

Spiritual Exercise EXAMEN by St. Ignatius Loyola

In his Spiritual Exercises Ignatius introduces us to two forms of 'examen' what he terms the General Examination and the Specific or Particular Examination. As these terms imply, the general looks at what has been going on generally in my day, while the particular looks at some specific area where I am seeking to change.

Particular Examen

I take some specific habit, sinful practice or habitual way of behavior that I would like to change. I can consider a positive practice I want to get into the habit of.

It could be something like making nasty comments about someone I don't like, or wasting time on internet games, eating too much or praising others for doing well.

- I start my day by acknowledging the desire to change this particular area and asking God for the grace to improve. Twice in the day I spend a little time reviewing progress so far:
- I give thanks to God for all the good that I have received.
- Then I consider whether I have failed in this specific behavior so far today and if so, how many times. I jot this down.
- I keep the record of my lapses for a week to see if, with effort and God's grace, I can lowly get out of the habit and live a life more pleasing to myself and God.
- To keep this area before my mind, Ignatius suggest that I make a sign to myself each time I fall into the offending behavior.

Obviously the idea is that with God's help, if I concentrate on just one thing at a time I can bit by bit develop a more Christian heart. Hopefully, day by day, week by week, I shall get into good habits and out of bad ones.

General Examen

This has become a very popular prayer over the last few years. Although in its original form it did tend to concentrate more on how I might have fallen into sinful behavior, today it has been given a more positive emphasis, which many people find more helpful. At the end of the day (or just before I start the next day if I am a 'morning person')

- I stop and quietly sit with my loving God. I consider all the good that has happened in the day: everything I have done that I'm proud of. Then I give thanks for all this good.
- I then ask for God's grace to see what I might have done wrong, my sins and faults. I consider too how I might have hurt others unintentionally.
- I become aware of my moods and feelings. Overall how would I describe my day. I then go over my day: all my thoughts, words and actions. What are the good things that have brought me joy, consolation and a sense of being alive?

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