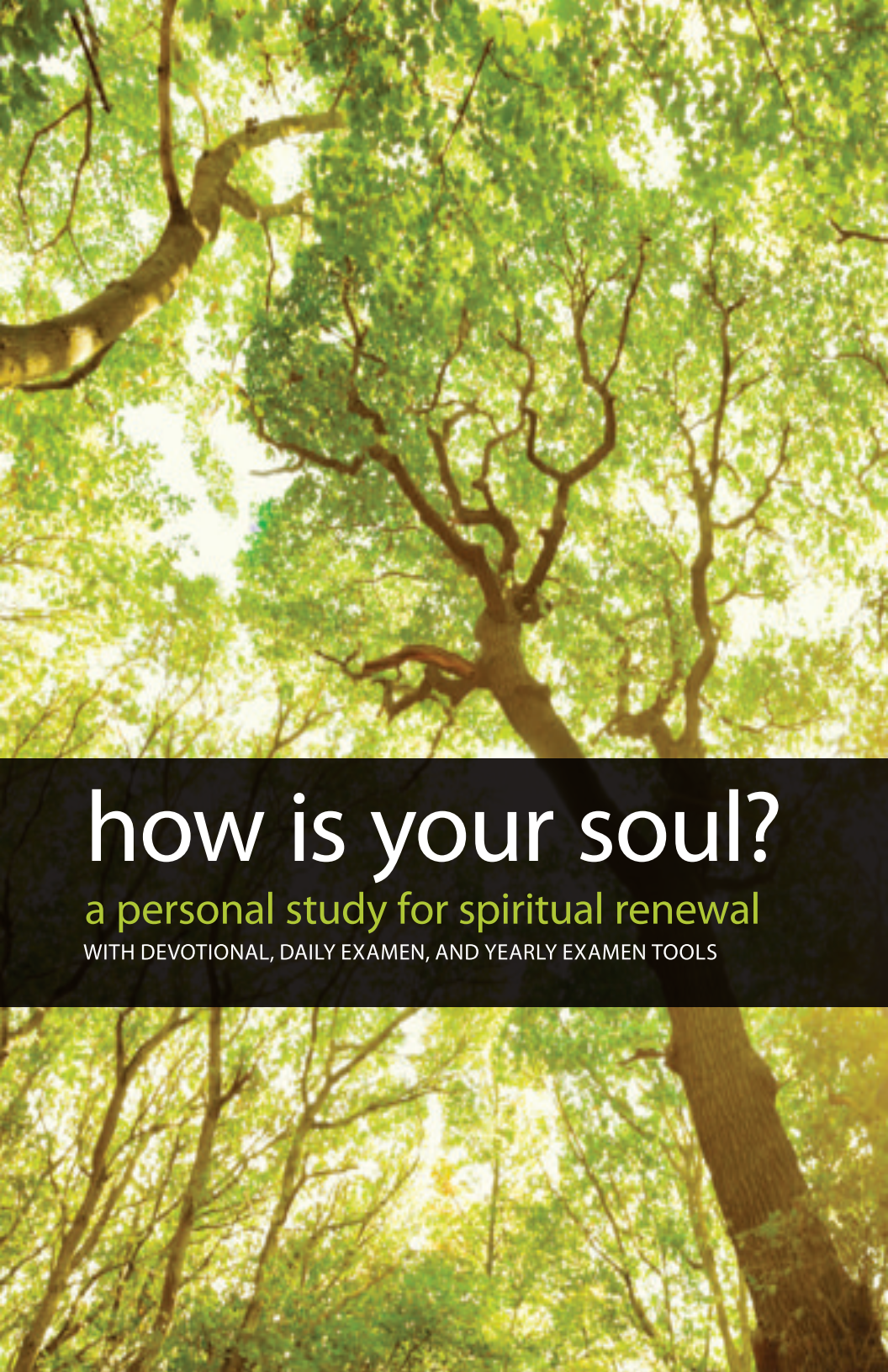


how is your soul?

a personal study for spiritual renewal

WITH DEVOTIONAL, DAILY EXAMEN, AND YEARLY EXAMEN TOOLS



"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY
AND BURDENED, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."
- JESUS

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A RESOURCE FROM VINEYARD USA
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vineyard usa

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Quotes from Ignatius, Brother Lawrence, and Lewis are from: Foster, Richard and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics, Revised Edition: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005.

