

Prayer toolkit

examen prayer

AIMS

An introduction to the practice of Examen Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola

Let me tell you

At a recent weekend for Gateways into Prayer (part of the Training for Learning and Serving courses run by the United Reformed Church) we were introduced to the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola. Some members of the group had already heard of him but it was all new to me. On the second evening we followed the Ignatian way of reviewing each day that is called Examen and I found it quite helpful.

INTRODUCTION: Who was Ignatius of Loyola?

Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuits, an order in the Catholic Church. Born in Spain in 1491, he was a soldier before becoming a priest and spiritual writer. His Spiritual Exercises are used by many people in different situations both in religious orders and lay people. One of these is a method of prayer by which we review our day with God: the daily examen. You can read more about Ignatian spirituality at <http://ignatianspirituality.com/>

Examen Prayer

This prayer is used at the end of a period of time, to look back and see where God has been moving in the events and feelings we've experienced. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, taught his followers to review each day in this way and it can be done at the close of day.

To reflect back our lives in this way we need to be aware of our own responses. Ignatius called some of these times of consolation, when we have been drawn towards God and the service of others. Times of desolation, by contrast, happen when we have been drawn away from God and wrapped up in our own selfish concerns. He encouraged people to pray back over their lives to allow themselves to be more in tune with the presence and leading of God in all aspects of experience. The Examen Prayer can be made in as little as 10 minutes and has been used by many people over the centuries. It may be useful to note down key words, images or phrases that come to you in your prayer diary or journal.

To begin

Settle yourself in a comfortable position, and invite the Holy Spirit to help you to reflect on the events of the day saying gently 'Come Holy Spirit' as you feel yourself relax and be still, so the tensions of the day just slip away. Know that you are in God's presence. It doesn't matter if you feel that you have neglected God during the day, for God is delighted you are spending time now.

Thanksgiving

Then let the day play back to you in any order, but first look at those moments you enjoyed. Relive them and relish them, thanking God for them. They are God's gift. Don't judge yourself on anything, just thank God saying simply 'Thank you God for....'

Review the day

Now ask God to help you see and understand how God's love has been working in you during the day. You might ask some of these questions:

Prayer toolkit

examen prayer

When did I give and receive the most love today?

When did I give and receive the least love today?

When did I feel most alive today?

When did I most feel life draining out of me?

When did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others and God?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

When did I feel the presence of God today?

When did I feel the absence of God today?

Forgiveness

Express sorrow for not responding to God in some of the events of the day and confidently ask for God's forgiveness and healing. God is not here to judge but to bring wholeness out of brokenness. Pray simply using words like 'God forgive me for ...'

Looking forward

Now look forward to tomorrow and ask God to open your heart to whatever surprises it brings, entrusting yourself to God's goodness and love. Pray simply saying 'God show me...' or 'God help me...' or whatever seems right as you look at your own life with God.

Let me tell you...

I'm not good at clearing space in the day for prayer. I get caught up in other things. That's why I've evolved this habit of imagining Jesus with me in the passenger seat when I'm driving. I talk to him about what happened yesterday, what's due to happen today and how I'm feeling.

It may sound a bit odd, but ever since I did a prayer exercise some years ago in which we had to imagine a conversation with Jesus, I've found it quite easy to picture and talk to him.

A few months ago, I was in the middle of the drive to work cross country, deep in thought. Jesus was sitting by me, in my imagination, as the car approached a blind bend. It felt as if he was warning me of danger ahead. I slowed down, though I could see nothing in the way.

A few seconds later my car rounded the bend and I was faced with a couple of sheep standing in the middle of the road – a ewe and her lamb. If I hadn't slowed down I might have hit them. Coincidence or Godincidence? You decide.

Discussion

If you are doing this in a small group or with a prayer partner discuss your responses to the stories and the Examen Prayer.

What did you learn?

How did you feel?

Prayer toolkit

examen prayer

Prayer

This prayer came from a time of doing the examen prayer...

I thank you Creator for dappled sunlight and drawn curtains.

I thank you Jesus for remembered encounters and forgotten ones.

I thank you Spirit for energy for life and for when it runs out.

Show me now the way I should go.

Like a ray of light through a magnifying glass, focus me God.

May I be attentive and listening.

And as for tomorrow, as I feel my way,

may I rise again.

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more toolkit materials please revisit the website. You will also find seasonal materials there for activities linked to different times of the year.

Acknowledgements

The prayer is copyright to Janet Lees.

This material has been contributed by various writers who are thanked for agreeing that it may be used in the Vision4life process.