



The Practice of Examen

Teaching: K. Adam Nelson

Cultivating our awareness of God at work in our lives and communities

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

- ❖ Spiritual formation is the process of character-shaping, disciple-making and value-shifting that followers of Christ submit to as we mature in our faith
- ❖ Beauty and frustration: there is no “one size fits all” path of formation
- ❖ Underlying assumption is that we are *all* formed and being formed in certain ways (by religious, culture, family, social media, self-narratives and meta-narratives). Spiritual formation seeks to be intentional about letting God do the forming and shaping.
- ❖ What are some ways we surrender to God’s rhythm and God’s way of seeing?

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

- ❖ The gardener and the sailer - Martin Laird
- ❖ The goal isn't to be amazing at a practice/discipline or to earn anything, the goal is Christ. Healthy practices *can* help us to foster a life that grows in awareness of Christ at work all around us and invite Christ to use us in new, bold, creative ways.
- ❖ Maturity, community, and self-awareness can help us in discerning patterns and practices that are fruitful. We build our toolkit/makeup kit with practices and faithfully experiment and trust God's loving creativity at work in and around us.
- ❖ The practices that are life-giving in different seasons will fluctuate and are flexible in how they engage with the way God made us.*



What is Examen?

- ❖ A practice for discerning the voice and activity of God within the flow of the day. - Adele Calhoun
- ❖ A type of reflective prayer that invites the Holy Spirit to “highlight” your emotions, your longings, your sense of closeness or distance to God in order to notice patterns in your life.
- ❖ Examen helps us to foster an attentiveness to ourselves and an attentiveness to God that invites us into transformative ways of living in this world. In this way, examen can act as the “foundation” for a Rule of Life or to discern individual disciplines for each of us.

The *Examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

- 1** **Ask God for light.**
I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.
- 2** **Give thanks.**
The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.
- 3** **Review the day.**
I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.
- 4** **Face your shortcomings.**
I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.
- 5** **Look toward the day to come.**
I ask where I need God in the day to come.



Rule of Life

Living intentionally in rhythms and patterns that invite us into awareness of the presence of God

What is a Rule of Life?

Rule comes from the Latin “Regula” and its linguistic roots have connections to a trellis, a scaffolding, a supporting structure.

John 15 - a rule is seen as a way to foster the growth, fruit bearing and health of our vine connected to the True vine
Acts 2 - the disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer”

Often connected to the Rule of St. Benedict. Benedict set out to organize the monastic day into regular periods of communal and private prayer, sleep, spiritual reading, and manual labour – ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus, “that in all [things] God may be glorified” (cf. Rule ch. 57.9).



What is Examen?

- ❖ Scripture attests to examining one's heart and mind in the presence of God. Ps. 139, 26, 4, 77, 119, Gal 4, 2 Cor 13, 1 Cor 11 among others.
- ❖ In taking up the call to examine our hearts and minds, we are inviting God into the ongoing transformative work of being disciples and becoming more Christ-like in our thinking, our living, and our desires.
- ❖ The Society of Jesus followers have a way of practicing (see right) that is daily and a bit simpler, weaving elements of prayer, discernment, gratitude, confession and intercession.

