

the Daily Examen

Noticing God in our everyday

When we search God's word, we encounter the recurring theme of repentance. Repentance is the act of confessing our sins to Jesus, asking God to forgive us and turning away from our sin. The very awareness of our sin is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who allows us to see what's in our hearts and gives us strength to turn away from sin and turn towards God.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

What is a daily examen?

The daily examen was developed centuries ago by Ignatius Loyola. It's an approach to noticing God's presence and discerning God's direction by praying through and reflecting on the events of your day.

Ignatius wrote about two orientations:

Consolation (that which draws you toward God)

Desolation (that which takes you away from God)

Consolation lifts our hearts so that we can see outside and beyond ourselves. It generates new inspiration and ideas. It shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us. It bonds us more closely to our human community.

Desolation turns us in toward ourselves. It drives us down the spiral deeper and deeper into our own negative feelings. It makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us. It takes over and drowns out our ability to see and hear anything new and good. It drains us of our energy.

How to do a daily examen

At the end of each day, take ten minutes to stop and review the day's events, becoming aware of God's presence all through it. Some people find it helpful to pull out their calendars as a way to remember all of their meetings and tasks. Do whatever it takes to help you remember the events of the day.

Ask two simple questions:

When was I most alive today?

(This question gets at our experiences of consolation.)

When was I most drained today?

(This question gets at our experiences of desolation.)

You can use lots of different questions for the examen:

When did I experience contentment today?

When did I experience the sense of missing out?

When did I give love today?

When did I withhold love?

When was I most myself today?

When did I cover up who I really am?

When was I kind to myself today?

When was I harsh with myself?

When did I show compassion today?

When did I show judgment?

Where did I sense God's love for me today?

When did I fear God's absence?

Some people find it helpful to journal their answers; others find it helpful to just pray through them. Still others find it helpful to actually talk this through with a friend or spouse. The benefit of writing your answers down is that after thirty days or so, you can begin to see the patterns in your life that bring consolation, and also the patterns that bring desolation. When you see the patterns, you can begin to make sense of where God is shining His light into your heart.

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