



# How To Notice What God Is Doing

A series of examens to prepare your heart for

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# What Is An Examen?

An examen is a prayerful review of the day that focuses your attention on the movements of God in your life. By reflecting on the events of the last several hours, you can look for moments where you felt more alive and connected to God and others. You'll also notice the events that caused you to withdraw or experience anxiety, restlessness, or frustration. Practiced daily, they help you notice patterns that may confirm and clarify your vocational calling.

In this season of your life, you're wrestling with many questions as you navigate the various options for your vocation. In the following seven examens, you will be guided on a journey of deep, inner awareness to notice God's love for you, the movements of your own heart, the things that affect you negatively, your connection to others in community, the ways you give the best part of who you are, what is important to you, and what you want to be about. We pray that these exercises might establish some foundational practices that can aid you in discerning and noticing God's movement in your life, to begin to create a framework for healthy discernment upon which a larger discernment process can rest.

## By Leaders of the Order of Sustainable Faith

The Order of Sustainable Faith is a missional monastic expression committed to the work of the Kingdom of God. It exists to provide solidarity among those within the Vineyard Movement who desire to move more deeply into the contemplative life. Members seek to take the best of both mendicant orders (Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans) and cloistered orders (Benedictines, Cistercians, Carmelites) and embody what they can of each, as the Spirit leads, and as we discern together his leading. To learn more go to <http://www.sustainablefaith.com/theorder/>.

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# Noticing God's Love For Me

## Identity: Who has God made me?

By Eric Nicolaysen, Des Moines, IA

As I begin this series of Examen prayers and in this moment of prayer in particular, how am I being received as I arrive?

I may be focused on my own condition as I arrive to prayer now. Perhaps I'm excited or tired, full of longing, or uncertainty. My condition is important, but it is not my starting point. My beginning has to do with my reception, and my reception depends entirely on the One receiving me.

I remember reunions of people - friends, family, spouses - that I've both witnessed and experienced in airport terminals. They are often characterized by eager anticipation just before and an abundance of joy upon reunion. Before I even go to prayer, I bring to mind that God has been eagerly anticipating this moment when I arrive at prayer. God is receiving me with great love and full attention, such that I'm able to relax into my identity as his beloved child.

What a good gift I've been given!

## Questions for Reflection

1. As I arrive to prayer remembering the welcome and embrace of God for me. What does this welcome embrace feel like today?
2. If my heart or mind are in the grip of any pressing thoughts or feelings, can I let go of those as I open myself to God now? I may want to open my hands, signaling my surrender of these thoughts or feelings.
3. Was there any time in my day where I felt the welcome of God?
4. When did I feel most loved today? Sometimes the love of God comes to us through another person.
5. When did I feel most out-of-tune with who I am as God's child?
6. How did I relate and respond to others today? Did I treat them as loved deeply by God or something else?
7. I ask God for the grace in the next 24 hours to notice his loving welcome of me as his child.



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# Noticing The Movements Of My Own Heart

## Inner Movements: What makes me come alive?

By Brian Hohmeier, Cleveland, OH

As I pay attention to God's love and welcome of me, I can also begin to pay attention to what is at work inside of me. We might call these the movements of my heart.

I think now of a baby kicking inside her mother. Do I sometimes notice how my heart "kicks" inside of me, either when something excites me or causes me to pull back? These movements can be big, flood-like reactions to a thing I see or hear or experience. They can also be very subtle and very quiet, like the movement of a tide moving deep within the ocean.

Where do I normally experience these movements inside of me? In my chest? In my gut? Through a flood of emotion? Or, is it more subtle? For thousands of years, the people of God have been using these "heart movements" as a way of noticing the Holy Spirit's movement in them. The Holy Spirit is always moving us into greater faith, hope, and love. As I pay attention to how my heart is moved, I'm able to notice how God has made me and how God has made me for the world.

