

Steps to praying the Examen

A great way to look for God's presence in our lives is to pray the daily examen. St. Ignatius (c. 1522) developed this practice of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence in our lives and to discern direction. This is one version of the examen.

Step 1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember the events of the day. The day may seem like a blur but ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

Step 2. Have gratitude. Mentally walk through your day in the presence of God. Ask Him where He was at work. In what ways did you experience His goodness, or maybe you heard His voice. Note what brought you joy. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What good did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things – the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details. Thank God for all these good things.

Step 3. Pay attention to your emotions. St. Ignatius believed we can learn a lot about ourselves and what God is doing in us and in our lives through our emotions. Turn your prayers to the emotions you experienced that day. What were some of the emotions you experienced? Ask God about a couple that stood out to you. This isn't about judging things as good or bad, it's about letting God reveal new things about you and about His love, care and desire to help you grow and have life to the fullest.

Note: God may show you some ways that you fallen into sin. If so, simply confess them knowing He is merciful and forgives. But look deeply for other implications. That is where you might find God at work.

Step 4. Choose one feature and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to one event or emotion of the day, it may be positive or negative; significant or insignificant. Look at it; pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart; it might be intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Step 5. Trust God with tomorrow. Mentally survey tomorrow. What's coming up? What emotions arise: anticipation, dread, cheerfulness, fear? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance and peace. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. Ask for God's wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in a spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.