

Search Me

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A. Introduction

(Psalm 139:23-24)

Lithuanian border search

At the beginning of 2025, wouldn't it be good if we could be searched regularly?

Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV)

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The poet thus sets the very ground and life of his heart, with all its outward manifestations, in the light of the divine omniscience.

The word rendered searched has a primary reference to searching the earth by boring or digging, as for water or metals. Then it means to search accurately or closely.

How willing am I to be open and vulnerable before GOD, to invite Him in to examine my heart and thoughts and guide me towards a righteous path?

Genesis 3: "Where art thou?"

This is a gracious pursuit of the heart, a journey we go on with God.

Vincent Donovan, in one of his stories about working to contextualize the Gospel within the Maasai Tribe in Kenya, talks about

Their realization that the lion was hunting them!

So how do we search ourselves, or allow God to search us, in order that we can grow as Christians?

Over the centuries, there have been loads of helpful tools, and one that we use is called the examen.

The Examen

The Examen, also known as the "examination of conscience," is a reflective practice that has its roots in Ignatian spirituality, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits.

The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, is probably the only saint with a notarized police record for night-time brawling with an intent to inflict serious harm.¹ Born in the Basque region of

¹ James Martin, SJ *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* (Harper Collins, 2012), p.11

northern Spain, the young Íñigo López de Loyola was focused entirely – as it says in the first sentence of his autobiography - on ‘the vanities of this world’ and ‘a great and foolish desire to win fame.’ He became a soldier, but at the age of 28, his leg was shattered by a cannonball in battle, which left him limping for the rest of his life. Whilst convalescing at his family castle in Loyola, he was dismayed to discover that the only books available to him were religious: one on the life of Jesus and others on the lives of saints. Reluctantly, he began reading but quickly became enamoured by the beauty of Jesus and the heroism of these great men and women of faith. Through these books, Ignatius found himself enthralled with a new vision: to be a knight serving the King of Kings.

Upon recovery, he went to the monastery at Montserrat where, with typical swagger, he removed his armour, laid down his sword, stripped off his finery, and gave his clothes away to the first beggar he met. After that, for a year he himself became a beggar in the nearby town, devoting as much as seven hours a day to prayer in a cave by the Cardoner River. Sitting there one day, he experienced ‘so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new.’ He perceived with ‘a very great clarity’ that the true destiny of humanity is to return home to God in whom alone our souls find peace and joy.

The aspiring saint changed his name, moved to Paris, and gathered a group of six lifelong friends who together formed *The Society of Jesus*. The longevity of these friendships speaks volumes, I believe, about Ignatius’ true character. As does the depth of spiritual insight revealed in his writings and the passion at the heart of his prayer life, from those early days in that cave by the Cardover River to his latter years praying under the stars on the rooftop of his monastery in Rome.

The Examen is something we can look at as a reflective model of prayer designed to help identify God’s voice (and our own sin) in the midst of normal life.

It’s a simple yet profound practice that can help us cultivate deeper spirituality, self-awareness, and gratitude in our daily lives, and it is particularly useful as a tool for self-reflection and allowing God to search us.

The Examen is typically done in the evening as a way to reflect on the events and experiences of the day.

However, it can also be done at any time that suits your schedule. It involves five basic steps, which can be completed in about 20 minutes:

Let’s call it ‘Search Me’

B. Search Me

1. PREPARATION.

(Matthew 6:6)

Find a quiet and comfortable space where you can be alone and undisturbed. Take a few deep breaths to intentionally calm yourself, and try your best to move into a posture of stillness, helping you to become present in the moment.

Matthew 6:6 (NIV)

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

2. **GRATITUDE.**

(Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:17)

Begin by expressing gratitude for the day's blessings. Reflect on the positive experiences, moments of joy, and things you are grateful for. It could be as simple as a smile from a stranger, a delicious meal, or a kind word from a friend.

Cultivating gratitude helps shift our focus from what went wrong to what went well, and it helps us cultivate an **attitude of gratitude.**

Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Gratitude helps stop us from becoming trauma focused.

'What was the best thing about your day?' We switched it....

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This verse encourages us to approach our reflections and prayers with a heart of thanksgiving and to trust in God's peace and guidance, even in times of uncertainty or anxiety.

Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks to God the Father through Him.***

This verse encourages us to approach all our actions and words with a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness, recognizing that everything we do can be an offering to God.

The day I have just lived is a gift from God; be grateful for it.

3. **REVIEW and REFLECT.**

From gratitude, we move on to reviewing the events of the day, the week or a given time period.

Our world is moving fast.

We need to slow down at times.

Recall the various experiences, encounters, and situations you went through. Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and reactions during those moments. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you; He will.

Try to be non-judgmental and objective, observing yourself with curiosity and compassion. (Poem be incredibly gentle with yourself)

*Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.*

John O'Donohue

You can jot down your reflections in a journal or make mental notes.

Reflect: After reviewing the day, take a moment to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Ask yourself questions such as:

What brought me joy today?

What challenged me?

What did I learn?

Where did I sin?

How did I show up in my interactions with others?

Reflecting on your experiences helps you gain insight into your thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, and can lead to self-awareness and personal growth.

"Self-awareness is the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions, thoughts, or emotions do or don't align with your internal standards.

It is wisdom to know others; it is enlightenment to know one's self.

Chinese Philosopher

We don't talk about sin much.

I also face up to what is wrong in me and in my life.

Psalm 95:7b-8a (ESV)

... Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...

1 John 1:8-9 (ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

4. PRAYERFUL INTENTION.

Conclude the Examen with a prayer or an intention. It could be a simple expression of gratitude, a request for guidance, or a commitment to take specific actions in the future.

Talk about Dan and my going and saying sorry.

What is your prayerful intention?

Sometimes it can be to rectify a wrong, repent, say sorry.

Sometimes, it can be to live differently.

To introduce a new practice.

This step helps you integrate your reflections into your spiritual practice and sets the tone for the next day.

James 1: 22-24 (NIV)

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

You can modify the steps or the order in which you do them, and you can practice them as often as you like, depending on your availability and inclination.

The key is to approach it with an open mind and heart and to be honest and compassionate with yourself as you reflect on your experiences.

Conclusion (Search Me)

Preparation

Gratitude

Review and Reflect

Prayerful Intention

My challenge is could you do this at least once this week?