Quote from Augustine is from: Chadwick, Henry. *Confessions*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1991.

Quote from Susanna Wesley is from: Wikipedia.org

Written by Dan Wilt, M.Min.

Why this little book?

Many years ago, a mentor and spiritual father in my life asked me a question I will never forget. "How is your soul, Phil?" he would ask in his deep, radio-sounding voice.

That question has stayed with me all of these years, and now I'd like to pose it to you – *"How is your soul?"*

The Spirit of God has used this simple question in my own life to set me on a personal, family, and leadership course that to this day I do not regret. If you and I will put our intimate relationship (*presence*) with Jesus first – daily, weekly, yearly, and across our lifetime – I think we may see more and more of what God has intended for us.

How Is Your Soul? is a booklet that is designed to encourage you, renew you, and empower you to live a life full of the Spirit's love – and a life energized by the Spirit's presence.

Along with 4 studies that address key areas of your personal life, family life, work life, and calling, you'll also find a Daily and Yearly Examen to help you keep asking the right questions consistently. Other tools, with historical voices on spiritual formation, will help to focus your spiritual life for the journey ahead.

How is your soul? I pray that you grow stronger through this resource.

Phil Strout
National Director, Vineyard USA

spiritual growth happens.

Like a tree, we are always growing. How healthily we are growing, however, is another matter. In a small seedling is all the DNA that will architect its rise into a majestic, living pillar – a *tree*. Rooting itself in the rich humus of the forest floor, that seedling is prepared to grow – but not all the ingredients for growth are found within itself. Water from the soil and the skies will feed its hunger, captured by leaves and feeder roots stretching for their supply. Minerals in the rich earth, offered by the life and death of the community of trees around it, will nurse it to full stature.

Psalm 1 tells us that we are "*...like a tree*" (Ps. 1:3). In other words, the water we drink and the minerals we gather all play a part in shaping our character into the likeness of Christ. For those of us who have decided that following Christ is the only way to be truly human, how we stretch out our roots in prayer, study, self-care, community life, and mission all have something to do with our growth. *Personal spiritual development is intentional; it is a daily choice, on which the Spirit breathes.*

This little book is a tool to help you on your unique path to full spiritual stature in Christ (Eph. 4:13). Use it for a season, and use it for a lifetime. Use it personally, or with a small group. More than anything, use it to help you grow in intimacy with Jesus. Bless you as you care for your soul.



How To Use *How Is Your Soul?*

1. **Read one section, once a week, for one month.** This is a 4 week experience, one topic/week.

2. **Use the Daily Examen each night**. The Daily Examen has 5 questions. According to the week you are on in the study, you will add that week's question to the Daily Examen. I.e. 6 questions total.

3. **At the end of 7 days, thank Jesus** for speaking to you on that topic, and journal fresh insights.

4. **Use the Yearly Examen once a year** to reflect on the past year, and to prepare your heart for the year ahead. If desired, use it twice a year to stay on track.

5. **Use the Morning and Evening Prayer** section, each day, as a tool to inspire your own prayers.

your interior life

Ignatius of Loyola was born into wealth, in a castle in Spain in 1491. A child of privilege, he couldn't buy his way out of the wars that were stirring in his lifetime. Sent to fight with France in 1524, Ignatius was wounded in the leg and sent to recuperate. As he recuperated, he read books such as *The Life Of Christ* and Thomas a'Kempis' *The Imitation Of Christ,* as well as stories of Saint Francis. Led to a profound conversion experience, Ignatius' life calling has transformed the church to date.

