

Integration Seven

EXAMEN & GRATITUDE JOURNALING

“Look around, look around, at how lucky we are to
be alive right now.”

- Lin-Manuel Miranda

Cultivating gratitude can be a powerful way to live happier lives. From the perspective of Christian faith, it is a response of love to the God who first loved us. One way to do this is through a traditional Catholic practice called the Examen. Popularized by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Examen helps us write down what we are grateful for at the end of a day.

Your **Integration this week is to practice the Examen every night this week.** Set aside a few minutes at the end of each day to follow the steps below. While there are many forms of the Examen to experiment with, the basic steps¹ below are an excellent place to start.

Examples

1. **Express Gratitude:** Write down three things that you are grateful for. These can be big things like celebrating a birthday, or little things like a text from a friend, a nice breeze, or a coworker's laugh.² You can write a word (coffee) or a phrase (grande vanilla lattes at the perfect time of day), but make sure to physically write it down in a journal or a note on your phone. Writing it down can lead to a deeper appreciation and memory of the experiences.³ In addition, it allows you to look back and experience all the little gratitudes again upon reflection.
2. **Review the Day:** Recall your thoughts and actions throughout the day as if you were watching a movie. Try to notice where you felt God's presence.
3. **Seek Forgiveness:** Ask for the grace to know your sins. Where did you fall short of being the best version of yourself today? When did you respond with anger or dismissal? Where did you fail to bother to help others? Ask God for forgiveness for these sins.
4. **Look Forward:** Finish by resolving to amend your faults and mistakes during the following day. Plan out how you can more faithfully grow into the best version of yourself.

There are many versions of the Examen. Different formats work for different people. You can explore some varieties on the [Reimagining the Examen app](#). For a guided audio Examen, try out [Fr. James Martin's daily podcast](#) or [the recordings](#) on the [Pray As You Go app](#) to walk you through the process.

¹ Adapted from pages 7-9 of the [McGrath Institute's Prayer Enrichment Guide](#).

² You can write freely on whatever you notice, or group your journaling into categories like past, present, future, or self, others, and world.

³ Emmons, Robert A., *The Little Book of Gratitude*, pg. 22, loc. 125. Kindle Edition



“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”

Psalm 9:1

Examen & Gratitude Journaling Tips

- **Regularity:** Do the Examen at the same time each day. If helpful, tape a reminder by your bed or sink. Digital reminders can work as well.
- **Variety:** Mix up your list each day to see the different things you are grateful for.
- **Specificity:** Be specific about what you are grateful for; writing “my family” everyday has diminishing returns, but writing about specific traits or experiences with your family can be a continual source of gratitude.
- **Generosity:** In addition to your own life, celebrate the good things happening to other people. When we love, everybody wins.
- **Communication:** Try sharing your gratitude with friends and family, in person or over social media.

Scientific Foundations

“Ingratitude is the
cause, beginning,
and origin of all
evils and sins.”

- St. Ignatius of Loyola

- **Gratitude and Healing:** The practice of gratitude can decrease stress and depression, improve relationships through more frequent forgiveness and expression of thankfulness, and lead to a general increase in self-esteem and well-being.⁴
- **Gratitude and Well Being:** A review of all 24 VIA strengths found that gratitude was by far the single most predictive of a person’s well-being.⁵ In addition, the “three good things” form of gratitude journaling has been shown to improve happiness and well-being.⁶
- **Gratitude and Healthy Relationships:** Grateful people also sleep more, engage in more prosocial behaviors like helping others and volunteering, and in general feel more connected to their community.⁷

⁴ Tannenbaum, Melanie, “[The Health, Happiness, and Heart Helps of Expressing Gratitude](#),” *Scientific American*, 25 Nov. 2015.

⁵ Kaufman, Scott Barry, “[Which Character Strengths Are Most Predictive of Well-Being?](#),” *Scientific American*, 2 Aug. 2015.

⁶ Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005), “[Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions](#),” *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410.

⁷ Research compiled and summarized in “[Gratitude Defined: Why Practice It?](#),” *Greater Good Science Center*, UC Berkeley.