

## Soul Care | *Spiritual Basics for Hungry People* Week 8 – Practice of Prayer

*And it was observed that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen he still preserved his recollection and heavenly mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit. "The time of business," he said, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."*

of Brother Lawrence in, *The Practice of the Presence of God*



### *Corporate Prayer*

"Returning" from Henri Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*

### *Personal Experience*

1. Examen of Consciousness – is an active attention to the work of God in the world.

Recall the beginning of the day when you first woke up. Watch that scene, as if on video, noticing places where God was present comforting you, guiding you, protecting you, indicating his love and care for you, showing you something that you might not have noticed at the time. Do not strain or try to force anything; just see what scenes turn up.

Spend time worshiping God for his activity and provision in your life. Consider elements that might come to mind: his demonstrations in nature (a thunderstorm or the coming spring), health, finances, family, growing relationships, vacations, peace in the home, etc.

Were you listening for the whispers of the Spirit during your day at work, in the home with the kids, along your drive, at the store? Were you responsive to the leading of the Spirit during the day? Pray that you would submit to the Father in the same way that Jesus submitted to the Father, in love and obedience to his will and direction.

2. Examen of Conscience – is an active attention to ourselves and our obedience to God during the day.

Continue the video of your day, going from scene to scene. As you reflect on each scene, some scenes may fill you with gratitude, others with regret as you consider your actions during the day. Try not to resist this or avoid these situations; instead be with God in whatever he is revealing to you. Speak to him directly about these things, celebrating evidence of God's goodness in your life and confessing any sin you become aware of.

As you see faces and relationships in your review, pray for those people and situations. Pray that you would be part of the care, or the reconciliation that is needed in these relationships. Ask God to give you wisdom in caring for the many men and women with whom you come in contact.

## *Prayers of Examen*

Adapted from Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*

[This exercise includes elements of both the examen of consciousness and the examen of conscience.]

### **Preparation**

Spend a few moments in silence, allowing yourself to be still and know how much God loves you. Use a favorite scripture, prayer or other spiritual reading as needed in order to settle into the assurance of God's love in the present moment. Hear God say to you, "I have loved you with an everlasting love..." It is because of Christ that we have a relationship with God, one that welcomes us to the throne of grace. Heb 4:16; John 15:9; Eph 3:11-12

### **Invitation**

Invite God to go with you in your search for evidence of his presence throughout your day and in your search to see your motivations and heart's attention and your sin more clearly.

### **Review the Week**

Identify the major events of the week (or the day, if you are doing the examen in the evening), including your spiritual practices, meals, appointments, interactions with others, significant events at work. Reflect on each of the events, noticing where God seemed to be loving you, speaking to you, guiding you or showing you something new about his character, providence, love, desire, holiness or majesty.

### **Give Thanks**

Thank God for each part of your day, for his presence with you in midst of it, for those moments when you sensed a growing freedom from sin and a greater capacity to love God and others. If there are any unresolved issues or questions pertaining to the vents of the day, express these to God as well, and allow yourself to experience gratitude for God's presence with you even in places that feel dark or confusing.

### **Confess Sin**

Using Psalm 139:23-24 as your prayer, invite God to bring to mind attitudes, actions or moments when you fell short of exhibiting the character of Christ or the fruit of the Spirit. As God brings different areas to mind, reflect on what contributed to the situation and what might enable you to respond to differently in the future.

### **Ask Forgiveness**

Also express your willingness to take any concrete steps needed to allow Christ's character to be more fully formed in you. Be assured of God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and his power to continue leading you into the transformation you desire. Ask God if there is anything you need to do to make things right relative to the situation you have confessed.

### **Live in Freedom**

The sinful self wants to stay in self-loathing, beating itself up before God, living in bondage to sin and shame. Ephesians 2:4-10 reminds us of the immeasurable riches that are ours in Christ, that he died for us while we were still sinners. Will not the God who loved us before the foundation of the earth continue to love us as his very own children? Go in freedom of the gospel giving God worship for his loving-kindness, his faithfulness and his care.

### **Seek out Spiritual Friendship**

Seek out a spiritual friend and tell them what you are discovering about yourself. Tell them your confession and your resolve to pursue transformation in this area in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In this friendship give praise to God for his care for you and how he is directing your life, making you more like his Son.

### *Personal Notes*

We have full confidence that we do not walk the spiritual life alone. God is fully and lovingly present to us, he hears and forgives, provides and guides us in our growth in grace and becoming more like Christ.

Write down thoughts, situations, images, people that come to mind in your time of prayer:

## REVIEW OF THE DAY [Prayers of Examen]

This activity is actually two practices: the *examen of consciousness* and the *examen of conscience*. These two practices are tools that the early church fathers and believers have used for centuries to tune their hearts to what God is doing around them and to consider how they have personally been Christ-honoring throughout the day. The watermark image is a prayer labyrinth found in many medieval cathedrals which many have used in the practice of prayer. The winding path of the labyrinth is similar to our walk in life; we meander, passing familiar places again and again. Participants walk slowly along the path as an aid to reflection, confession, worship and prayer.

### SCRIPTURE:

<sup>1</sup>*Oh Lord you have searched me and known me and are acquainted with all of my way.  
You hem me in behind and before and lay your hand upon me.* Ps. 139:1 [Examen of Consciousness]

<sup>23</sup>*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

<sup>24</sup>*See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* Ps. 139:23-24 [Examen of Conscience]

### PRACTICE:

1. With your posture and environment, take a few moments to be still and quiet your mind.
2. In prayer, acknowledge that God is alive and present and invite him to guide you in the process.
3. The *Examen of Consciousness*: seeing God more clearly throughout the day.

Recall the beginning of the day when you first woke up. Watch that scene, as if on video, noticing places where God was present comforting you, guiding you, protecting you, indicating his love and care for you, showing you something that you might not have noticed at the time. Do not strain or try to force anything; just see what scenes present themselves. Notice your reaction to what you see.

*How was God present with me today? What promptings did I notice? How did I respond or not respond?*

4. The *Examen of Conscience*: seeing ourselves more clearly throughout the day.

This practice is similar to the *Examen of Consciousness*, with the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit we review the activities of the day; our attention is directed toward ourselves and our attitudes. In the *Examen of Conscience* we review our attitudes, our actions, and our words. We compare them with those of Christ. In our discipleship—or Christ-following—we are to be made more like him, reflecting his love and character, and bringing God glory through our actions and attitudes. The Holy Spirit leads us and sustains us in this exercise, showing us how we might respond differently in the future.

In this practice, we *see our sin* from the day, we *name it* what it really is (greed, selfishness, pride, lust, anger, etc.) and finally we *confess it* to God, repent of it and in faith live anew.

5. End your time of examen with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's love and mercy throughout the day and release your cares and burdens to his loving care, share this with a close, spiritual friend.

<sup>6</sup>*If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.*

<sup>7</sup>*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.* <sup>8</sup>*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* <sup>9</sup>*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:6-9.