Ignatius devoted his days to training people to care for their interior life with Christ. This is the life we live on the *inside*, that can often be cluttered by (and even confused with) our "*exterior"* life of activity. He suggested that our souls "move" in and out of two states – *consolation* and *desolation.*

Hear Ignatius' own words as he talks about the movements of our soul: *"I call it consolation when the soul is aroused by an interior movement which causes it to be inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord and consequently can love no created thing in this world for its own sake, but only in the Creator of all things. ...I call consolation any increase of faith, hope, and charity and any interior joy that calls and attracts to heavenly things, and to the salvation of one's soul, inspiring it with peace and quiet in Christ our Lord.*

I call desolation all that is contrary to [consolation], as darkness of soul, turmoil of the mind, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from many disturbances and temptations which leads to loss of faith, loss of hope, loss of love. It is also desolation when a soul finds itself completely apathetic, tepid, sad, and separated as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation" (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, p. 194).

Bring your interior life to Jesus – and welcome Him to root and establish your identity in His love for you. As your soul becomes tuned to His love, your faith and hope will increase over time.



1. how is your soul?

EXAMINE YOUR LIFE

Ask the questions of the heart.

When is the last time you took a moment, a deep breath, and allowed your heart to tell you its condition?

In Luke 6:45, Jesus addresses the heart, or the spirit, and how it shapes our actions. He says, *"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."*

We are truly creatures of the heart. What is going on inside, eventually finds its way out. The quality of the desires that we allow to rule our hearts end up flowering into thoughts, actions, habits, character, and a lifetime destiny. Tending to our heart is a vital, daily task of the Christian.

Mother Theresa was a little woman, with a big heart. Like a small, dense planet, that has more gravitational pull than a large, gaseous one, her intimacy with Jesus made her actions meaningful, dense, and powerful.

Ignatius understood that our souls get distracted and disoriented in the course of any given day. Our actions go awry. We all have a need to be re-oriented to our love relationship with Jesus day in and day out. Reading the Scriptures, quieting our hearts, worshipping with others, praying, and doing the Daily Examen (p. 17) are all habits that will keep our heart on track.

When we stop, daily, to listen to God's whispers, we can recalibrate and recollect our fragmented soul.

PRAYER

For a quiet heart and mind.

Spirit of God, my soul can fluctuate between faith and fear, moment to moment. I choose to pursue intimate communion with you as my daily remedy. Let your Presence center me, displacing turmoil, fear, and anxiety. In Jesus' name, I ask this. Amen.

QUESTION

Add to your Daily Examen.

Am I finding my identity in my relationship with Jesus, or increasingly in my tasks, relationships, ministry, or vision?

Going Deeper: *Am I taking the time to unclutter my physical and spiritual life? Am I at peace in my intimacy with Christ, secure in my identity, and fastened by love to His designs and purposes? Do I sense inner turmoil leading me, or am I centered, substantial, and filled?*

your family life

Susanna Wesley, the mother of the famous John and Charles Wesley, is considered by many to be a preeminent voice in spiritual formation history on parenting and family. With a primary focus on shaping the character and vocation (calling) of her children, Susanna did whatever she could to integrate a rich spiritual life into her daily routine. She and her husband, Samuel, had 19 children. Only 10 of their children grew to maturity (the 9 others died in infancy).

In writing to her husband, she once said *"I am a woman, but I am also the mistress of a large family. And though the superior charge of the souls contained in it lies upon you, yet in your long absence I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my charge as a talent committed to me under a trust. I am not a man nor a minister, yet as a mother and a mistress I felt I ought to do more than I had yet done. I resolved to begin with my own children...."*

In other words, Susanna saw her immediate family of her spouse and children as her "First Church." She didn't wait for someone to ordain her – she knew that God had given her a sacred trust in her family. She set her life's goal to *"train up a child in the way [s]he should go"* (Prov. 22:6), and to care for their needs with the care of Christ. She saw herself as a steward of their talents, and one who would carry their destiny to God in prayer on a daily, moment-by-moment basis.

Her son, John, went on to become one of the premier voices of faith in his generation. Charles wrote over 8000 hymns in his lifetime, many of which have shaped the faith of millions.

Bring your family life to Jesus – and invite Him to teach you how He would desire you to disciple and train your family in the ways of love, grace, and faith.



2. how is your family?

YOUR FIRST CHURCH

Tend carefully to your family.

