



Attention and Examen

August

In Christian theology, we say that God is omnipresent – not bound by space and present in all places. Personally, this means God is present to us at all times, even when we aren't aware of his presence or are distracted by the everyday tasks of life. God's presence to us is part of his essence before it is ever part of our experience. Especially regarding a typical workday, most of us can echo Jacob's words as he awoke from his dream: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it" (Genesis 28:16).

Ignatius of Loyola is the father of the Prayer of Examen, a practice of reviewing your day to look for ways you may have missed God's presence. "Examen" comes from the latin "penso" – the weight indicator on a scale, implying an accurate assessment. Ignatius believed the prayer was given to him as a gift from God, and he encouraged the Jesuit monks he led to practice the Examen prayer at noon and at the end of each day.

Examen at Work

A simple version of the Prayer of Examen can help us to pay attention to God's presence with us at work. Just before or after lunch and again at the end of the workday (perhaps during a commute) pause with a prayer such as, "Father, help me to see the ways you were present to me today."

This is an easy practice to do, and an easy practice to forget because of the nature of work busyness for most people. So commit to doing this for five days in a work week. In time, it can help us to become more aware of God outside the intentional pauses for prayer.



Examen of our Day

Traditionally, the prayer of examen is done in the evening at the end of the day. It can be 5-15 minutes of prayer to help us sense God's presence through the day and to discern his desires for our days to come. Pray through these steps:

1. **Presence:** Remember that God is already present to you now. Ask him to make you more aware of his presence to you.
2. **Gratitude:** Think back and note the day's gifts. Think of the work you did and the people you interacted with. Savor the gifts and thank God for them.
3. **Review:** Ask God's Spirit to guide your recollection. Walk back through your day from start to finish, noticing where you experienced God's presence. Pay particular attention to your emotions throughout the day and the times when you may have felt the presence or absence of God more acutely.
4. **Confession:** In a similar review, look back at the day and ask the Lord to point out the moments when you failed in big ways or small. Ask forgiveness for these, and commit to turning from them. Seek God's wisdom and grace for those situations that may not have felt like sin, but where you didn't feel that you responded well.
5. **Look forward:** Imagine and pray about the day to come. Seek God's grace and wisdom for tasks, relationships, challenges, and joys that the next day may hold.

Examen Resources

The Prayer of Examen has been adapted to review different aspects of our days, from emotions to habits to stress. If you'd like to experiment with different approaches to this prayer, see ignatianspirituality.com or look for the phone app Reimagining the Examen.