



The great Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt described contemplative prayer as “a long, loving look at the real.”

The examen, a prayer developed over five hundred years ago by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a beautiful way to do that, training our eyes to see the fingerprints of God in our lives. The examen can be practiced with any time period in your life, but today we will be looking back over the summer and looking forward to the fall. There are five steps to the examen, through which you can move at your own pace. Feel free to journal, draw, or pray silently, however it comes most naturally to you. God hears us in any form of expression.

- 1. Begin in quiet, however is most comfortable for you, by acknowledging the loving presence of God.** *Take a few moments to breathe deeply in and out, welcoming the Divine.*

- 2. Imagine your summer as a physical object, perhaps a book or a beautiful stone, held gently in the hands of God.** *As you prepare to look at it more closely, take a moment to give thanks for the gift of your life.*

- 3. As you look back over your summer, take note of the times when you felt close to God, whether in joy or sorrow, and the times when you felt far from God.** *You might take a moment to flip through your photos or journal entries, scan your calendar, or just rely on your memory. Here are some questions to guide you.*
 - What is your first memory of the summer, and your last? Dwell in those moments for a bit, and then consider everything that passed in between them. What is the feeling that arises in you? Contentment, anxiety, longing? There is

no right answer; this is just an opportunity for you to take your emotional temperature about your summer.

- What were the greatest gifts of this summer? And what were the hardest challenges or difficulties?
- If you had to choose one moment in which you experienced the presence of God this summer, what would it be? If you had to choose one moment in which God felt distant, what would it be? Spend some time reflecting on those moments, paying attention to the feelings that arise around them.

4. Turn your focus toward anything you wish you had handled differently this summer. *Remember that this is not an exercise in shame, but an opportunity to ask for God's loving assistance in any area of your life in which you'd like to draw closer to the heart of God..*

5. Turn your gaze to the fall and the future. *Was there anything that God shook loose in you this summer that you want to carry with you into autumn? Here again, there is no right answer. It could be an idea, a curiosity, a spiritual practice, or anything under the sun. Be assured of God's intimate love and knowledge of your life, your heart, and your self.*

After a few moments of quiet, close with this prayer by Teilhard de Chardin, SJ.

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.
Amen.