

Experimenting With Prayers of Examen

In the book *From Good To Great*, Jim Collins explores the differences between good and great organizations. One of the key differences, according to Collins, is that great organizations are willing “to face the brutal facts.” Great organizations don’t sugarcoat their self-analysis. They evaluate themselves honestly and objectively, always ready to make changes for the better.

This same principle applies to us as individuals. Again and again, in the Bible and in our world today, we see that successful people are willing to conduct searching self-examinations. In the Bible, King David provides a classic example. Despite all his failures, he kept getting up again and moving forward, ultimately achieving great success, because he was humble enough to learn from his mistakes.

In Psalm 139:23-24, David pens this famous prayer, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

One way to give life to these words is to learn to pray so-called Prayers of Examen. This is an ancient way of praying; the basic idea is to work closely with God’s Spirit to examine ourselves. The goal is to identify the good and the bad, and to learn from both, as we grow in our self-awareness.

Exercise One: Examining An Important Event

1. Think back across your life—or the prior few months. Ask God to guide you to select an important event. The event can be either a good or bad experience.
2. Quiet yourself and ask God’s Spirit to guide you to truth and understanding as you examine the event.
3. Tell God about the event as you remember it. You can do this verbally or in writing, whichever is most comfortable for you.
4. Once you’ve retold the event, ask yourself a series of probing questions about the event. Feel free to ask whatever you feel led. Here are some example questions to get you started:
 - a. How do I feel about what happened?
 - b. Am I pleased with how I responded to the situation?
 - c. Does the situation still impact me now? If so, how?
 - d. Is there anything I need to confess to God and myself?
 - e. If I could re-live this situation, what would I do differently?
 - f. What did I do right in this situation?
 - g. What can I learn about myself from this event?
 - h. Does this event reveal things I need to work on? How will I do that?
 - i. God, what else do You want to say to me about this situation?

Exercise Two: Examining The Day

1. Before going to bed, or first thing the next morning, look back over the day just completed. Quiet yourself and ask God’s Spirit to guide you to truth and understanding as you reflect on the day.
2. **Prayers of Desolation.** Begin with this question: During the course of the day, when did I feel most desolate? When did I feel furthest from God?
 - a. Describe the situation to God verbally or in writing.
 - b. Then spend a few minutes dialoguing with God about the situation and your role in it. Think about what you did well, and about what you did poorly. Consider what you might learn from the situation.
3. **Prayers of Consolation.** Ask this question: During the course of the day, when did I feel the most consolation? When did I feel closest to God?
 - a. Describe the situation to God verbally or in writing.
 - b. Spend a few minutes dialoguing with God about the situation and your role in it. Think about what you did well, and about what you did poorly. Consider what you might learn from the situation.
4. Give thanks for the gift of another day and the lessons your soul learned from the day, as you prepare yourself for eternity. Embrace the new day to come, knowing that God is with you each step of the way—in good times and bad.