

PRAYER OF EXAMEN | Reflecting on 2021

Well we're at the beginning of a brand new year and I don't know how many of you are into New Year's Resolutions – whether you've made any, or possibly broken them already :) – but this is often a time of year when there's a natural pull towards reflection, towards taking stock of our lives and how they're going.

And so as the calendar turns from one year to the next here, we want to pause together to engage in a spiritual practice known as the Prayer of Examen – an intentional reflecting back on a specific time period of life (could be a day, a season, or – in this case we'll do a full year) and looking for places where we saw God at work. The thinking is that the more we are able to look back and notice where God *was* at work in the past, we'll increase our ability to also spot when and where God's Spirit is working in the present as well.

So I'm going to invite you to either take the pencil & paper you found on your chair this morning – or open SR app and click the Prayer of Examen button for a digital option – and let's begin.

It's probably a good idea to start by just taking a couple of deep breaths and try to let the peripheral noise in the room and your mind quiet down.

God we ask you to lead us by your Spirit now, as we turn our eyes back on the year we've just come through. Help us to see what you want us to see, to know what we most need to know, in order to become better attuned to you and your love in the here and now.

So, question #1:

1. When and where in the **past year** did you feel most connected to God? What were the things you were doing, or the experiences you had, when you felt most alive, grateful, aware of goodness and love? Even if they were hard experiences, when were you most aware of God's presence? Think of as many specific instances as you can, and just jot them down.

And now, the flip side:

2. When in the **past year** did you feel disconnected and empty, lonely or alone, that God was far away or that you were far from God? What were the details of those experiences? Jot those down as well.

Often, things surface in Examen that help us realize the ways we've drifted away from or simply lost sight of God. As those moments surface, just acknowledge them honestly and then simply re-align your heart and mind back toward God in every way. Similarly, practicing Examen regularly can help us notice even the little ways we might have missed or taken for granted God's care for us. It helps us remember the love that's always right there by training us to ***look for it*** everywhere.

I don't know what's on your paper right now. I know mine is a big mix of amazing wonderful things, and brutally painful things. What I do know is that there are great big hands holding all of it, for you and for me; great big love covering over both the good and the bad, and a God who loves us all so very much that he will not let any one of us walk a single step of these roads alone. So as we hold the year

that was in our hands right now, let's stand and sing together to that God. Let the words of this song be your prayer over the year of 2021 that was.

RESPONSE & REFLECTION | Looking Ahead to 2022

Well those are Andrew and Abigayle's stories of new life and making a fresh start. So encouraging! If the idea of baptism intrigues you at all we'd love to talk with you, answer any questions you have; you can reach out to baptism@southridgechurch.ca anytime or talk to your location pastor – we'd love to hear from you.

But for all of us the real question is: what's *your* story? Or what's your story going to be, in the year ahead? Are you longing for a fresh start in 2022? We know we can't control external circumstances – if 2021 has taught us anything! But what do you want this next year of life to look like – spiritually, relationally, missionally – in the person you are becoming in the world.

Who do you want to be?

How do you want to live?

What do you want to be able to look back on January 1st 2023 and say: that was the life I wanted to lead this year?

Let's pause for one more minute – and pull that little piece of paper back out again. If you were to write down 3 things that you want to be able to say at the end of this year, about who you were and how you lived – what do you want them to be? Take a minute with that now.