When a family member looks into your eyes, do they feel like they are the most important person in your life?

The Scriptures have much to say about family life. In Ephesians 5 and 6, we hear words that address husbands, wives, and children. *"However, each one of you [husbands] also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband"* (Eph. 5:23). *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right"* (Eph. 6:1). *"...Do not exasperate your children..."* (Eph. 6:4).

Across faith history, families were not only considered to be the central unit of society for the development of good citizens. They were spiritual greenhouses in which character, identity, and a blossoming faith were nurtured on a daily basis.

The great reformer Martin Luther saw daily family life, rather than a church building, as being the pivotal learning center for the spiritual development of children. Marriage, in his view, was the training ground of the Christian.

Tending to our families is not an easy task. Everyone in a family has needs, dreams, and a unique calling that demands "sacred care" from those who will walk with them across a lifetime in their role as a family member. When we begin to see our family as our "First Church," as Susanna Wesley did, we can care for one anothers' needs knowing that God and all of heaven will back us up as we disciple these souls entrusted to our care.

Tend carefully to your family, and give them your very best energies as you cultivate your own life of faith.

PRAYER

For a quiet heart and mind.

Spirit of God, I place my family in Your capable hands right now. As a [insert your role in a family member's life], I look to you for strength to love, serve, and cherish each person as you do. Help me to be present to them, aware of their needs, and a joint partner in seeing Your highest plans for them fulfilled. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

QUESTION

Add to your Daily Examen.

> *What is the greatest dream I have right now, that I believe is from God's heart, for one member of my family? How can I participate with God in the fulfillment of that dream in their lives?*
>
> Going Deeper: *How can I pray for my church family? My extended family?*

your active life

Brother Lawrence is perhaps the most famous historical voice we have today on the integration between work life and one's prayer life. This simple monk, born into poverty in the 1600s, went on to become a community member in the Discalced Carmelite Order in Paris, France. Here, Lawrence labored in the kitchen, cooking for the community of which he was a part. In his mind, he was a servant of the servants of God, and this perspective placed a golden hue on every small task of kitchen work that was his duty.

Lawrence seems to have anticipated both our spiritual need and the stresses of our age when he speaks the following: *"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament (ed. note: communion)"* (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, p. 369).

With the turn of a phrase, Brother Lawrence is inviting all who name Christ as Lord to learn what it means to concentrate all the fragments of our work day into one sacred, holy act of worship. He calls us to see our work as a privilege rather than a burden, turning our attention to serving and enhancing the lives of others through each diverse task to which we put our hands.

Bring your active life to Jesus – and allow Him to reshape your work life as a vivid, profound, and enriching act of both service and worship.



3. how is your work?

WE WORK TO GIVE

Carry Jesus into your world.

Carrying Christ in us, into the world of our work, is like carrying a lion into Times Square – you never know what is going to happen.

Colossians 3:17 says *"...And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

Whether you are a stay-at-home mom, an insurance salesman, a famous record producer, a pastor, a student, a contractor, or an employee at Starbucks – you have been given a sphere of influence through your *work life.*

Work is what we do, often, because we must. We must eat. We must keep up our homes. We must care for the people we love with the resources we gain from working. We must work to live. It's been that way for human beings, for a long, long time.

However, the meaning of that work for the Christian is quite different than the meaning of work for a person who doesn't acknowledge Christ as Lord. From the beginning of creation, God's people have had a call to beautify and enhance the world through our fruitful labor. We're not looking simply to our own benefit as we do the tasks we have been given – we are looking to see others loved, served, encouraged, and provided for through the spending of our energies. We aren't after money; we're after the pleasure and joy of God.

While not all of us have a job situation that we love (we may even, at present, hate our job), the passage above calls us to see our work as an act of thankful worship – bringing glory and fame to Jesus as we express our attitudes, words, and work ethic in the world.

PRAYER

For a quiet heart and mind.

Spirit of God, each day you invite me to turn my energies to fruitful work – some that serves to provide for us, and some that serves to enrich our lives in other ways. Give me eyes to see my current work from Your perspective. Receive my work as an expression of my worship, and show Yourself to me within it. In Jesus' name, I come. Amen.

