



THE EXAMEN

“TAKE FROM OUR SOULS
THE STRAIN AND STRESS,
AND LET OUR ORDERED
LIVES CONFESS
THE BEAUTY OF THY PEACE”

- JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

THE EXAMEN

I don't know about you, but I need to slow down. I dive head first into my days aware of the jobs I need to do, the commitments I need to keep and the things I need to get done. The soul though was not meant to function at this speed.

In his book 'Soul Keeping' John Ortberg shares a story a friend told him about being on a missions trip somewhere, and how they were driving for hours to get to a key location for the next portion of the trip. Then seemingly out of nowhere, their drivers (hired locals from the country) stopped the vehicles, turned off the engines, and just sat there. They had been making great time, there were still hours of daylight, there was no mechanical issue or engine failure- these guys just simply stopped driving. And when the passengers asked them what was wrong, they told him that they had been going too fast a pace for their souls, so they had to stop and *wait for their souls to catch up*.

My pace of life is certainly not the pace that is healthy for my soul. I had been feeling like this for a while when I came across the prayer of examen.

The prayer of examen is a time of prayerful reflection where you think over the events of the day or week in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction. The examen finds its roots in Ignation spirituality. St Ignatius wanted this practice to be shared as widely as possible and it became one of the very few expectations he placed on the Jesuit order – the requirement that they practice the examen twice daily.

The most widely used and most accessible version of the prayer St Ignatius practiced is composed of the following.

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

This simple act of reflection and prayer has given my soul the space and time to catch up.

In our home we do not do the prayer of examen daily but instead complete it together every Sunday. We have found it to be an amazing time of reflection and resetting as one week draws to a close and a new one begins. Some Sundays we are not at home so we complete the examen verbally talking through each section.

On the next few pages I have outlined how we do the prayer of examen and offered some prayers to help you frame it. I have included 60 examen pages (one for each week of the year - with a few left over, or enough for two months if you do it daily.)

However you choose to use the prayer of examen and this little journal, it is my prayer that it will be a time of slowing down and that through this simple act your soul finds the space to catch up.

Offered with love

David Towns

Monastic Retreats

www.monasticretreats.co.uk



PREPARATION

Firstly we light a candle and then we say an opening prayer. We searched for ages to find an examen preparation prayer and after a long time of searching we decided to write our own. Our opening and closing prayers are included on the last page of this journal for you to cut out and use as a bookmark.

Dear Father,

We thank you for the week that is coming to an end, for all the things we have done and everything we have learned. Lord, we thank you that you were with us in every experience.

As we quieten our hearts before you, we ask you would help us recognise those times when we have failed you. Help us to know our hearts and grant us true repentance.

Father, we don't always understand ourselves in the moment and we need not understand your plans for our future. But show us enough to take the steps that you would have us take this day.

*Lord, you have promised to never leave us or forsake us. We thank you that we are your children, made in your likeness,
Help us to grow into the full image of Christ you would have us be.*

*All this we ask through Christ Jesus our Lord,
Amen*

EXAMEN

We then take some time to sit in silence before reflecting on the past week. We reflect on the different aspects and parts of our lives and make notes on what has struck us this week and where we have seen God, we record these reflections alongside any actions we need to take in light of what the spirit has identified. We look at our spiritual, physical and mental health and our work life, home life and relational life. We use the top section of each box to reflect on the past week and the section below to reset for the coming week.

CLOSING

We end our time with this prayer.

*Lord of creation,
who by your wisdom order all things aright,
create in us a rhythm of life that sustains us and blesses those around us.
Amen*

DATE

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

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“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” Jeremiah 29:11.