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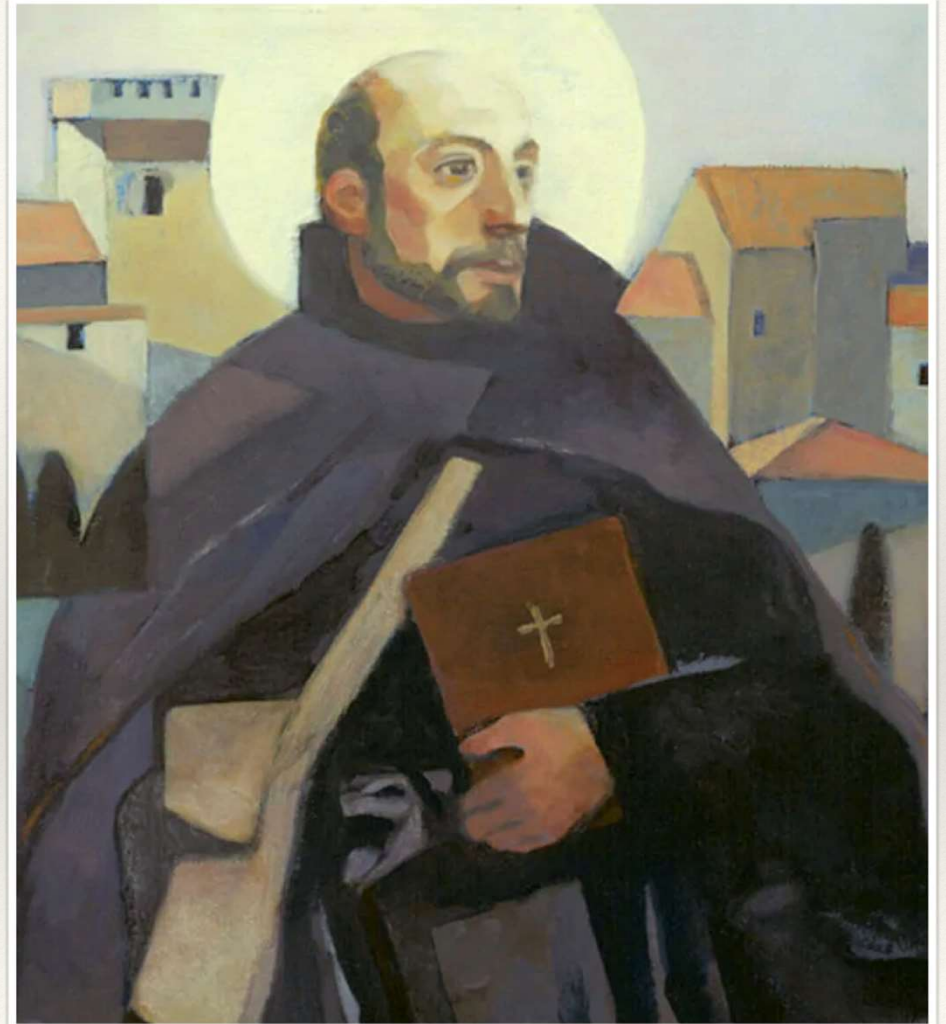
Examen - History and Basics

Examen is rooted in *The Spiritual Exercises* written by St Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). As the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius wrote this document to be a 4 week period of meditation of the life of Jesus.

Ignition spirituality could be summed up:

1. Finding God in all things
2. Becoming a contemplative in Action
3. Looking at the world in an incarnational way
4. Seeking freedom and detachment

Examen formed the underlying practice through the 4 weeks, inviting the followers of St. Ignatius to literally examine their consciousness and grow more aware of patterns of consolation and desolation. He wanted believers to notice their mental, physical and emotional states and trust they weren't random but a part of our walk with God.

