

# ANNUAL EXAMEN

## *A PRAYERFUL EXERCISE OF REMEMBRANCE*

By Bryan and Rachel Hehr

Each year brings with it a breadth of experiences: peaks and valleys, joys and sorrows, to be sure—but also the ordinary, mundane, and day-to-day moments. God is present in them all. The Annual Examen is a prayerful exercise that invites us to remember and reflect upon significant moments and experiences of the last year, intentionally focusing upon God’s presence and movement, as well as our own spiritual growth and formation into the image of Jesus.

Based upon Ignatius of Loyola’s daily Examen, this exercise helps us to notice God in unexpected ways, and it prepares us to become more attentive to His presence and voice in the coming days. It includes four specific movements: Gratitude, Illumination, Review, and Renewal. You’ll find that the review section is the longest and most extensive, inviting you to review your year through eight categories: General, Body, Vocation, Mind, Heart, Relationships, Spirit, and Resources.\*

### HELPFUL TIPS

- Go slowly, and don’t rush. Linger, reflect deeply, and allow yourself the necessary time to do so.
- Grab your calendar or journal, if it helps you to recall significant events and experiences of the last year. If your calendar or journal become distracting, trust that the Holy Spirit will help you to remember what He wants you to remember.
- If the space provided isn’t enough, feel free to use a journal or notebook.
- Feel free to skip, add, or reword any questions. This is for you and your life with God!
- Share your responses with a trusted friend or your spouse, as this is an exercise that becomes all the more meaningful when shared in relationship and community.

### GRATITUDE

*Begin the Annual Examen with a posture of gratitude towards God.*

What did the past year bring that I’m grateful for?

### ILLUMINATION

*Read Psalm 103. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to remember what He wants you to remember from the last twelve months: events, experiences, relationships, desires, losses, hopes, challenges, moments of grace, moments of struggle, etc.*

\*Some of these categories were adapted from Stephen Smith’s “The Great Annual Examen” (<https://www.pottersinn.com/podcast-episode/ep30>) and the Examen found in Sacred Ordinary Days Liturgical Year Daily Planner (<https://sacredordinarydays.com/pages/yearly-examen>)

## REVIEW

*This is the most lengthy section! Be sure to give yourself enough time to complete this part of the exercise, section by section. As new memories or thoughts come to mind, be sure to jot them down.*

### GENERAL

Thinking over the last twelve months, what significant moments or experiences come to mind? What are the most significant events of the past year? If it helps to think through the year chronologically, make note of any significant dates.

When did God feel near over the last year?

When did I feel the most known and loved this year? When and how did I offer love this year?

When did I experience beauty? Wholeness? Peace? Hope?

When did God feel distant or far-off over the last year?

What has been my greatest struggle this past year?

What has been my deepest loss this past year?\*

## **BODY**

What choices have I made over the past year that have had an impact on my health?

What do I need to pay attention to or take seriously regarding my physical health?

## **VOCATION**

What words describe my vocation?

On average, how many hours did I work each week over the last year? How many hours would I like to work each week?  
What will I need to do to accomplish this?\*

\* Stephen W. Smith, "The Great Annual Examen."

What role has work played in my life this past year?

Do I desire any changes in my vocation? What might those be?

## **MIND**

What has received the most air time in my thoughts over the past year?

What have I learned in the past year?

## **HEART**

What are a few feelings that were especially present in the past year?\*

When did I experience the most stress this year? The most sorrow?

When did I experience joy, delight, or the sense of feeling the most alive this year?

\*Stephen W. Smith, "The Great Annual Examen."

## RELATIONSHIPS

Who are the most significant relationships in my life?\*

How would I describe my sense of community and relationship?\*

What kinds of relationships do I desire and need? What do I need to do to make room for those relationships?\*

## SPIRIT

How is it with my soul?

How has my prayer life and connection to God been this past year?

As I think over the past year, what was my greatest challenge or struggle in my life with God?

\*Stephen W. Smith, "The Great Annual Examen."

The most significant spiritual experiences, lessons, or insights that I'm taking with me into next year are:\*

If I could ask God one question, it would be:

What is my deepest longing in my life with God?

### **RESOURCES (TIME, TALENT, TREASURE)**

How have I utilized my resources in the last year?

What do I wish I had given more time to? Less time to?

### **FORGIVENESS & RENEWAL**

*Read through the previous sections, and pay attention to any common threads, themes, new insights or awareness. Write down what you notice below.*

For what do I need to repent and receive God's forgiveness, as I reflect on the past year?

What passages of Scripture have been significant over this year?

What is one word that I might use to describe the past year? What one word might I carry into the new year?

How can I be intentionally attentive to God's presence in the coming year?

*Share this exercise with a trusted friend or your spouse. Note any new insights that the Holy Spirit brings, and look ahead with prayerful grace to the year ahead.*

## DAILY EXAMEN

The Examen was originally written as a daily prayer by Ignatius of Loyola more than 500 years ago, and it has been prayed by followers of Jesus ever since. Below is a daily version of the Examen. The beauty of this prayer is that you can do all five movements, or just one or two—it's flexible, and it's a wonderful way to end the day with the Lord. You can also pray the Examen with your roommates, spouse, kids, or grandkids. It is, without question, one of the most transformational prayer practices we've experienced, and we hope it blesses you as much as it has blessed us! The prayer below is adapted from Timothy Gallagher's *The Examen Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006).

**Step One: Gratitude.** Note what you are grateful for. It can be as simple as fresh coffee, as grandiose as God's great love, or anything in between.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! (Ps. 100:4)*

**Step Two: Illumination.** Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh and illuminate your heart as you review your day.

*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (Ps. 139:7-8)*

**Step Three: Review.** With God, review the day. Note the moments when you felt most connected to God (consolation) and most disconnected to God (desolation). Review your choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. (Ps. 139:1-2)*

**Step Four: Forgiveness.** Ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God, particularly in areas of brokenness, sin, or times you missed His presence.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (Ps 51:1)*

**Step Five: Renewal.** Look toward tomorrow. Anticipate His presence in the day to come, and plan to live in accordance with His guidance.

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)*

Linger in God's presence as you end this prayer of Examen.