

# follow Prayer: The Examen

## Introduction: Noticing the Burning Bush

In the Book of Exodus, Moses encounters God in a burning bush. While we often think of this as a spectacular, impossible-to-miss event, many scholars suggest that the bush may have been burning for some time before Moses actually *noticed* it. The miracle wasn't just the fire; it was that Moses "turned aside" to look. The Examen is a prayer of "turning aside"—a daily practice of noticing God's presence in the ordinary moments of our lives.

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### What is the Prayer of Examen?

Developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern His direction for us.

- **The GPS Analogy:** Think of the Examen as a spiritual GPS. When we realize we've taken a wrong turn or missed a cue from God, the Examen provides a "recalculating" moment. It isn't about shame; it's about getting back on the path with God.
  - **The Most Vital Prayer:** Ignatius believed this was the most important prayer of the day. He famously said that if a person were too busy for any other prayer, they should never skip the Examen, because it anchors our relationship with God in reality.
  - **Relational and Formational:** Like all prayers in the *Follow Prayer* series, the Examen is a way of "talking to God about what we are doing together" (Dallas Willard).
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### The Five Steps of the Examen

1. **Presence:** Begin by asking the Holy Spirit for light. You aren't just reminiscing; you are looking at your day through God's eyes.
2. **Gratitude:** Walk through your day and note the small gifts—a good cup of coffee, a kind word from a colleague, or a beautiful sunset. This shifts your heart toward abundance.
3. **Review:** Look at the day as a whole. Where did you feel a sense of peace or "consolation"? Where did you feel a "desolation" or a pulling away from God?
4. **Sorrow/Repentance:** Acknowledge the moments where you missed the mark. If you were short with a spouse or ignored an inner nudge to be generous, talk to God about it. This is where the "recalculating" happens.
5. **Hope/Tomorrow:** Look forward to the next 24 hours. Ask for the grace to be more aware of God's presence and to follow Him more closely tomorrow.

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## Why Journal the Examen?

While the Examen can be done silently, journaling the highlights and lowlights is highly recommended.

- **Reinforcement:** Writing down where God showed up reinforces your faith.
- **Pattern Recognition:** Over weeks and months, you will begin to see patterns in how God speaks to you and where you typically struggle, allowing for deeper spiritual growth.

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## How to Use This Prayer

- **Consistency over Intensity:** It is better to do a five-minute Examen every night than a thirty-minute one once a month.
- **Schedule It:** Write “**God**” in your calendar at the end of your day.