QUESTION

Add to your Daily Examen.

Do I love the work I did today, or do I resent it? Why?

Going Deeper: *Could there be meaning behind my work, be it in my home or other environment, that I am presently missing because of attitudes in my own heart?*

your missional life

C.S. (Jack) Lewis is a name that is not unfamiliar to most Christians. The famous novelist, academic, and Christian apologist from Belfast, Northern Ireland injected a rich vision of the spiritual life into the 20th century Body of Christ through his books (*The Chronicles Of Narnia*, *Mere Christianity*, *A Grief Observed*), sermons (*The Weight Of Glory*), and radio broadcasts.

Lewis had much to say, and model for us, related to finding and following our "calling" in Christ. The word "vocation" is from the Latin word *vocātiō*, which means "a call, or summons." When speaking of the general vocation (or calling) of the Christian, and the specific vocation of an individual, Lewis was quick to affirm the challenge we face every day as many voices call out to us for our attention:

"That is why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in" (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, p. 9).

Cultivating a life that hears God's voice, His "calling" to us, is a daily challenge. We have many opportunities to be distracted by the voice of the television, the news, the last trauma we faced, the negative scripts running in our mind from our childhood, and the duties that require our energy.

However, a life that prioritizes hearing God's call at the beginning of every day, through His Word and by His Spirit, will begin to understand how God's call is specifically shaped by, and expressed through, our unique personality, gifts, and skills.

Bring your missional life to Jesus – and allow Him to renew your memory each day about your personal mission, calling, sense of purpose, and vocation as a follower of Christ.



4. how is your calling?

JOIN GOD'S FUTURE

Jesus calls you to His mission.

Do you have a mission in life – or does a mission have you?

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus delivers some profound words related to our individual calling: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

In a day when our sense of "calling" is often rooted in our need to feel special and unique, isn't it odd that Jesus, in this passage above, seems to give every Christian that ever lived *the very same calling*?

John Wimber, the leader of the Vineyard movement, once suggested that while everyone is running around looking for their unique calling, their unique ministry – all along it is sitting right in front of them in the Gospels. The work of Jesus is our calling – to love the unlovable, serve our enemies, care for the poor, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, equip the saints, and do the works of the Kingdom.

Each of us is made in the glorious image of God, and we are very, very special. Our special reflection of God's heart is shaped by our genetics, personality, upbringing, way of thinking, skill set, inclinations, and natural giftedness. It is all precious to Him.

Through our individual design, God will lead us to delightful and stunning opportunities to extend His loving Kingdom, shaping true disciples who have tasted the love of God through us in our homes, workplaces, and unique spheres of influence.

PRAYER

For a quiet heart and mind.

Spirit of God, it is Your Voice I desire to hear above the din of all others clamoring for my attention. Give me ears to hear Your daily calling on my life as a follower of Jesus, and in my specific role in Your mission to love the world to wholeness. I choose to obey; speak and I will both listen and respond. In Jesus' name, I offer myself to you. Amen.

QUESTION

Add to your Daily Examen.

Is there much about who God is, and who I am, that I have yet to discover?

Going Deeper: *What do I do, that when I do it, I feel the pleasure of God? What do I do that makes me come alive, and also deeply impacts others in my family and community?*

MORNING PRAYER

To Start Your Days

Good morning, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Once again, You give me breath, and welcome me into a wild world in which You are living, active, speaking, and pursuing the hearts of humankind.

Let me be Your voice today to those in my family, to those with whom I work, and to those who I touch in any way.

Find in me a fitting sanctuary for Your Presence, and work through me to heal, renew, inspire, encourage, and impact those to whom You send me.

