

EXAMEN | *The Garden Of Your Soul*

We're going to begin with an ancient practice commonly referred to as "The Examen." This is a practice that combines prayer and reflection that essentially distills to two questions: "Where did I sense God? And where did I sense God missing?" It's an important practice to engage in because as we journey inward, we can begin to observe, to notice, and over time identify patterns in our lives that can actually help us *grow* in our faith and experience God more fully. As one of the early church leaders John Chrysostom said, "Find the door of your heart and you will discover that it leads to the kingdom of God."

Now, these days, growth is all around us. Our world has begun to shift from the greys and browns of winter to the vibrant colours of spring. And so, as we practice the Examen together, I want us to tend to, water, weed and cultivate the gardens of our hearts as we journey inward.

I invite you to get comfortable, take a few deep breaths and begin to quiet your mind.

This first part is referred to as the **Examen of Consciousness**. Becoming more "God conscious" if you will. It's asking "where did I see God?" So as you comb through the soil of your soul, what is it that catches your mind's eye? What's growing in your garden? Thinking back on the last few days, can you notice God's fingerprint, perhaps in a moment of encouragement, friendship, fulfillment in your work, or improvement in your mental health?

Take a moment and reflect on where you've experienced the presence of God recently. And take a minute to really savour what that was like.

Where have you felt God's presence recently?

Now before we move on, take a minute to thank God for the ways you have experienced his presence recently.

The second part is referred to as the **Examen of Conscience**. It involves asking where we've missed God's presence? Now the truth is, we know God is never absent, but we feel that way when it's actually us who have withdrawn from God. So, I want to ask you to consider what weeds have grown in your garden? Where is the ground cracked and dry, waiting desperately to be softened by the rain? Where do you feel out of control? What relationship in your life right now is in need of tender care? Where have you been running yourself ragged, unable to do anything beyond surviving?

Instead of reflecting on the guilt and shame this might bring up, consider bringing this before God as a way of experiencing cleansing, release and life - because the purpose of pulling out

weeds in a garden isn't to focus on the growing pile in our compost bucket, but to make room for new growth, fruit and beauty to break forth.

Take a minute and ask the question: Where has God felt absent? Let yourself feel what that really felt like.

Where have you felt God's absence?

As we wrap up, take a minute with just you and God to acknowledge your role in the perceived absence you've felt.

The Examen can be a hard practice to engage in because it takes so much vulnerability. But truthfully, the more often we practice it, the easier it gets to remain open. But similar to the flowers that are blooming outside, growth can only occur when the soil is soft. And so let's remain open to God's spirit as she seeks to continually grow in us, that we might become more like Jesus.