## Questions for Reflection

1. As I reflect upon my day, replaying it from waking up until now, I ask myself, at what moments did I feel most alive, the most free, the most "me"? Or, when did I feel the most trusting of God, the most hopeful, and the most open to give and receive love?
2. What was I doing, and what was happening around me?
3. What was that feeling and how did I respond to it? How did I want to respond to it?
4. As I return to that scene now and the feeling I had, how do I want to respond in this moment? What do I want to say to God or what do I want to ask?
5. Who is in my life who knows my heart and might help me continue this conversation?

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# Noticing The Things That Affect Me Negatively

## Inner Movements: What draws me away from God & others?

By Heather Kristine, Inglewood, CA

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Psalm 42:5*

In the same way that pain is my body's way of telling me that something is wrong in my body, the negative emotions within my heart and mind can also be excellent teachers. Instead of avoiding or numbing these shadow movements I choose to sit with them and listen to what they have to tell me.

I've already begun to pay attention to the heart movements that make me feel the most alive, the most free, the most like my authentic self. This week I will begin to also notice those times when I feel anxious, sad, or angry. What is going on when these feelings emerge? What can I learn from them about who God has created me to be? Do they reveal anything about what may be holding me back?

## Questions for Reflection

1. As I look back over the events of the day I pay close attention to any discomfort in my physical body. Where in my body do I feel a reaction to something I am remembering? Is there an ache in my throat, a tightness in my chest, or a knot in my stomach? I sit with these sensations in silence as if sitting at the bedside of a sick friend. I make myself available in case my body wants to tell me something about these events.
2. Jesus commanded us to love our enemies. When have I rejected the shadow sides of myself instead of responding in love? When did I criticize or judge too harshly? If instead I were to come alongside these broken pieces of myself and treat them as a friend, what could I learn about how to be more authentically the person that God created me to be? What happens if I extend mercy to myself instead?

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3. As I review the interactions I had with others during the day, do I notice any moments where I missed an opportunity to share the burdens of another? I search my heart for what may have been distracting me. Do I sense an invitation from the Holy Spirit to choose to move closer to a person who is suffering next time?
  4. Were there any moments today when I felt isolated or lonely? What was the barrier between myself and others? Was there anything that made me feel far away from God? What does God want me to know about these moments?
  5. Did I experience any moments of anxiety today? As I observe myself in these moments, where do I sense God? What would happen if I brought these fears to God and allowed Him to comfort me?
  6. I pay close attention to my day and notice if I experienced any feelings of heaviness or a burden that is too great for me to carry. I ask God if this is something that He wants me to let go of. Is this something I can leave behind or something I can allow Him to help me carry? What might that look like?

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# Noticing My Connection To Others In Community

## My desire for community: Who is with me and for me?

By Michael Munson, Birmingham, England

I take a moment to find silence and solitude right where I am, so that I may be present to the voice of the Holy Spirit whispering his truths into my spirit.

Community and other people can be a tricky thing in my life. I can love them deeply, and fear or dislike them just as strongly. Yet I know that I am called to relationships and to community.

As I take this moment to rest in my heavenly Father, I ask the Holy Spirit to “search and know me” as the Psalmist writes in chapter 139. I ask for the grace to become aware of the movements in my heart towards others. I notice the good gifts of others as well as the opportunities to learn to love more deeply.

*Heavenly Father, help me to know where you are calling me to more deeply engage with the people around me, especially my church family. Would you help me see where I have defenses up to those around me, and to see where I have found joy in those around me. I wish to know and understand my desires and passions, and your desires and passions for me, in community.*

## Questions for Reflection

1. I thank God for the following things that I love about the people in my life:  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. I consider now what my community has offered to me as a gift that has helped me in my life with Jesus.
3. Where is God at work within my community? I ask God to give me the grace to notice.
4. Where I may be missing God’s work within my community?
5. I ask God to help me see where I may be disengaged or held myself aloof from true intimate friendships.



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6. I receive from the Lord the grace and healing for any unhealthy habits or insecurities that may be present in that disengagement.
  7. What is the the invitation God has for me in connection with community?

