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# Examen

Examination of Consciousness  
(adapted by Fr. Brendan McGuire)

Spend 20 minutes at the end of each day thinking, praying, and recording the Examen. Use the below as a model of steps:

1. Pray the exercise of nine breaths to relax and invite God into our space.
2. Ask Jesus to open your eyes to see as God sees your day.
3. Ask Jesus to guide you to the moments of blessing of the day; ask God to lead you to the graces He showered upon you in that day. Try to name three moments of grace that you witnessed that day. It can be an action, thought, event, or encountering a person. Record the three moments in your journal with a word, phrase or few sentences.
4. Look for the *movement of the Good Spirits (pattern of virtue)*. Here you are seeking to identify the pattern of behavior or mindset that led you to experience the blessings or moments of grace. Ask Jesus to direct your mind to the pattern that he sees. Go where he leads you. There is no judgment here; just observe what led up to the moment of grace. Record the *pattern of virtue* in your journal with a few sentences.
5. Look for the *movement of the Evil Spirits (pattern of vice)*. Here you are seeking to identify the pattern of behavior or mindset that led you to experience the negative moments of the day or times when you were not your best self. Maybe there was a temptation or thought that recurs or maybe there was an action that led you astray. Again, there is no judgment here; just observe what led up to the moment of temptation or weakness or sin. It is very important that one be gentle with oneself and ask Jesus to direct your mind to the pattern that he sees. Go only where he leads you. Record the *pattern of vice* in your journal with a few sentences.
6. Give thanks to God for the grace of your prayer.

**Daily:** Write in your journal the thoughts you just prayed.

**Weekly:** Read over the journal entries of the last week and examine the pattern of the week for the movement of goodness and movement of weakness. Then ask the Lord how you can address any potential ways to modify actions or thoughts to make changes in your life. Be gentle with yourself and do not take any big steps; only baby steps of adjustments. Listen to Jesus. Verify it is Jesus you are listening by asking Mary to verify it is Jesus' voice.

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## Prayer Exercise: Nine Breaths

This is a simple and quick way to be attentive to God's presence in our lives and simply slow down enough to silence our minds. Here's how to do it:

1. Make ourselves comfortable in a place that is as free from interruptions as possible.
2. We close our eyes and begin to focus all our attention on our breathing in and out.
3. Inhale and exhale slowly 3 times
4. Inhale and exhale slowly another 3 times inaudibly saying,
  - a. Jesus—as we inhale
  - b. I love you—as we exhale
5. Inhale and exhale slowly another 3 times without words
6. Open our eyes and continue with our prayer or activity

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## Praying Through Distractions: Logs on the River

It is often the case that when we sit to pray that we have many thoughts that go through our mind. Thoughts about your spouse, children, friends or about your work situation or the many other concerns that pass through our minds. It is sometimes hard to settle these thoughts and we can get consumed by them. This methodology should help deal with the more routine distractions.

1. Make ourselves comfortable in a place that is as free from interruptions as possible.
2. Pray the exercise of nine breaths to relax and invite God into our space.
3. Open our hands wide in acceptance of his invitation to be in God's presence.
4. When the distractions appear, and they will not leave or lessen.
5. Then imagine ourselves sitting on the side of a river watching the water flow by.
6. Notice the large logs floating down the river.
7. Each log represents one of our distracting thoughts.
8. We may look at the log, examine it, and even name it if we want, but do not attempt to take the log out of the water.
9. We might even want to briefly stop the log to examine it, but we must kick it back out into the fast-flowing river.
10. There are other logs behind it and if we stop it then the logs will pile up into a logjam and the water will eventually stop flowing freely.
11. Now imagine ourselves sitting at the bank of the river, watching all these logs floating on by, each representing one of our thoughts.
12. Now notice the flowing river and the power of the water and see that the logs are carried by the power of that river.
13. In the same way, the power of the Holy Spirit will carry our thoughts and distractions away down the river of prayer.
14. Continue with our prayer or activity.