

# THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIOUSNESS



By Pastor Jerry Truex

The *Examen of Consciousness* is a spiritual discipline that reduces and eliminates our “false self,” those negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that make us miserable and harm ourselves and others. Conversely, though the *Examen* we learn to align with the Spirit of God and develop our “true self” (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:16-24).

The *Examen* was taught by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). He believed it helped people align with God’s will and look for God in all things, including nature, scripture, and one’s own heart. He encouraged people to practice the *Examen* at the end of every day. Some people do it several times a day. For most people, it takes about 10-15 minutes. There are six steps.

## **Step One: Be Silent**

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him” (Psa. 37:7; cf. Psa. 46:10).

First, find a place where you are least likely to be disturbed and where there is the least amount of noise. Consider lighting a candle, playing soft music, or some other symbolic gesture to signal the change of activity. Sit comfortably and still yourself. Relax. Be aware of your breathing, your body, and your feelings.

## **Step Two: Be Attentive to God**

“In [God] we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Second, remind yourself that you are in the presence of God and now, in the Examen, be especially attentive to God. Ask the Spirit to let you be aware of God’s love, power, and purpose.

## **Step Three: Be Thankful**

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thes. 5:18).

Third, take a few moments to give thanks to God for the “gifts” God has given you today. God is found in the big and small things of your life. Recall the smell of your morning coffee, the laugh of a child, the playfulness of your pets, the conversation you had with your family. Remember that every single event has been a gift from God.

### **Step Four: Ask for God's help**

"When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Fourth, ask God to help you look clearly at the events of your day. Ask God to help you look at yourself fearlessly and honestly. This is not a "beat up on yourself" session. It is a gentle look at how you have been received God "gifts". God knows you perfectly and accepts you unconditionally. Ask God to help you know yourself truly and love yourself unconditionally.

### **Step Five: Review Your Day**

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Cor. 13:5)

Fifth, review your day. This is the longest step. Watch your day like a movie replaying in your mind. After reviewing your day, choose one event or situation. What happened? How did you feel? What were your thoughts? What did you say? How did you act? In addition to looking at your feelings, thoughts, and actions, consider examining one of the following areas:

**Freedom.** Look for signs of things where you acted with less than perfect freedom, given the circumstances of your life. Notice where you acted freely and were able to choose a course action that aligned with the God's Spirit. Conversely, observe where you were swept along without the freedom you need to live as God would have you live.

**Habits.** Look at your daily routine and habits. Are your daily habits life enhancing? Notice what is happening there. Are any of them are dragging you down? Notice what is happening there. How is God speaking to you about your daily routine and habits?

**Fruit of the Spirit.** Look for evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit or, conversely, the Works of the Flesh (Gal 5:16-24). Where did you observe the **Fruit of the Spirit**—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Did they spring from you or someone else? Conversely, did you observe the **Works of the Flesh**— sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other things like these? From you or someone else?

### **Step Six: Talk with God**

"As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in mine" (Jer. 18:6).

Sixth, have a heart-to-heart talk with God. Share what you have discovered about yourself, others, and God. Here you seek forgiveness, ask for direction, share a concern, express gratitude, and make new commitments. The Serenity Prayer is a helpful way to conclude the *Examen*.

*God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.*