

SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOOLS · NO. 3

The Prayer of Examen

Psalm 139:23–24 · Looking back on your day with God, not alone.

I used to end most days by scrolling through my phone until my eyes gave out. Not because the phone had anything for me. Because I didn't want to think about the day I'd just had.

Turns out there's an older way to end a day — one Christians have practiced for five hundred years. It's called the Examen. A sixteenth-century priest named Ignatius of Loyola built it as a way to look back over the day with God instead of alone, or worse, instead of not looking back at all.

This is the third tool in our spiritual formation series at Restoration Church. The first was the Lord's Prayer, the second a simple way to start your morning. This one closes the loop — a way to end the day honestly, five movements you can walk through in ten minutes, most nights right before you turn out the light.

It's not a performance review. It's not a guilt exercise either. It's an invitation to let God narrate your day back to you — the good parts and the hard parts — instead of letting your own tired mind do it alone.

“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 (NIV)

HOW TO USE THIS

End of the day works best — after dinner, before bed, wherever you land. Find a quiet ten minutes. Move through the five movements slowly and in order; each one builds on the last. Don't skim past the day trying to remember every detail. Let specific moments surface on their own.

This isn't about grading yourself. It's about noticing where God already was in your day — and where you'd like him to be tomorrow.

1. Presence — Where was God in my day?

WHY

Before you evaluate anything, remember who you're doing this with. This isn't you interrogating yourself. It's you and God, together, looking back over the same day from the same table. Starting here keeps the whole exercise from turning into self-judgment.

HOW

Take a breath. Ask God to help you see the day clearly — not harshly, not through rose-colored glasses, just clearly. Picture him sitting with you as you look back, because he already was.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, help me see today the way you saw it. I don’t want to do this alone.”

2. Gratitude — What am I most grateful for from today?

WHY

Gratitude comes before review on purpose. It trains your eyes to notice gift before you go looking for fault. Even a hard day usually has something in it worth thanking God for — you just have to slow down enough to find it.

HOW

Walk back through the day chronologically — morning, afternoon, evening. Notice one or two moments that stand out as good, even small ones. A conversation. A meal. A moment you almost missed.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, today I’m grateful for ____.”

3. Review — Where did I feel most alive? Where did I feel most drained?

WHY

Your emotions aren’t distractions from spiritual life — they’re data about it. The moments that gave you energy and the moments that drained you both say something true about how you’re built and where God might be leading you next.

HOW

Scan the day for one high point and one low point. Don’t just label them good or bad — ask what was actually happening underneath each one. What made that moment give life? What made the other one take it?

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, I felt most alive when _____. I felt most drained when _____. Show me what that means.”

4. Confession — Where did I fall short? What do I need to confess?

WHY

Let's be honest: this is the step most of us want to rush through, or skip entirely. But an honest day includes the moments you snapped at someone, cut a corner, said yes to something you knew was wrong. Naming it isn't about shame. It's about not carrying it into tomorrow.

HOW

Name one specific moment — not a vague “I could've done better,” the actual thing. Confess it plainly. Receive forgiveness instead of just filing it away to feel bad about later.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, forgive me for _____. I don't want to carry that into tomorrow.”

5. Resolve — What's one thing I'll do differently tomorrow?

WHY

The Examen doesn't end in analysis. It ends facing forward. One honest look back should produce one small, doable step ahead — not a whole new life plan by tomorrow morning, just the next right thing.

HOW

Pick one thing. Small enough to actually do. A conversation to repair. A habit to start or stop. A person to call. Say it to God as a resolve, not a resolution you'll abandon by Thursday.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, tomorrow, with your help, I want to _____.”

This Week's Invitation

1. Pray the Examen at the end of each day this week — same time, same place if you can manage it.
2. Keep a short list of your daily resolves. Read them back at the end of the week.
3. Notice if a pattern shows up in your high points or low points. Bring that pattern to God, or to someone you trust.

Start there.

A Simple Prayer

God, thank you for walking through today with me instead of leaving me to sort it out alone. Show me where you were. Forgive me where I missed you. Meet me again tomorrow. Amen.