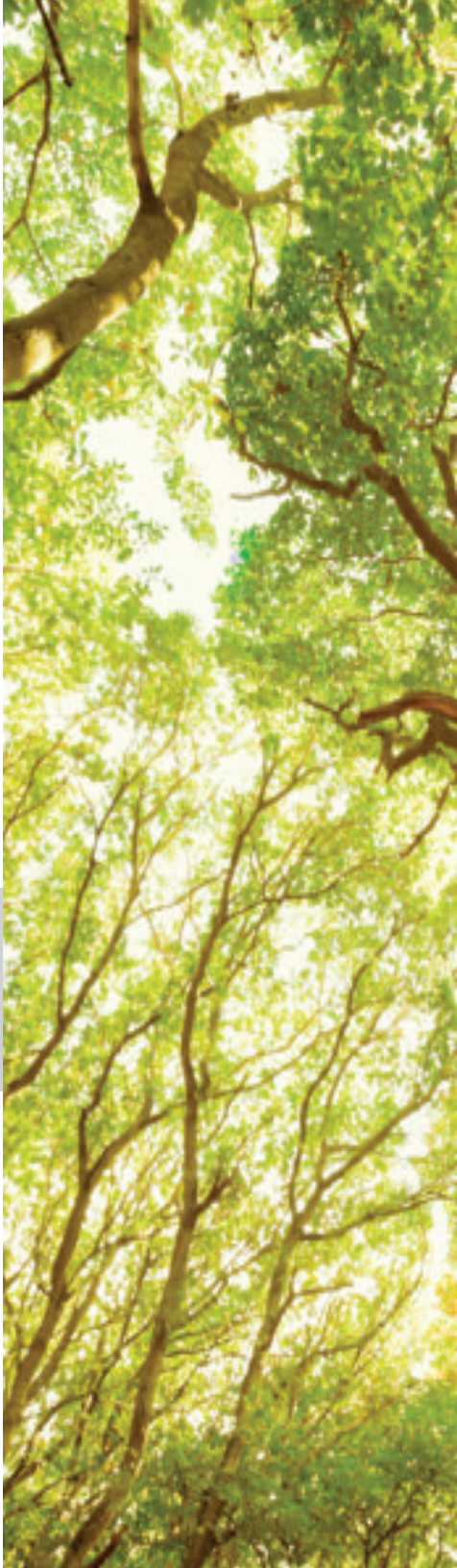
I choose faith over fear, believing in Your promises. Have Your way in me today; come Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' living name, I come. Amen.

MORNING PSALM

Psalm 23:1-3

"The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake."





EVENING PRAYER

To Conclude Your Days

Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Once again, You have shown Yourself to be faithful and true to Your promises through the moments and hours of this day.

You have spoken, and I turn my heart to listen as I rest. You have acted, and I turn my heart to see what You accomplished today. You have loved me well in body and soul, and for this I am eternally grateful.

Let your Grace and Presence both surround and embrace those I love as they sleep. I bring each one to you now [pray here for family members, friends, and those in need of healing].

I sleep now, in Your loving care.

In Jesus' living name, I come. Amen.

EVENING PSALM

Psalm 55:22

"Cast your cares on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken."

growing forward

How do we keep growing, day by day and week by week, as a Christian? Ignatius of Loyola, many centuries ago, asked this same question. Ignatius knew that human beings are deeply emotional creatures, as well as being thoughtful, and physical. To create a "cleansing, thanking, and evaluating" time for each day, he developed what is called the *Daily Examen*.

The Daily Examen is a series of simple questions that helps us to see the Spirit's work in the day we just completed, and to expect the Spirit's work in the day ahead. We examine our souls before God, and then turn our heart to gratefulness, joy, repentance, hope, and trust for tomorrow.

The attitude in which we best approach the Daily Examen is one of love for God and gratefulness for His deep work in our lives. That spirit is captured in these words from the great Augustine of Hippo, at the historic moment of his conversion:

"*Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! Lo, you were within, but I outside, seeking there for you, and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong, I, misshapen. You were with me but I was not with you. They held me back far from you, those things which would have no being were they not in you. You called, shouted, broke through my deafness; you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace*" (Chadwick, *Confessions*, x.27, p. 201).

This Daily Examen is adapted from many variations of Ignatius' original. While in this booklet an "Additional Question," is added, once you have completed the study the 5 simple questions here will serve you for a lifetime. Take your time, and give about 15 minutes at the close of your day to this spiritual exercise.



daily examen



1 Stillness

Become aware of the Presence of God. Quiet your heart, and listen. In this moment, become present to Jesus.



