

PRAYER OF EXAMEN | *Faith & Families of Origin*

You've probably heard the saying "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" – which could come as good or bad news to you, depending on how you feel about the "tree" you fell from. I know there are some ways in which I wear my childhood roots and rituals with pride, and other ones in which it feels like it's been important to get as far away from them as possible. The truth is, we are all shaped to some degree by our families of origin – *and* we're shaped in both helpful – and harmful – ways. We want to spend a few minutes prayerfully examining those dynamics together this morning.

There's an ancient spiritual practice we've engaged in together several times, called the Prayer of Examen. It's a style of prayer that involves reflecting on the landscape of our lives, asking God to help us become more aware in two directions: 1) what has been deeply good, and life-giving; and 2) where have things been not good, possibly even destructive to our spirits and our lives. And then to process both of those in prayer with God.

So we can use different versions of those questions. And right now where we want to point them, is in the direction of our families of origin, and specifically how they've impacted our faith – both then and now. In a moment we're going to create some space, and ask you to reflect on 1) where you saw and experienced the love of God growing up, what **good things** your upbringing brought to the faith you hold today; and then 2) how that original foundation might have also **negatively impacted** your understanding and experience of God.

AND. If you (like me) didn't grow up in a religious context at all, I'd encourage you to not believe that means you don't have deep and meaningful answers here. As human beings we have been *being formed*, since the moment our hearts began to beat, and regardless of at what point we started to become aware of God, there's never been a moment where he hasn't been moving and drawing us. Even when we didn't yet know his name. And even *our* families had – and have – an impact on our faith formation. So while you might have to dig a little deeper for them, your answers *are* there too.

So take a minute to get into a comfortable position, maybe take a deep breath or two, try to let the noise of your mind quiet down right now, the stillness of your heart open up, and try to consciously allow yourself become aware of God's presence around you. You were created by love, in love, for love. And you're held by that same love right now.

So, first...

- 1. Take a moment to think back to your childhood. How did you see the love of God present in that space and in your family of origin?**

[60 seconds reflection – ON SCREEN: How did you see the love of God in your childhood & family of origin?]

Pray: God we're grateful for the ways we saw you present to us as children. Thank you for the good things our families built into us. Would you show us how to keep carrying those gifts forward in our lives, and how to pass onto others what was invested in us?

2. And now take a moment to reflect on the ways your upbringing may have negatively shaped your view of God. What got in the way of a healthy understanding of spirituality? And probably your ability to receive God's love.

[60 seconds reflection – ON SCREEN: How has your family & upbringing negatively impacted your faith and your view of God?]

Pray: God we grieve the ways our upbringing distorted our view of who you are, and how life in you is meant to be lived. Would you help us to let go of the harmful past, so that we do not carry it forward, And do not pass it onto those around us.

WRAP UP PRAYER

The Prayer of Examen is simple really in essence, and yet it *is* one of the powerhouse practices of healthy spirituality. These few minutes we've spent *barely* scratch the surface of how deep and valuable this practice can be. We hope you will practice it again, throughout the week ahead.