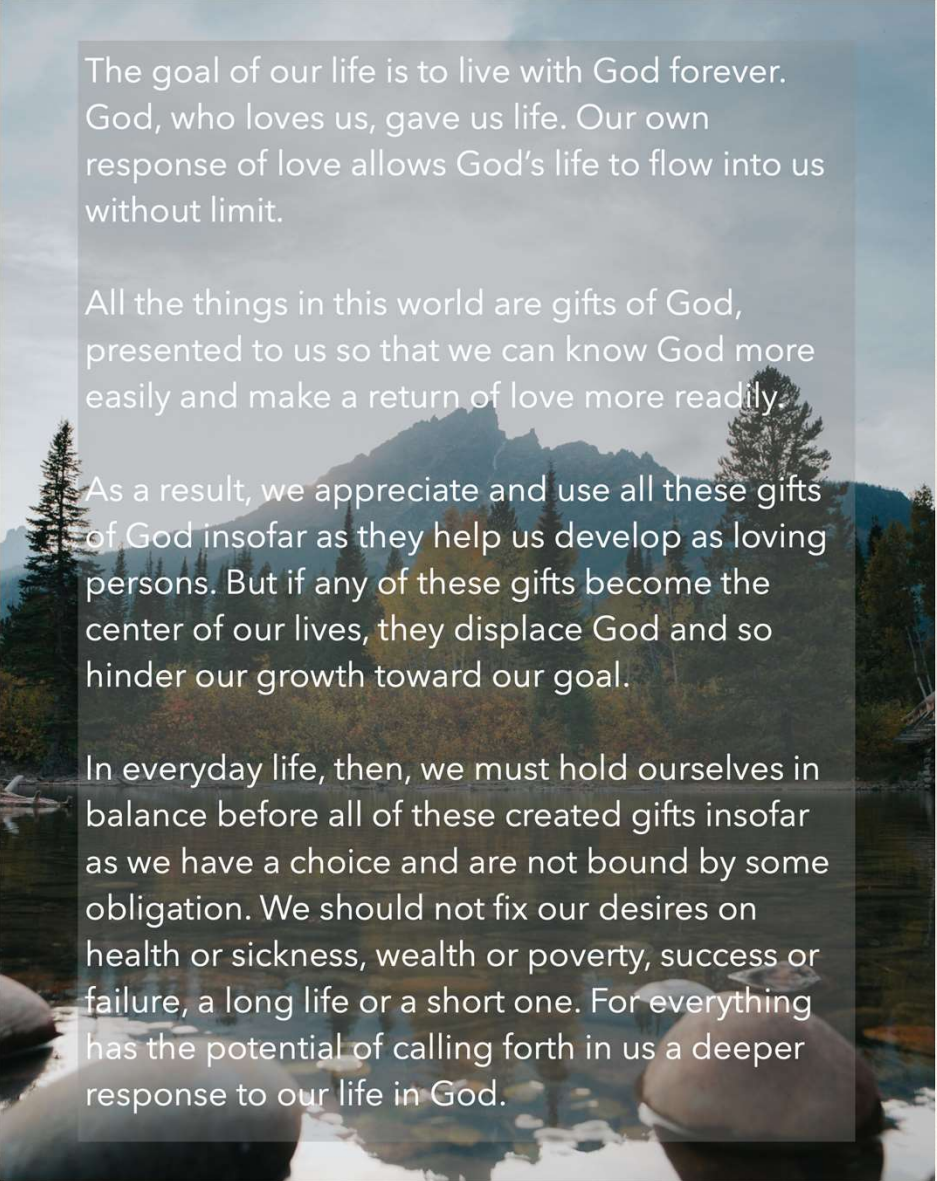


Examen - History and Basics

As followers adopted this practice, they were able to better discern the rhythm of God in the day-to-day and respond more readily and fully out of who God is and who they were in God.

It is *not* a means of learning to organize your day so that you achieve greater efficiency or effectiveness; rather, it is a way of *ordering your life* so that you become a certain kind of person (a person of blessing, wisdom, wholeness, peace, *shalom*, rather than a person of regret, ruin, emptiness, brokenness)

Ignatius talked about these feelings of connectedness to God and others and disconnectedness as Consolation and Desolation. The beauty is that both states or feelings offer the invitation to grow closer to God if we let them.



The goal of our life is to live with God forever. God, who loves us, gave us life. Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some obligation. We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.

Desolation

- ❖ Turns us in on ourselves
- ❖ Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
- ❖ Cuts us off from community
- ❖ Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us
- ❖ Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision
- ❖ Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far]
- ❖ Drains us of energy

Consolation

- ❖ Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
- ❖ Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
- ❖ Bonds us more closely to our human community
- ❖ Generates new inspiration and ideas
- ❖ Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
- ❖ Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us
- ❖ Releases new energy in us

Practice Examen

- ❖ Pick a set time (day, week, month, year)
- ❖ Center yourself in God's presence
- ❖ Ask yourself some of the examen questions below, inviting the Holy Spirit to "highlight" these moments.
 - ❖ For what moment am I most grateful? Least grateful?
 - ❖ When did I give and receive the most love? The least love?
 - ❖ What was the most life-giving part? The most life-draining part?
 - ❖ When did I have the deepest sense of connection to God, others and myself? The least connection?
 - ❖ Where was I aware of the fruit of the Spirit in me? Where was it absent?
- ❖ Try to notice without judgement your thoughts and feelings
- ❖ Journal your observations. What led up to that moment or interaction? What was your body feeling at the time? How did your response in the moment reflect who you are and who God is?
- ❖ End with gratitude that God has invited you to notice the ebb and flow and assurance that God will lovingly guide you forward
- ❖ What has God led you to notice? What might a response be to cultivate moments of consolation and to avoid fostering desolation?



FEELING WORDS

ANGER

Annoyed
Agitated
Fed up
Irritated
Mad
Critical
Resentful
Disgusted
Outraged
Raging
Furious
Livid
Bitter

HAPPY

Amused
Delighted
Glad
Pleased
Charmed
Grateful
Optimistic
Content
Joyful
Enthusiastic
Loving
Marvelous

SAD

Depressed
Desperate
Dejected
Heavy
Crushed
Disgusted
Upset
Hateful
Sorrowful
Mournful
Weepy
Frustrated

CONFUSION

Uncertain
Upset
Doubtful
Uncertain
Indecisive
Perplexed
Embarrassed
Hesitant
Shy
Lost
Unsure
Pessimistic
Tense

ENERGIZED

Determined
Inspired
Creative
Healthy
Renewed
Vibrant
Strengthened
Motivated
Focused
Invigorated
Refreshed

STRONG

Sure
Certain
Unique
Dynamic
Tenacious
Hardy
Secure
Empowered
Ambitious
Powerful
Confident
Bold
Determined

Resources

- ❖ *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* - James Martin, SJ
- ❖ *Discernment* - Henri Nouwen
- ❖ *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* - Adele Calhoun
- ❖ *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life* - Kevin O'Brien