.

Hard Core:

- Same as “Hit Harder” but 4 days instead of 2 days.

Beast Mode:

- Same as “Hit Harder,” but 5 days, *both at midday and at the end of your day before bed.*
- If you commit to Beast Mode, please email, text, or call me so I know about it and can be praying for you. I will try to reach out to see how it is going. grhodea@grandgrace.org; 469-250-0825.

DISCUSSION GUIDE WEEK 12: EXAMEN

*Meet together this week with at least one other person to discuss your experiences. **Before meeting, each person should read pages 5-6 in this handout (or read it together). Underline key parts of the readings and write down any questions you might have.***

Discussion Questions for Your Group

1. Discuss your practice of Examen thus far.
2. Discuss the reading on pages 5-6. Any new insights here?
3. Questions from the author of the reading:
 - a. How do you tend to recognize God’s presence in your day?
How do you respond to God’s presence?
 - b. How does the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in your life reveal God’s presence and his will?
 - c. What has God been doing in your life in the past six months?
What themes are emerging, and how will you attend to them?
4. Pray for one another based on what you have discussed.

READING: EXAMEN

Adapted from Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Expanded Edition, 58-61

Desire	To reflect on where I was most and least present to God’s love in my day
Definition	The examen is a practice for discerning the voice and activity of God within the flow of the day. It is a vehicle that creates deeper awareness of God-given desires in one’s life.
Scripture	<p>“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives” (Col 1:9).</p> <p>“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11).</p>
Practice Includes	<p>A regular time of coming into the presence of God to ask two questions (possible ways of asking the questions are below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-thwarting part of my day? • When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection? • Where was I aware of living out of the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit? • Where did I experience “desolation”? Where did I find “consolation”?
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping company with Jesus throughout all the highs and lows of the day • Recognizing God’s presence in your experiences • Developing more discernment and receptivity to God’s voice • Freedom from “acting the guru”; pointing others toward listening to God, not to me • Fostering gratitude • Being aware of your growing edges • Being aware of God-given desires • Being aware of invitations to prayer that God presents to you throughout the day

Examen

Throughout the centuries prayerful people have found direction for their lives through the practice of the examen (also known as the “examination of consciousness”). The examen is a foundational aspect of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola (AD 1491-1556). Ignatius was concerned that the missionaries in his society would know how to detect the movement of God in their lives. He believed that discernment came out of awareness of how God moved uniquely in each soul. The examen provides a way of noticing where God shows up in our day. It is a practice that attends to what we might otherwise miss in the press of duties and busyness. The questions of the examen open our attention to how God’s internal movement is present in our external comings and goings. They lead us to listen deeply to the data of our lives. These questions help us pay attention to our mental state, our body responses and our emotional baggage. Our insomnia, nervous stomach, difficult interaction and headache can all take their place as a possible way of more deeply leaning into God. The examen helps us recognize the things that bring us death and life. Once these things are known they become part of our ongoing interaction with God in prayer.

The examen can open us to both the difficult and beautiful in our lives, relationships and profession. The examen is also a useful way of reflecting alone or with others on what God is saying to us through a meeting, a class, a meal, a service project, a relationship or a conflict.

Examen questions include:

- 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?
- What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-thwarting part of my day?
- When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?
- Where was I aware of living out of the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit?

The examen is a wonderful tool for discerning the places you feel most alive, most grateful, most present to the fruit of the Spirit as well as the times and place where you do not. Those with melancholic tendencies may find that while the day's low points stand out clearly, they need the examen to help them recognize the life-giving moments the Spirit brings during the day. Those naturally inclined to optimism need the examen to help them name the difficult things in life. The examen invites attention to both low and high points, recognizing both of these as an invitation to prayer.

Perspective and direction for the future happen through listening to where and how God shows up in your day and then interacting with God in prayer. Awareness of the Spirit's enlivening and enlightening presence puts you in touch with the kind of person God created you to be. When you begin to recognize who God created you to be, you have the raw material for discerning God's unique call and design for your life.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Gather together the threads of your daily encounters and activities. Attending to them one at a time, ask yourself some of the examen questions:
 - a. Where did I give or receive love in this activity or interaction? How did I withhold love in this activity or interaction?
 - b. What activity gave me the greatest high? Which one made me feel low?

Reflect on where God was in the highs and lows of the day. How is God inviting you to pray about these things before you nestle into his arms and fall asleep?

2. Make a list of feeling words. For example: *accepted, anxious, apathetic, confused, defeated, disgusted, ecstatic, enraged, paranoid, weepy, undecided*. Then begin to ask yourself the examen questions. Let these words help you articulate what drains or saps you and what give you life. Let this knowing inform your choices.
3. Light a candle and become still in the presence of Christ. • Place your hand on your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the moment of the day you are most grateful for. When were you most able to give and receive love? • Talk to God about what it was like for you to be in that moment. What made it important to you? • Breathe in your gratitude to God. Journal your gratitude to God. • What have you learned about yourself in this?
4. Find a quiet moment to reflect on your day or week. Open your palms and ask the Holy Spirit to show you the moment for which you are least grateful. What made that moment difficult? • Be with your feelings; don't try to change them or make them acceptable. Offer them up to God. Talk to him about them. • Where was God in this moment? You may want to thank God that he is always ready to be with you and talk to you.
5. Look back over the past year. List the things that brought you life and the times you were able to truly give and receive love. • Make another list of the life-thwarting moments. • What do you discover about yourself? How can this self-awareness help you choose a healthier, God-directed life?
6. Teach your children the practice of finding God in their daily lives. You can teach the examen by playing "I spy God." At the dinner table invite your children to tell you where they have spied God in their day.