

The Prayer of Examen

Explanation

The Latin word *examen* refers to the weight indicator on a balance scale which gives an “accurate assessment of the true situation¹”, coming from the same root of our English word “examine”. The Prayer of *Examen* is not an introspective examination of self, but rather inviting the Holy Spirit to search us and speak to us. “Lord, You have searched (examined) me and You know me” (Psalm 139:1).

There are two main parts to this prayer. The first, an *examen* of consciousness, is a ‘remembrance of love’—discovering how God has been present to us. The second, an *examen* of conscience, is a ‘scrutiny of love’—allowing God to uncover those areas of our life which need healing, or forgiveness¹. These two parts are distinct but really inseparable and can flow cyclically back and forth as you pray and listen.

Here’s a tip for parents—a good way to practice this with children is, at bed time, ask them to think about the day and what they were thankful for and then to give thanks to God with them. Then ask them what was difficult about the day and pray with them about it, reminding them of God’s presence and care.

Steps

1. Posture

Position yourself in a way that you can sit comfortably for the duration of the prayer. Quiet yourself inwardly, inviting God to meet with you, opening yourself to the One who is closer to us than we know. One way to do this is by focusing on your breath and/or repeating a simple phrase over and over.

2. *Examen* of Consciousness

This part of the prayer invites God to reveal how and where He has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence—an act of remembering, “here is where God met me and helped me”. Here are some examples of guiding questions:

- Where have you been active in my life since I was last silent in Your presence?
- Where did I feel most alive, most hopeful, most in Your presence over the past day, or week?
- How have You revealed Your goodness to me in the past day, or week?

3. *Examen* of Conscience

This part of the prayer invites God to reveal areas that need cleansing, purifying and healing—inviting God to search our hearts to their depth—listening more than defending our actions, thoughts and inactions.

- Where did I feel farthest from you, most despairing? Why?
- Where did I, intentionally or unintentionally, withdraw from You?

Confess those sins committed, not necessarily limited to your actions. They include things such as not taking the time to engage God when He was initiating conversation. Be specific. Invite God into those places to heal or forgive.

4. Celebrate and give thanks for God’s forgiveness

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Conclude with saying the Lord’s Prayer (Our Father), or reading Psalm 51, giving thanks to God for His forgiveness and continued presence.

¹ These are Richard Foster’s words from his book *Prayer*.