

EXAMEN | *Last Week*

This morning we're going to engage in a classic spiritual practice, one the church has actually been doing for hundreds of years, known as the prayer of Examen – or the '*examination of our consciousness.*'

We did the Examen together a couple of months ago (in our sort of extended-practice service) and heard from a number of you that it connected well. So, we're going to engage it again, as a way of continuing to develop these muscles.

This is a practice of looking backwards and trying to notice where God **was** at work in the past, in order to more easily spot and open up to where God **is** at work in our present moments. Since the regular noise of life tends to drown out that awareness.

The Examen is meant to open us up to both the beautiful **and** the difficult in our lives – both of which are deep places to encounter God. In Examen we try to observe two things: 1) the times when we felt most close and connected to God, *and* 2) the times we felt most *disconnected* from God's presence.

Now you can practice Examen looking back over different chunks of time: a month, a year, a season – or a season of life – it's actually most valuable practiced at the end of every day. That's the real sweet spot. Today, we're going to practice by looking back over just the past week.

So, go ahead and get comfortable, maybe take a few deep breaths, start to quiet your mind, tune out any distractions. You can close your eyes if that helps you.

A good Examen requires slow, unhurried, attentive time. What we do here is always just a tiny taste, so you get a feel for how to practice on your own. It's just a start! But it's a start.

Try to think all the way back to last Sunday – maybe you were right there in that same place where you are right now; maybe you were someplace else. Can you remember back that far? What went on in life this week? As you think back over the past 7 days, at what points did you feel most aware of and connected to God? If that seems like a daunting question, think of it like: when did you feel most alive this week? When did you feel grateful? When did you experience love (either given or received)? Where was there hope, peace, the fruit of God's presence? Try to think very specifically: where were you, what were you doing? Take a couple of minutes, and as those memories surface, notice, observe them, and just go ahead and re-savour them a bit.

Now take a few more seconds and just express a thank you to God for those experiences.

And now, we'll try to find where we felt **disconnected** from the love and presence of God. It's not that God actually goes away (ever!) but often things surface in Examen that help us realize the ways our tuned-in-ness might have drifted from God over the course of our day. So as those moments also now surface for you, just acknowledge them honestly, and then let them go and re-align your heart and mind back to Christ. There's no need to judge or shame ourselves, we just want to keep drawing ourselves back into the goodness of God. Letting go of anything in the way.

So when in the past week did you feel disconnected and empty, lonely or alone, that God was far away, or that you were far from God? Try to get specific again: where were you, and what was going on?

Now take a few more seconds and just release all that disconnection to God, receiving back mercy.

The truth is God is deeply present in all the intricacies of our lives, when we're aware of it and when we're not, Jesus is endlessly working to bring about the full redemption of our hearts and lives. And the more we can tune into that working, joining our efforts with his, the more and more of Christ's love and presence here on earth we will experience – and be able to share with those around us. The more regularly you practice this, the easier it will become to genuinely live in that reality – sensing God more and more clearly every minute of every day.

So, happy practicing!