

## 5. Exploring Prayer: 'Reviewing the Day' – Examen



*Examen* is about self-examination. Think about verses such as these:

'O Lord, you have searched me and known me' (Psalm 139:1).

'Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.

'See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting' (Psalm 139:23-24).

'The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (1 Corinthians 2:10).

Verses like these speak of self-examination and review, but there's nothing guilt-driven about it. Rather, it's life giving, strengthening and empowering. Put simply, it's about reflecting on our daily life and noticing where God shows up – of seeing how the Spirit is working where we might otherwise miss God's activity.

Reviewing our daily life

- gives us a greater sense of God's constant and loving presence in our lives;
- helps us celebrate who God made us to be;
- provides a safe way to see and name areas where we aren't Christ-like;
- helps us become conscious of something we might not otherwise notice – of some way God is working in our lives, perhaps through other people.

This process of prayerful reviewing (*Examen*) has two aspects to it, like the sides of a door. The first is a *review of consciousness* through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to God's love for us. The second aspect is *review of conscience* in which we discover those areas in our life that need forgiving, changing, transforming, healing.

This prayer can be made anywhere, but wherever you undertake it, it's helps to first still yourself and be silent for a while, knowing God's presence. Perhaps use the breathing exercise, or light a candle as a point of focus (a symbol of the light of Christ shining in our lives).

Having stilled yourself and become aware of God's love for you, ask the Spirit to journey with you through your review. 'When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). Ask that you will learn and grow as you reflect, and so deepen your knowledge of self and your relationship with God.

Now go back over the day that's just been. Start with getting up and gradually progress through the day: work, relationships, play, chores and duties etc. Invite God to show you where God was present with you. It's helpful to be concrete. You may, for example, recall the smell of your first cup of coffee, a beautiful sunrise, the visit of a friend, a hug or smile received. Draw on what you have learnt from the prayer of gratitude. Notice what you received.

Some questions you might ask yourself:

- For what am I most grateful today?
- What was the most life enhancing part of today – when did I feel most alive?
- When did I have the greatest connection with God, with others, with myself?
- When did I most receive and give love today?
- When was I happiest?
- What was the day's high point – the best moment?

As you get used to doing this you might find yourself noticing more times when, in retrospect, God was there with you, beside you, working through you, coming to you. You might, for example, see ways you gave to others through your gifts and experience, through an act of kindness, or your sense of humour. You may see how you overcame some difficulty or challenge. Or, looking back you realise that when someone made a hurtful remark you *didn't* snap back. As you move through the details of your day, give thanks for God's presence in the big and the small things of your life.

As you review the day you will also recall times and places where you failed to respond in a Christ-like way. This leads us to the other side of the door: to the *review of conscience*. This is where we recognise the elephant in the inner room of our lives. At first this may seem a little scary, but in the safety that comes with knowing that we are secure in God's love, that we are God's beloved child, we can let this 'shadow' side emerge in God's presence. We begin by seeing God blessing us through the day to seeing ourselves more clearly. This is the priceless gift of self-knowledge: of seeing ourselves for who we truly are.

This part of the prayerful review of the day asks God to help us bring to mind attitudes, actions, and words that fell short of showing Christ-like responses – where we failed 'to be what we claim to be'. Here we acknowledge our sins and failures and open ourselves to God's forgiveness and healing.

Some questions you might ask yourself:

- For what am I least grateful today?
- What parts of the day were life denying – when did I feel life draining out of me?
- When did I have the least connection with God, with others, with myself?
- When did I receive and give the least love today?
- When was I saddest?
- What was the day's low point – the worst moment?

Whatever inadequacies you find in how you lived the day, let them be there before God, for God's Spirit to hover over the chaos, bringing new life, healing and forgiveness, transformation and change.

Finally, end with hope. Look forward to the next day. 'Lord, how will I let you lead me towards a brighter, more loving and life-filled tomorrow?'

This is a process that helps us find God in both the beautiful and difficult experience of daily life. I usually end my day with this review, but it can also be used to reflect on a larger period of time, such as at the end of a job, task or ministry, or over a week or even a year.

*Alister Hendery*

[alisterhendery@clear.net.nz](mailto:alisterhendery@clear.net.nz)