

WHEN CRISIS STRIKES: 5 STEPS FOR PRAYING WHEN YOU'RE OVERWHELMED

INTRODUCTION

In his [Spiritual Exercises](#), St. Ignatius of Loyola provided the Examen as a five-step tool for reflection. The focus of this tool is to heighten your awareness of God's presence in the experiences of your daily life. This adapted Examen is a tool for reviewing and processing your situation following a crisis. This retreat is not intended as a substitute for seeking mental health support after a situation of loss or crisis, but instead is an opportunity to process the experience through the lens of faith. As you move through this retreat, consider writing down your thoughts or feelings in a journal.

STEP 1: FIND A SAFE AND QUIET PLACE TO BECOME AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Recent events may seem to be swirling around you. Honor your own beauty and dignity by stepping away to breathe. Jesus told us that there is a time to "Come away ... all by yourselves and rest a while" ([Mark 6:31](#)). You could say something like "God, help me to calm the storm in my heart and mind so that I can hear your voice and feel your peace."

STEP 2: REVIEW WHAT HAS OCCURRED THROUGH THE LENS OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. In every situation, even the most difficult, we are given gifts. Maybe God's gift to you was your safety, or hearing a loved one's voice, or the feeling of the sun on your face. Tell your story of the recent overwhelming event to God.

Begin when you first became aware of the situation that is now affecting you. When did you first hear about/know that this crisis situation was going to affect you? What were your first thoughts and feelings? Then what occurred? Pay attention to the emotions that are evoked as you tell the story to God. What are the little details that stand out to you that you may not have noticed before? God is speaking in those details. Who are the people that you interacted with during the crisis situation?

As you think about them, how do you feel? The story will take various turns; continue to share with God in your mind and heart. As you move closer to the present in the story, how have your thoughts and feelings changed?

STEP 3: PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS RECOGNIZING THEY ARE SACRED

St. Ignatius embraced emotion. He believed that the presence of the Holy Spirit became clearly revealed in the emotions that are evoked when we reflect on our experiences. As you reflected

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on your story, what were the emotions you felt? Where were they stronger than others? What were the moments when the feelings that surfaced surprised you? Can you pinpoint one or two moments or interactions where emotion arose from within you? Thank God for speaking to you through those emotions.

STEP 4: ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO YOUR OPEN HEART

Now that a couple of moments have been pinpointed where feelings surfaced in the recent situation, you can pray to receive insight from these experiences. Allow the Holy Spirit to direct you toward one or two moments, images, or feelings that God is calling you to examine with greater intensity. It could be one word or phrase that someone said to you. It could be your emotional reaction to something that occurred. It could be a tiny detail that you think no one else noticed. As you hold that moment or feeling in your heart, words of prayer may begin to form around that experience. Let the prayer grow.

Somewhere in your reflection on this recent crisis situation, God is providing you with messages. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, begin to look for those messages in the emotions, images, and interactions during the crisis situation. What can you learn about yourself? What might some of the messages be that can be taken away from the experience? What is God whispering to you in your heart?

STEP 5: LOOK TOWARD TOMORROW

These messages have been given to us as a gift from God. When waves of stress and crisis are crashing over us, it is difficult to see the shoreline. Having embraced the truth in emotion and extracted messages, however, we now can choose our next destination. You are now seeing the shoreline more clearly. You are strengthened to look forward to the future. How can you incorporate the wisdom that has been given to you into the next steps of your journey? Ask God to provide you with strength for the challenges that lie ahead. Pray this prayer: "God, in the next few hours and days, please help me to ..."

Address any concerns that are in your heart about the next steps of your journey in prayer. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. Recognize with gratitude that you are loved and never alone as you walk forward on your journey.

END THE EXAMEN WITH THE OUR FATHER OR PRAY QUIETLY IN YOUR OWN WAY.