

The Examen: A prayer for finding God

The prayer exercise below is almost 500 years old. It was developed by Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. This 16th century soldier-turned-monk developed an extraordinary sensitivity to the work of God in his own life, and in the lives of his friends. As a priest, he turned his full attention to the task of spiritual formation—especially for those who were following Jesus into difficult places.

One of Ignatius' key insights was that it is always easier to recognize God's presence in retrospect (rather than in the moment). Thus this prayer exercise will guide you through a reflection on the last 24 hours of your life with God.

The following five moves of the exercise should take roughly 10 minutes.¹

1. A perspective of Grace.

- a. Do your best to shut out distractions, close your eyes and seek peace in God's presence.
- b. Pray for the grace pray, to see, and to understand.
- c. Pray: Father I want to see my life through your eyes.

2. Begin with gratitude.

- a. Give thanks to God for everything in your life—every good and perfect gift that has come from above.

3. Look back. (Let the events of the last 24 hours play out in your mind as if in a movie.)

- a. **Consolations:** In what ways and through what experiences did you sense God's presence as a consolation or comfort to you? Recount these things to God with gratitude.
- b. **Desolations:** Were there times over the last 24 hours when you longed for the consoling presence of God but did *not* feel it? Recount those experiences to God and ask the Holy Spirit, "What does this mean?" Take a few moments to listen.

4. Acknowledge shortcomings.

- a. Are you aware of any situations in which you fell short over the last 24 hours? Gently notice any shortcomings that have caught in your spirit.
- b. If you find you were at fault, simply ask for forgiveness and ask God for help in seeing what you could have done differently.

5. Look forward.

- a. Ask God, "What 'one thing' should I consider doing in the day ahead?" Listen to what God is telling you.
- b. As God, "What else do you want to say to me?" Listen

Consider ending your Examen with the Lord's Prayer

Note: This exercise works very well as a guided audio reflection. If you have a smartphone and headphones/earbuds with you, you can find an audio version of the Examen and other Ignatian exercises at <https://pray-as-you-go.org/prayer-resources/the-examen/>

¹ Feel free to stretch this exercise out further, but also consider this: Ignatius valued the repetition of the exercise regularly—twice daily in fact. He considered this a more helpful rhythm than doing the exercise for a longer period of time but less frequently. Consider taking this sheet with you for use tomorrow... and the next day...