

- When or where in the past 24 hours were you cooperating most fully with God's action in your life?
- When were you resisting?
- What habits and life patterns do you notice from the past day?

(For a fuller list of questions contact Viv Coleman)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me." [Psalm 139:23, 24]

Richard Foster reminds us this is a gentle exploration: "God is with us in the search...in the light of his presence. he will show us what we need to see."

"Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul...Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."

[Psalm 143v8b,10]

Response

Having spent time remembering, it seems natural to want to respond in some way. Take time to journal or pray, expressing your thoughts on the actions, attitudes, feelings, and interactions you've remembered. You might need to seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, or resolve to make changes and move forward. Allow your observations to guide your responses.

- Beginning today, how do you want to live your life differently?
- What patterns do you want to keep living tomorrow?

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

[Hebrews 13v20-21]

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

[Philippians 1:6]

Resources for Further Exploration:

Sleeping with Bread by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

Mars Hill Bible Church sermon podcasts and website www.marshall.org

<http://beliefnet.digitaria.com/Faiths/Christianity/2008/09/The-Prayer-of-Examen.aspx>

<http://www.annagram.org/extras/consolation.html>

http://www.ministryhealth.net/mh_articles/314_ignatius_survive_desolation.html

<http://www.faithandleadership.duke.edu/features/articles/centered-prayer>

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the godshaped life



Spiritual Practice Two

The Examen

An introduction by Viv Coleman

"A godshaped life is a flourishing tree" Prov 11: 28

Spiritual Practices

Eastview Baptist Church 2010

About Spiritual Practices

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength”

“Practice” means the repeated performance of a task or action regularly over time. A spiritual practice is exactly what the word suggests, a way to be deliberate about matters of the soul. Spiritual practices - and there are heaps of them - are tools for becoming aware of God within our daily life; they bring out the sacred in experiences that could otherwise seem just everyday. Down through the centuries the way of Jesus has been understood as a life that requires deliberate and attentive spiritual practices. Orienting our energies toward God and one another can help counter apathy and despair as we create space for God. Spiritual practices you may have heard of include prayer, praise, confession, meditation, and fasting. But keeping Sabbath, memorising scripture and welcoming guests are too. Think of it as keeping your ears open, in ways and in places and times of day when before you wouldn't have thought to listen. Think of it as tuning yourself to recognize God's voice, as becoming someone who regularly, intentionally hears.

For many years, spiritual practices were virtually unknown in Protestant churches. Baptists, for example, tended to frown on spiritual practices as they seemed like “works,” at odds with our belief that salvation comes by grace alone. But today the centuries-old Christian exercises are growing more popular among mainline Protestants. One Baptist who recommends the practice of spiritual disciplines is sociologist and writer Dr Tony Campolo, who at the age of 75 is still undertaking 400 speaking engagements a year. Each morning, he sits silently for a half an hour repeating the name “Jesus” in a private prayer of the heart, and waiting for the “still, small voice” that is God. At night, he spends an equal amount of time lying in bed and working through an ancient prayer called **the Examen**. First, he reviews his actions and thoughts of the day, looking for places where God has worked through him. Then he reviews the day a second time, looking for places where he failed to allow God in. This “heart-based” practice helps him discover more about God, more about himself, and more about how to love God “with heart and soul and mind and strength” as Jesus commanded his disciples to do.

About the Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a daily spiritual exercise designed by the Spanish monk Saint Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556], the founder of the Jesuit movement. He encouraged fellow followers of Jesus to engage in the practice for developing a deeper level of spiritual sensitivity and for recognising and receiving the help of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of the practice is an increasing awareness of God's presence and the Holy Spirit's movement throughout the day.

This Prayer is primarily an exercise in remembering, and noticing God in experiences and encounters from the past 24 hours. The beauty of the practice is its simplicity; it is more a guide than a prescription. The purpose is to increase awareness and sensitivity, not to finish or accomplish a task.

Practising the Prayer of Examen

Space: For this practice find a comfortable and relatively quiet location conducive for reflecting. Many people light a candle.

Time: any time, but night is best, as little as ten minutes could be sufficient; if more time is available you can spend more time on certain portions.

Presence and Gratitude

Start with feet flat, and slow deep breaths. Imagine yourself in a favourite place with God or a friend. Begin by recognising the presence of God. Breathe in his unconditional love and breathe it out to fill the space around you. Remind yourself of God's love and His desire to be with you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be attentive to God. To become more focused, it might be helpful to repeat a simple phrase during this time, like “Be still and know that I am God” [Psalm 46v10]. Don't rush. Take the necessary time to wait and focus on the nearness of God. Open yourself to His presence.

“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

[Psalm 145:18]

“Gracious God, in these moments please remind me of your presence and generosity, and give me the wisdom and courage to live gracefully with myself, others, and the world you have wonderfully made. For the sake of Jesus, Amen.”

Using simple words, express your gratitude to God. Look back over the day, the big and small aspects of life, your day's experiences and encounters, helping your mind and spirit centre on the goodness and generosity of God. If you're using a journal, consider capturing your thanks in writing, expressing gratitude for God's generosity and faithfulness.

Highs and Lows (*Ignatius called these Consolation and Desolation*)

Now place your hand on your heart to remind you this exercise is more about feelings than facts. Ask Jesus/God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are most grateful, a moment you would like to relive, a moment when you felt most able to give and receive love. What was said and done in that moment that made it so special? Breathe in the grace and hope you felt and receive life again from that moment.

Then ask Jesus/God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful, when you felt least able to give and receive love. What was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult? Be with whatever you feel, without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

Try to look back with an openness and sense of curiosity Rather than interpreting, justifying, or rationalising, just observe and remember. Allow your mind to wander the situations you've been in and to notice details. Three basic questions should help you bring specific experiences to mind.