



Session 6: Prayer of Examen



The word 'examen' is Latin, and literally means to examine.

The Prayer of Examen is a way of reflecting on our life before God on a regular basis. God is always present with us and at work in us; our challenge is to recognise and know what he is trying to do in our lives and to respond with honesty, openness and gratitude. The Prayer of Examen helps us to notice God in the challenges and demands of our everyday life. It teaches us to ask questions like: 'Where is God in this situation? What is God saying to me? What is God trying to teach me through this?' Self-reflection helps us to grow, develop and deepen our relationship with God.

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Psalm 139.118, 2324

You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and you know all about me.

You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven you discover my thoughts.

You notice everything I do and everywhere I go. Before I even speak a word, you know what I will say, and with your powerful arm you protect me from every side.

I can't understand all of this!

Such wonderful knowledge is far above me.

Where could I go to escape from your Spirit or from your sight?

If I were to climb up to the highest heavens, you would be there.

If I were to dig down to the world of the dead you would also be there.

Suppose I had wings like the dawning day and flew across the ocean. Even then your powerful arm would guide and protect me.

Or suppose I said, "I'll hide in the dark until night comes to cover me over."

But you see in the dark because daylight and dark are all the same to you.

You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvellous! Of this I have no doubt. Nothing about me is hidden from you!

I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below, but with your own eyes you saw my body being formed. Even before I was born you had

written in your book everything I would do.

Your thoughts are far beyond my understanding, much more than I could ever imagine. I try to count your thoughts, but they outnumber the grains of sand on the beach.

Setting the scene:

- The key focus of this psalm is God's intimate knowledge of us. We can feel safe about God's scrutiny and knowledge because he loves us, cares for us and is committed to our well-being. How incredible that we can be totally exposed and yet totally accepted.
- The psalmist's response to being known is an impulse is to flee, to run and hide because this is all too much! But there is no escape, there is nowhere dark enough or far enough away to hide.
- Instead of running, he uses the insight into his 'evil ways' to lead and long for God-pleasing ways.

And when I awake, I will find you nearby.
Look deep into my heart, God, and find out everything I am thinking.
Don't let me follow evil ways, but lead me in the way that time has
proven true.

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. How easy do you find it to be yourself with other people?
What do you fear about this? In what ways might it be helpful?

Q2. How do you respond to God knowing, searching and
understanding everything about you?

Group Prayer

During this week, pray for each other to understand more of what it means to be completely known and completely loved by God.

Respond

Prayer of Examen challenge: as a group, create a challenge that will encourage you towards more self-reflection this week, or choose one of the following:

Challenge ideas:

1. Practicing the Presence of God

Turn your attention and thoughts to God as often as you can this week, whatever you are doing and wherever you are. You might like to look up Frank Laubach's book *The Game with Minutes* in which he talks about his experience of seeking to consciously experience the presence of God for as many minutes each day as he could.

2. Journaling

Christians throughout the centuries have found recording their spiritual journey in writing to be of great value. Spiritual journaling can include recording events and interactions with other people, but also an intentional reflection of our journey with God, including the struggles we experience and progress we make. Consider trying to keep a journal of your 'life with God' this week. Continue to journal if you feel this is a helpful practice.

3. The Prayer of Examen

Take time each evening this week to reflect on the highs and lows of the day.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I grateful for this day?
- What am I not grateful for this day?
- Where did I give and receive love in my activities and interactions?
- Where did I withhold love and grace in my activities and interactions?
- Use these brief questions and your responses to form your prayers before you go to sleep.