

The Prayer of Examen

(Ignatian Examen)

A Brief History of this Prayer

The *Prayer of Examen* is an ancient reflective exercise originally developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, who lived from 1491 to 1556. He is considered something of the godfather of discernment practices. Many variations on the *Examen* have been adapted over the centuries in different traditions, but they all share a very common base.

The Purpose of this Prayer

The intention of the *Prayer of Examen* is to develop a deeper understanding of God's presence in our lives by reflecting on the details of each day. As we search out God's workings in our normal routines, we begin to see the ways God enters into and affects them. In doing this we also develop our ability to discern God's call in our lives at times of major decision.

How it Works

The *Examen* has a variety of methods, and ours contains five steps. The prayer begins by developing a grateful heart for all God's done for you. Then, enter into an attitude of humility, seeking to know in what ways your actions have pulled you from God's heart. Review your day, literally thinking through each hour, processing how you responded or reacted to various situations. Now that your actions and attitudes are before, ask for God's pardon of sin and praise him for the ways in which you saw his presence at work. Finally, affirm to your need for God's aid in difficult situations and your desire to follow his ways. The steps are written below in a simple format, allowing you to eventually memorize or perhaps copy them into your Bible.

The Five Basic Steps

1. Give thanks to God for the benefits I've received
2. Ask for the grace to know my sins and be rid of them
3. Ask for an account of my soul for the entire day, hour by hour
4. Ask for pardon of God for my shortcomings
5. Resolve, with God's grace, to amend them in future situations

--The process should take from 15-25 minutes, but it may seem difficult to get the flow at first, but your consistency will be rewarded. Practice this daily, either before going to bed for the night, or first thing in the morning, depending on what time you are most alert.

