

# “The Daily Examen”

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Lenten Season 2016

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## Who was Ignatius Loyola?

St. Ignatius Loyola was born in 1491, one of 13 children of a family of minor nobility in northern Spain. As a young man Ignatius Loyola was inflamed by the ideals of courtly love and knighthood and dreamed of doing great deeds.

But in 1521 Ignatius was gravely wounded in a battle with the French. While recuperating, Ignatius Loyola experienced a conversion. Reading the lives of Jesus and the saints made Ignatius happy and aroused desires to do great things. Ignatius realized that these feelings were clues to God’s direction for him.

Ignatius, who founded the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, gained many insights into the spiritual life in the course of a decades long spiritual journey during which he became expert at helping others deepen their relationship with God.

## What is Ignatian Spirituality?

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the experiences of Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), a Basque aristocrat whose conversion to a fervent Christian faith began while he was recovering from war wounds.

Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality for everyday life. It insists that God is present in our world and active in our lives. It is a pathway to deeper prayer, good decisions guided by keen discernment, and an active life of service to others.

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the conviction that God is active, personal, and—above all—*present* to us. We don’t have to withdraw from the world into a quiet place in order to find God. God’s footprints can be found everywhere—in our work and our relationships, in our family and friends, in our sorrows and joys, in the sublime beauty of nature and in the mundane details of our daily lives. It’s often said that Ignatian spirituality trains us to “find God in all things.”

This perspective greatly influences how we live and how we pray. The daily grind of our everyday lives takes on transcendent importance. It’s the place where we connect with God. This means that the choices we make in our daily lives either push us away from God or draw us more closely to him. Our lives *matter*.

Over the years, Ignatius became expert in the art of [spiritual direction](#). He collected his insights, prayers, and suggestions in his book the *Spiritual Exercises*, one of the most influential books on the spiritual life ever written.

With a small group of friends, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. Ignatius conceived the Jesuits as “contemplatives in action.”

## What is The Daily Examen?

The Examen of Consciousness - an unexamined life is not worth living.

A way to look back over the day and consider where did you find God in the events of your day? Where did you get in the way of finding God in those events? Regular daily practice of the Examen allows you to reflect on the person you are and are becoming.

One author calls the Daily Examen “rummaging for God.” He likens it to “going through a drawer full of stuff, feeling around, looking for something that you are sure must be there.” That’s an accurate description of what it’s like to pray the Daily Examen. We look back on the previous day, rummaging through the “stuff,” and finding God in it.

Another image or analogy is ‘Sitting next to Jesus on the sofa’. You’re looking at the day together, like a video and having a conversation about it. Jesus may say, ‘It’s OK, did you do your best? Try again tomorrow’.

The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and to discern his direction for us.

The fruit of the regular practice of the Examen—or more broadly, the life of regular, cumulative, formative reflection—is living with greater attentiveness, greater readiness, even greater anticipation of God’s whispers.

## What are the Five Steps of the Daily Examen?

**Important reminder:** It’s actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order. Ignatius, the Jesuits, practice it twice a day . . .at noon and at the end of the day.

**1. Become aware of God’s presence.** Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

**2. Review the day with gratitude.** Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day’s gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

**3. Pay attention to your emotions.** One of St. Ignatius’s great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?

God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a

new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

**4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

**5. Look toward tomorrow.** Ask God to give you light for tomorrow’s challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what’s coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God’s guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

## Ten Elements of Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian spirituality is one of the most influential and pervasive spiritual outlooks of our age. There’s a story behind it. And it has many attributes.

### **1. It begins with a wounded soldier daydreaming on his sickbed.**

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the experiences of Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), a Basque aristocrat whose conversion to a fervent Christian faith began while he was recovering from war wounds. Ignatius, who founded the Jesuits, gained many insights into the spiritual life in the course of a decadeslong spiritual journey during which he became expert at helping others deepen their relationship with God. Its basis in personal experience makes Ignatian spirituality an intensely practical spirituality, well suited to laymen and laywomen living active lives in the world.

### **2. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”**

This line from a poem by the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins captures a central theme of Ignatian spirituality: its insistence that God is at work everywhere—in work, relationships, culture, the arts, the intellectual life, creation itself. As Ignatius put it, all the things in the world are presented to us “so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.” Ignatian spirituality places great emphasis on discerning God’s presence in the everyday activities of ordinary life. It sees God as an active God, always at work, inviting us to an ever-deeper walk.

### **3. It’s about call and response—like the music of a gospel choir.**

An Ignatian spiritual life focuses on God at work *now*. It fosters an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to God. God calls; we respond. This call-response rhythm of the inner life makes discernment and decision making especially important. Ignatius’s rules for discernment and his astute approach to decision making are well-regarded for their psychological and spiritual wisdom.

### **4. “The heart has its reasons of which the mind knows nothing.”**

Ignatius Loyola’s conversion occurred as he became able to interpret the spiritual meaning of his

emotional life. The spirituality he developed places great emphasis on the affective life: the use of imagination in prayer, discernment and interpretation of feelings, cultivation of great desires, and generous service. Ignatian spiritual renewal focuses more on the heart than the intellect. It holds that our choices and decisions are often beyond the merely rational or reasonable. Its goal is an eager, generous, wholehearted offer of oneself to God and to his work.

#### **5. Free at last.**

Ignatian spirituality emphasizes interior freedom. To choose rightly, we should strive to be free of personal preferences, superfluous attachments, and preformed opinions. Ignatius counseled radical detachment: “We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.” Our one goal is the freedom to make a wholehearted choice to follow God.

#### **6. “Sum up at night what thou hast done by day.”**

The Ignatian mind-set is strongly inclined to reflection and self-scrutiny. The distinctive Ignatian prayer is the [Daily Examen](#), a review of the day’s activities with an eye toward detecting and responding to the presence of God. Three challenging, reflective questions lie at the heart of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the book Ignatius wrote, to help others deepen their spiritual lives: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?”

#### **7. A practical spirituality.**

Ignatian spirituality is adaptable. It is an outlook, not a program; a set of attitudes and insights, not rules or a scheme. Ignatius’s first advice to spiritual directors was to adapt the *Spiritual Exercises* to the needs of the person entering the retreat. At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is a profound humanism. It respects people’s lived experience and honors the vast diversity of God’s work in the world. The Latin phrase *cura personalis* is often heard in Ignatian circles. It means “care of the person”—attention to people’s individual needs and respect for their unique circumstances and concerns.

#### **8. Don’t do it alone.**

Ignatian spirituality places great value on collaboration and teamwork. Ignatian spirituality sees the link between God and man as a *relationship*—a bond of friendship that develops over time as a human relationship does. Collaboration is built into the very structure of the *Spiritual Exercises*; they are almost always guided by a spiritual director who helps the retreatant interpret the spiritual content of the retreat experience. Similarly, mission and service in the Ignatian mode is seen not as an individualistic enterprise, but as work done in collaboration with Christ and others.

#### **9. “Contemplatives in action.”**

Those formed by Ignatian spirituality are often called “contemplatives in action.” They are reflective people with a rich inner life who are deeply engaged in God’s work in the world. They unite themselves with God by joining God’s active labor to save and heal the world. It’s an active spiritual attitude—a way for everyone to seek and find God in their workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

#### **10. “Men and women for others.”**

The early Jesuits often described their work as simply “helping souls.” The great Jesuit leader Pedro Arrupe updated this idea in the twentieth century by calling those formed in Ignatian spirituality “[men and women for others](#).” Both phrases express a deep commitment to social justice and a radical giving of oneself to others. The heart of this service is radical generosity.