

SERVE 2010 Supplemental Prayer Guide Prayer of Review (Prayer of Examen)

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As you prepare or debrief your SERVE experience with your team or entire youth group, you may desire to introduce this type of reviewing prayer if it isn't a practice that's already familiar. This guide offers some context and help getting started.

Many students may have little or no experience beyond basic prayers of thanksgiving, petition, and intercession ("God, thanks for my day. Please help me not fail my math test, and help Grandma feel better"). During the SERVE week, each night's small group meeting includes a time of "Focus," designed to expand the group's exposure to prayer practices that create space for reflection and listening. So if you're doing this after SERVE, students will already have a context for it.

This guide is based on what's known as the Ignatian *Prayer of Examen*, or Prayer of Review. The ancient practice is simply a way to review our day before God and recognize our "highs and lows," offering them to God. If this approach to prayer is new to you, you may want to access some of the following resources ahead of time:

- Dennis Linn, Sheila Linn, and Matthew Linn, [Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life](#) (New York: Paulist, 1995).
- <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>
- <http://norprov.org/spirituality/ignatianprayer.htm>
- Really any online search for "prayer of examen" is going to give you ideas—it's widely practiced in and outside the Jesuit tradition.

Don't worry if students get a little fidgety during the prayer—that's natural—but at the same time, don't try to draw out these prayer times too long. Start out with 5-7 minutes of silence, then build up to longer reflection times as your group gets more acquainted with this type of prayer. As the leader, practice ahead of time speaking slowly and allowing space in between reflection questions so students have time to think and pray through them. You may even want to discipline yourself by slowly counting to 15 or 20 in your head in between questions.

Introduce the time by saying something like: **We are going to spend some time in prayer, but this prayer might be a little different from what you're used to. In this prayer we are going to take a few moments to quiet ourselves, then we will invite God to help us reflect on our day and listen for what God might want to do in and through us in the coming days. Don't worry if you're not sure what to say to God during these moments—the important part is being present with God just as God is present with us.**

Invite students to pause for a moment to close their eyes, calm their bodies and minds, and take a couple of deep breaths. Ask them to think about breathing out distractions and anxieties, and breathing in the presence and peace of God. Note that while God's presence is always with us, sometimes acknowledging that truth with our bodies helps us become more aware of God.

Next ask students to silently think back over their day (or week, or longer period if appropriate)—the places they've been, the people they spent time with and the things they did and said. After a few moments of this, ask them to answer the following questions (again, silently):

- 1. For what are you most grateful today? It could be a conversation, an experience, a person, or anything at all.**
- 2. For what are you least grateful today?**

Invite them to spend some time with each question, and silently offer both of those responses to God.

Finally, ask students to close by silently having a conversation with God about their day, including what they are most and least grateful for, and to say whatever they want to say to God as they finish this prayer.

You may also want to provide paper and pens for students to journal their prayers and reflections, or art materials to help those who are more image-oriented to pray their examen visually.

Here are some other questions for reviewing the day in prayer that you could incorporate into your reflection time or in future use of this prayer if they seem helpful to you:

- What was most life-giving for you today?
- What was most draining or life-depleting today?
- Where did you see or experience growth today?
- Where did you see God at work today?
- When did you feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or undone today?
- What person or experience was most significant for you today and why?
- What gifts did you receive today?