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“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:32

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“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,
for the LORD your God goes with you” Deuteronomy 31:6a

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“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

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“As water reflects a face, so a man’s heart reflects the man.”
Proverbs 27:19

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“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” 2 Corinthians 3:18a

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“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

1 John 4:18

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“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

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“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”
John 13:35

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“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible;
and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” - Francis of Assisi

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“Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” - Pope John Paul II

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“Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” - Saint Augustine

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“Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me.” - Saint Patrick

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“Be at peace with your own soul, then heaven and earth
will be at peace with you.” - Isaac of Nineveh

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”Be gentle to all and stern with yourself.”
- Saint Teresa of Avila

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“If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me.”
- Joan of Arc

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“Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.” - Francis of Assisi

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“Patience is the companion of wisdom.”
- Saint Augustine

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“I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.” - Mother Teresa

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“Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self.” - Francis of Assisi

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“In doing what we ought we deserve no praise, because it is our duty”.
- Saint Augustine

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“All things must come to the soul from its roots, from where it is planted.”
- Saint Teresa of Avila

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“Love begins by taking care of the closest ones - the ones at home.”
- Mother Teresa

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“Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.” - Saint Augustine

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“Holy wisdom confounds Satan and all his wickednesses.”
- Francis of Assisi

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“Accustom yourself continually to make many acts of love, for they enkindle and melt the soul.” - Saint Teresa of Avila

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“True friendship ought never to conceal what it thinks.”
- St. Jerome

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“Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it” - John Piper

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“God loves each of us as if there were only one of us”
- Augustine

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“God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile” - Max Lucado

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“God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supplies.”
- Hudson Taylor

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“God will meet you where you are in order to take you where
He wants you to go.” - Tony Evans

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“Let God’s promises shine on your problems.”
- Corrie ten Boom

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“Christ literally walked in our shoes.”
- Tim Keller

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“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”
- Jim Elliot

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“If you can’t fly, then run, If you can’t run, then walk, If you can’t walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.”
- Martin Luther King Jr.

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“Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.” - Francis Chan

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“If God is your partner, make your plans BIG!”
- D.L. Moody

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“We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face...we must do that which we think we cannot.” - Eleanor Roosevelt

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“God does not give us everything we want, but He does fulfill His promises, leading us along the best and straightest paths to Himself.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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“Always, everywhere God is present, and always He seeks to discover Himself to each one” - A.W.Tozer

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“If you believe in a God who controls the big things, you have to believe in a God who controls the little things.” - Elisabeth Elliot

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“There is no one who is insignificant in the purpose of God.”
- Alistair Begg

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“Relying on God has to start all over everyday,
as if nothing has yet been done.” – C. S. Lewis

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“The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.” - Helen Keller

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“We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.” - Chuck Swindoll

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“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”
- Mother Teresa

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“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him”
- John Piper

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“Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them.”
- Elisabeth Elliot

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“Remember Whose you are and Whom you serve. Provoke yourself by recollection, and your affection for God will increase tenfold.”

-Oswald Chambers

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“There is not a single thing that Jesus cannot change, control, and conquer because he is the living Lord.” - Franklin Graham

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“The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.” - C.S. Lewis

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“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” - Augustine of Hippo

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“This is my Father’s world, O let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.”

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“Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.”

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“Jesus sought me when a stranger, wand’ring from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood.”

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“My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.”

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“In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

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“Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end;
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!”

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OPENING PRAYER

Dear Father,

We thank you for the week that is coming to an end, for all the things we have done and everything we have learned.

Lord, we thank you that you were with us in every experience.

As we quieten our hearts before you, we ask you would help us recognise those times when we have failed you.

Help us to know our hearts and grant us true repentance.

Father, we don't always understand ourselves in the moment and we need not understand your plans for our future.

But show us enough to take the steps that you would have us take this day.

Lord, you have promised to never leave us or forsake us.

We thank you that we are your children, made in your likeness, help us to grow into the full image of Christ you would have us be.

*All this we ask through Christ Jesus our Lord,
Amen*

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord of creation,

*who by your wisdom order all things aright,
create in us a rhythm of life that sustains us and blesses those around us.*

Amen



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