

Draw Near 3

Examen, March 17

1. Introduction: Today we continue looking at different practices we will be using to allow the Holy Spirit to move within our lives to help us better live out the Sermon on the Mount.
 1. Always remember, as I talk about these different practices, that they are just like church attendance, just like daily Bible reading, daily prayer that we have always talked of. Those things we do to bring God more into our lives.
 2. I want to introduce you to things you may not have thought of doing before that will help you get closer to God. But these are not things to get God's approval - you already have that. God loves you deeply. These practices are for your benefit.
2. Superficiality: A real problem in our churches today, and among too many Christians is a shallow relationship with God. We are not closely connected so that when stress and crisis come into our lives, we have a hard time with our faith in God. We doubt God is there or think he has left us.
 1. As Richard Foster said in his book, Celebration of Discipline back in the 70s, "Superficiality is the curse of our age...The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people." This is our goal.
 2. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was also working against superficiality. Read Matthew 6:1-8. These instructions are focused on a group that is used to seeing religion practiced outwardly; but inwardly, in reference to lives and how people act toward other people, it is not being practiced. That is the focus of the instructions Jesus gives in these verses. What are they doing while they pray? Jesus wants them to focus on the internal heart issues.
3. Read Philippians 1:9-10 and Colossians 1:9. What is Paul praying for? He is praying for these churches to be filled with knowledge. This knowledge was so they might know themselves better so they could know what is best and pure and blameless. How can we do that? An ancient practice called Examen can help us know ourselves better and know the best way toward the pure and blameless life for ourselves.

3. Ignatius of Loyola - He was born in 1491, and he formed the Jesus following Society (Jesuits) when he got tired as a Roman Catholic of those who were superficial. He embraced, among other things, two core practices - Spiritual Exercises and Examen.
 1. The Spiritual Exercises were several different disciplines done over a 30 day period in a focused spiritual boot camp. Obviously this would be for someone wanting to be a priest or monk. It is highly regimented, focused, and takes a lot of dedication and commitment.
 2. Examen is more for daily living and helps propel faith day to day. It is more for "normal" people. The Examen is a structured form of prayer used twice a day usually. When he taught it, there were five parts. For our use, we will simplify it to 4 parts and only use it once a day.
4. Recognize, Request, Review, Resolve
 1. Recognize: Recognize God's presence in your day, an intentional remembering that God is present all through your day, even when you forget. It is a focus on Psalm 139:7, Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5. To accomplish this you can do one of three things - spend a few moments in silence or say a prayer or read a text such as one of the ones listed above.
 2. Request: In this step we request from the Spirit enlightenment from God. We are asking God for wisdom and insight and discernment as we move through the next step of Examen. For this step we lean on James 1:5 and Matthew 7:7-8 for example.
 3. Review: In this step we review the past day - either that night or the following morning for the day before. This is like a coach watching a review of a previous game. We are reviewing in our mind the events of the previous day.
 1. There is a lot of flexibility in how this can be done - as we will see in this week's devotionals. It is vital to remember both high points and low points for ourselves from each day.
 2. But this is not a dry interest in chronology. It is fueled by our interest in motivations, spiritual desires, emotions, and where God acts in our day.
 3. We are wanting to see positive and negative things about our behavior during the day. Let me emphasize - this is not about tearing you down, but about understanding you - both good and bad. Do not focus each time just on bad things you did. You may have done something wrong during the day. But we most often do both bad and good every single day. This is a time to think through each event and see our motivations for each activity.

4. Resolve: We move from pondering the past to focusing on the future. We prayerfully ask, "What have I learned, what can I change, what should I change for the next day?"
5. This allows you to be aware of God in your life - because you are looking for ways He is acting. In Matthew 6:1 Jesus encourages us to have an audience of one - God. Examen helps us clean up our lives and focus on God.
6. The word examen comes from Latin and means "an accurate assessment of the true situation." We are using this activity to provide us with an accurate assessment of the situation between God and ourselves. So we understand there are two aspects to examen:
 1. "Examen of consciousness" is where we recognize the ways God has been present to us during the day and how we have or have not responded to that presence. Because we so often do not pay attention to God during the day, this allows us to see how God acts during our everyday life.
 2. "Examen of conscience" is where we recognize the moral and spiritual areas of our character that need to be improved. When we examen ourselves, we have an opportunity to look at each action and its motivations and results. This allows us to not only know when and how we have fallen, but how to overcome in the future. If you choose to use examen to focus on character issues, it can be helpful to use a list - like the seven capital sins (envy, vainglory, sloth, avarice, anger, gluttony, and lust); or one of Paul's lists as in Romans 12:9-21 or Galatians 5:16-23.
7. We must be careful - examen is meant to praise and glorify God in our lives as well as point out our struggles. So as we look at our lives each day, we have an opportunity to not only see our failures - which can be so blatant to us that we must be careful to not overly focus on them. But we also see when we succeed, when God is with us, and when God help us overcome.
8. Conclusion: This week you will have four opportunities to practice examen. These will focus on doing it once a day - either in the evening for the day just ended, or in the morning for the day before. Be careful to work through each step of the Examen, not skipping a step, so that you gain the full benefit of its impact on your spiritual walk.