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# Noticing What I Can Give From The Best Part Of Who I Am

## The Gifts I Give: What are my charisms?

By Jared Boyd, Columbus, Ohio

I want to be called into to something. I want the Lord to give me an assignment. But what I sometimes forget is that he has already given me gifts. These gifts, or charisms, is the sense of inspiration and ability to accomplish a particular task to which one feels invited to by God. When I feel an ease in my work or a deeper desire to persevere in the midst of setbacks, these can often indicate that there is a particular gifting for the work.

But these gifts are not just for myself. These are gifts, given by God to me, for the purpose of partnering with God in his mission. We imagine that each follower of Jesus brings her gift to the table, and together our gifts become gifts to each other in our work together for the building of God's kingdom. I am often looking for the task - the assignment or call (vocation) - but I don't give nearly enough time to thinking deeply about the charism God has already given and how this gift can become the gift I give away to others.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do I experience the current work I'm engaged in? What do I do that makes me come alive?
2. Where does my community experience the best of me? What do I offer to them when we are together? What gifts do I bring that others would readily recognize?
3. What do others ask of me that makes me feel affirmed in their asking it?
4. What kinds of things do I dream of doing?
5. God, what gifts have you given me to steward?

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# Noticing What Is Important To Me

## My Values: What is important to me?

By Dixie Vargo, Columbus, OH

When I think of values, I think about shopping. When I visit an online store, I see products that are assigned dollar amounts which reflect the value the seller has assigned to those items. It is one of those odd twists of language to realize that the word "value" is often used interchangeably with the words "cost" and "price". As I reflect on my own personal values, I am taking time to identify those things in this world for which I am willing to experience some measure of personal sacrifice - things that feel worthy of the cost or price I will pay to live into them. Values are the things that cost us something when we lean our lives toward them.

I live in a culture with deeply entrenched values, although the way these values are defined and the means by which they are attained are highly debated in our increasingly polarized society. It's important for me to know where I stand. There are so many voices coming at me from countless sources, some loudly contending that their position is the right one. I need to look within my own heart, my own personal convictions, and consider these questions in the Lord's presence.

I look full into the face of Jesus. His penetrating gaze peers deeply into my soul, revealing the very core of my inner being. I see the tenderness in His face as we have an honest, open, and very real conversation about my values. My heart swells with an awareness of the weight of his love for me and every other person on this planet. He shows me the bigger picture, the broader scope of influence that my values might have on the world.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What importance do I want to put on my own personal integrity, trustworthiness, and transparency? What emotions rise inside me when I think of allowing myself to be vulnerable to others?
2. How do I want to define success in my life? What words do I want to remember in times of failure?
3. How willing am I to sacrifice my own rights, opinions, and preferences for the sake of unity with those who are different from me?
4. What criteria do I want to use to weigh issues of justice and mercy?

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5. If I could visualize my life stretched out before me like empty pages of a book yet to be written, how might my values define what the chapter titles might be? Take some time to write out some titles that describe what you want the book of your life to be about.

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# Noticing What I Want To Be About

## Principle and Foundation: What am I for?

By Liz Olson, Columbus, OH

I want to do big things for God. I think of missionaries that have converted thousands, healing ministries that have brought God's healing touch and deliverance, and teaching ministries with books and videos watched by Christians throughout the world. I often want to be counted in these ranks.

The Christian faith holds the conviction that I'm created to praise, love and serve God. This is the foundation of my calling. I stop now to wonder, are my big plans really for God? Or, are they to bring attention to myself?

If it is my purpose is to praise, love, and serve God, this means that I'm wired to do this naturally. This is what I was created to do. It is how God designed me. I don't have to wait for the big thing or my "life's work." I can begin today.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What has God already invited me into? How would I feel if God asked me to stop? What would I miss about it?
2. As I consider my day-to-day life - studying, working, recreation, household chores - how can I praise, love, and serve God in these areas?
3. As I think about the people around me, who are the people on the "fringes", those that might go unnoticed, that God might invite me to serve?
4. What is my experience of loving God? What does it look like practically when I am loving God?
5. When was the last time I praised God outside of a corporate worship service? What did it look like? How did I feel?