2 Gratitude

Review your day with gratitude. Seeing through a lens of thanks, appreciate God's gifts in each event of the day.



3 Reflection

Become aware of your emotions. Review your positive and negative feelings. Did you choose Jesus' way in each situation?



4 Joy & Sorrow

Choose one feature of the day, and pray. Rejoice in a success, or ask forgiveness for sin. If necessary, plan to make amends.



5 Hope

Look toward tomorrow. Move toward expectation. Ask God to shine light on tomorrow's path. Resolve to grow.



Additional Question

Go to the weekly section you are in, and look at the question on the page. Answer this question as honestly as you can. Reorient your heart to God's desires for you, and welcome His Holy Spirit to transform your desires to match His.

spiritual rhythms

Life is full of rhythms, and they can be very useful when caring for our souls.

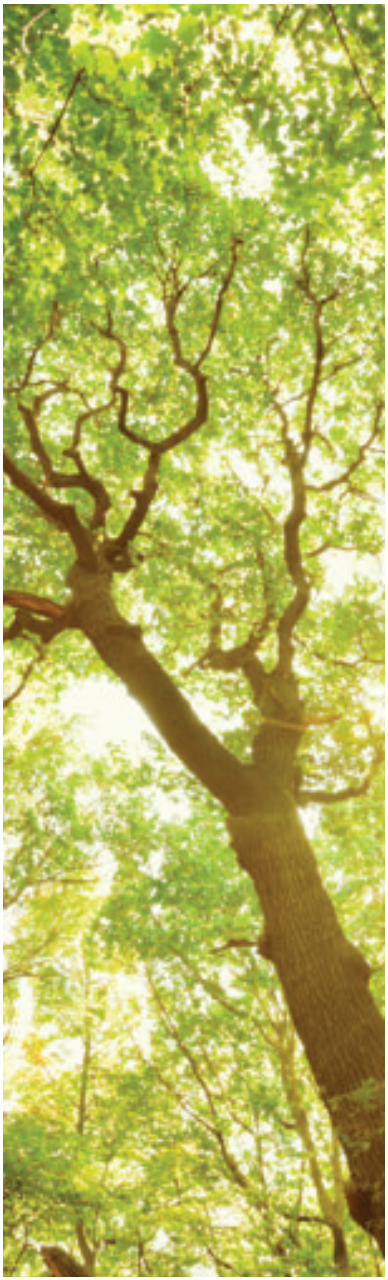
At the end of each year that passes, and at the beginning of every New Year, we have much to consider. Perhaps a great loss in your life occurred, that has redefined your priorities and given you pause as you look to the future. Conversely, a great success may have marked your year – and you are wondering how you will navigate the unexpected times that may be ahead.

The New Year is an optimal, appropriate time for a guided reflection. This Yearly Examen was designed to be used at any time you sense a page has turned in life.

Allow the Spirit to illumine the year past, and ahead, through these questions.



yearly examen



1 Stillness

Become aware of the Presence of God. Quiet your heart, and listen. In this moment, become present to Jesus.

Now, begin to reflect over this past year. Ask the Spirit of God to begin to lift out moments in each season that impacted you.

Jot them down in your journal.

2 Gratefulness

Review your year with gratitude.
Seeing through a lens of thanks, appreciate God's gifts in each event of the year that has come to the surface.

Now, take the time to give thanks for God's presence in each event, for comfort in distress, for courage found, or for an opportunity to be Jesus to someone.

Write a prayer of thanks for the past year.

3 Hope

Look toward tomorrow.
Move toward expectation. Ask God to shine light on this next year and the path ahead. Resolve to grow.

Now, take the time to talk to God about the New Year, and your hopes and dreams. Ask Him to make His dreams your own.

Journal any ideas you have for growing spiritually this next year, and any commitments you're willing to make toward that growth. When done, consider sharing them with someone close.



The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and neighbor-love, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family. To find out more about the Vineyard, visit www.vineyardusa.org.

FOR MORE RESOURCES LIKE THIS, VISIT WWW.VINEYARDRESOURCES.COM