

An Examen for 2024 St. Peter's Chelsea

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 2024 and looking forward to 2025. 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 the past year 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 this season.*

3. As you look back over the past year, take notes 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 want to look at your journal, scroll through the photos on your phone or scan your calendar, or just rely on your memory. Here are some questions to guide you.*

- What is your first memory of 2024 and most recent? Dwell in those moments a bit and then consider what has passed in between them. What is the feeling that arises in you? Contentment, anxiety, longing, stress, gratitude? There is no right answer; this is just an opportunity for you to take your emotional temperature.

- What have been the greatest gifts of 2024? What have been the hardest challenges or difficulties?

- If you had to choose one moment in which you experienced the presence of God at work over the past year, 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 over the past year. *Remember that this is not an exercise in shame, but an opportunity to ask for God's loving assistance in any area that you'd like to draw closer to the heart of God.*

5. Turn your gaze toward 2025. Was there anything that God has imparted to you from the past year that you'd like to carry with you into the next season? *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 you.*

Adapted from An Examen for The Turning of the Seasons

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THE YEAR AS A HOUSE
A Blessing by Jan Richardson

Think of the year
as a house:
door flung wide
in welcome,
threshold swept
and waiting,
a graced spaciousness
opening and offering itself
to you.

Let it be blessed
in every room.
Let it be hallowed
in every corner.
Let every nook
be a refuge
and every object
set to holy use.

Let it be here
that safety will rest.
Let it be here
that health will make its home.
Let it be here
that peace will show its face.
Let it be here
that love will find its way.

Here
let the weary come
let the aching come
let the lost come
let the sorrowing come.

Here

let them find their rest
and let them find their soothing
and let them find their place
and let them find their delight.

And may it be
in this house of a year
that the seasons will spin in beauty,
and may it be
in these turning days
that time will spiral with joy.
And may it be
that its rooms will fill
with ordinary grace
and light spill from every window
to welcome the stranger home.