

“Like Jesus, who went to the cross not for pain in itself but ‘for the joys that were set before him’, so we are to make this journey through the memories of pain and darkness, not to stay with these things but to redeem them and move beyond them. [...] We, who build so many hells on earth, need to know that there is no place so dark, no situation so seemingly hopeless, that cannot be opened to the light of Christ for rescue and redemption.”

Malcolm Guite, reflecting on Dante's *Divine Comedy* in *The Word in the Wilderness: A Poem a Day for Lent and Easter*

An Examen For Your Story

A Prayer for Illumination

Directions: Sit for a moment in silence. Take a couple deep breaths, notice your body relax. Pray this prayer and then sit in the stillness. Enjoy being with Jesus. Begin to open your heart and mind to the Spirit's guidance as you begin this prayer.

God of my imagination and life, as I make time to consider my life's story, is there a part of my story, past or present in which you'd like to illuminate for me today? I open my heart to your guidance considering where I have been, where I am now, and the dreams you have for me. Amen

A Prayer for Gratefulness

Directions: Spend time giving thanks for the life you have lived. The mini stories and experiences that make up the whole of your spiritual journey. The people and circumstances that have shaped you for better or for worse. Try to hold it all with thanksgiving.

Lord, you are the source of all life. You know the depths of my heart. In you, I know I am known and loved. Thank you for being present with me from the beginning of life till now. Help me to appreciate the flow of my narrative; all the valleys, all the mountains, all the crevices filled with pain and shame, and all fountains that flow forth from your love.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Psalm 139:13-14

Exploring your Story

Directions: Pray the prayer below to start. Don't rush this portion. This is the heart of the Examen. As you sit in prayer, think over your narrative with the Spirit as your

navigator. *Where is God inviting you to look deeper? Where do you notice a strong emotion, could that be God's leading? Is there a portion of your life that comes to you quickly?* If a memory, a person, or event rises to the surface don't ignore it. Be open to that part of your story. Don't worry if it is painful, or joyful just let it come. There is no need to analyze the story. Just sit with it for moment, go back into the story. This could be a time to write the story if that practice helps. After a story comes, you may use the reflective questions go deeper.

Lord, you encourage us to examine our hearts. Help me examine my story with tenderness, gentleness and grace. Guide me to find that part of my heart that you wish to illuminate through the life I am living. Is there a part of my story, past or present, in which you'd like to give me eyes to see? Lord, I open my heart to you. Amen

When you have your story in mind, consider these reflective questions:

- What emotions arose as you were lead to this story? Invite God into those emotions.
- What might those emotions be revealing?
- Were there any images that stood out to you? What did you notice about those images?
- Can you notice if those images felt like they were drawing you nearer to God or further from him?
- Was something new revealed in this story that you hadn't noticed before? What might God be wanting to show you in this revelation?
- If you wrote your story, did any words, phrases, colors, or people strike you in a new way? Reflect on those noticing.
- What can you appreciate about this story?
- What felt painful in your story, or held resistance? Ask God to open that to you.
- Is there a gift for you in this part of your story?

Redeeming your Story

Directions: Sometimes an Examen reveals a need for reconciliation, confession or redemption. This part of the prayer is a time for that. Use these questions to guide you in prayer. I acknowledge pain may arise in our stories, God does not shy from our pain and encourages us to lament. There is a prayer to guide you in grieving, or sharing your pain.

- Did you notice anything that felt amiss in your story, or brought up uncomfortable emotions? If so, sit with them before God and ask, what invitation do you have for me in this noticing?
- Is there a need for healing in this story? Can you ask Jesus for what you need? (Luke 18:35-43)

- Would sharing this story with a safe person be helpful?
- Is there someone in which you should seek reconciliation and forgiveness?
- Is there a confession to God or a lament you feel led to pray?
- Did this story lead to joy? If so, spend time in thanksgiving.

If your story stirs pain in you, you may use this prayer, or pray your own as a personal lament. (The Psalms offer many such laments: Psalm 62, 55, 137, 130 and Lamentations 3 are a few.)

Lord, you are the author and finisher of my life. Nothing is too hidden or too shameful to bring into your presence. You forgive all wrongs and mend all hurts. For the places in my story that bring hurt, please soothe my pain. For the places that are broken, bind it up. For the shame hidden, shine your Light of Love. For wrongs done, bring your justice. Wrap me in your grace and love. For wrongs I've committed, forgive me and help me to seek reconciliation. Amen.

Holding Your Story with the Future in Mind

Directions: The final part of any Examen is finding hope for tomorrow. As you reflect on your story, where can you find hope that your story is redeemed or that your story has made you who you are so that you may walk forward in God's transformative love?

- How does reviewing this part of your story with God give you hope for the future?
- If something new arose in your story, how will you live tomorrow differently with this new knowledge?
- Is there redemption in your story that allows you to walk forward in freedom?
- Who's story can you honor tomorrow as a gift of love?

Closing Prayer

You may pray the Lord's Prayer or this prayer:

*Abba, teach me to honor my story. Illuminate your fingerprints throughout the pages of my life. Show me your redemptive work in the painful parts of my story. Reveal places of joy within my memories so I may rejoice in my life. Guide me to others who need a compassionate ear to hear their story. Help me honor their narrative and see them through Christ's loving gaze. Thank you for the new mercies that you pour into our collective stories so that we can live tomorrow with newness of life. **Amen.***

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.[...] Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? [...]even the darkness will not be

dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. [...] I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made [...] Search me, O God, and know my heart [...] lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalm 139