

“This spiritual practice of reflection is powerful and honors one year as it travels back into the Lord’s hands. Then my hands are empty to receive God’s gift of the new year - full of hope, strength, blessings, joy, stretching, learning and as always a grand adventure, not alone, but with God.”

After Advent and Christmas, those seasons of hectic preparation and seemingly endless hours at church, Christian educators can take a well-deserved break before Epiphany. In the last days of the calendar year, taking time for your own spiritual assessment is a gift to give yourself.

Invite God into Daily Reflection

More than a grade for the past year’s resolutions, spiritual review brings God into your assessment. The daily examen, St Ignatius’ twice-daily spiritual review, helps us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience. The examen gives us time and focus to detect God’s presence and discern God’s direction for us. Even if you don’t practice this daily, consider a yearly examen as your year-in-review. While the daily examen takes about 20 minutes, an examen of your year will take a little longer, but it is in essence the same steps: inviting God to be present, reflecting on the gifts and sins of your day, and looking to tomorrow. You can read more about practicing a daily examen [here](#).

Start with Structure

For most people, using these steps to [simply looking back at the year](#) is not particularly constructive. How do you make sense of 12 long months? Without structure, how do you see the interweaving of God’s presence in those days? Start by creating structure for the review itself. Assessing a whole year takes a few hours.

- Block out that time and move away from distractions. You might make a date with yourself at a museum or the library.
- You’ll need reminders of the year past. Perhaps that’s a calendar (paper or electronic) and your journal or maybe it’s your checkbook or budget.
- You’ll want to take notes! Bring paper and markers, pens, or pencils. What about using a [Praying in Color](#)-style form?
- As you review your weeks and months, ask those Ignatian questions: where was I

grateful? where did I err? what are the feelings I had? Have I noticed God's presence in any of this? What is my response to God's presence? Author Jim Manney provides these questions and more in a [blogpost](#).

Maybe these questions aren't quite reflective enough? Lutheran spiritual director Jean Wise offers [more reflective choices](#) on her excellent website for daily spiritual reflection. My favorite is "What got me curious about God?" You could substitute any emotion for curious.

If you participated in a [Guiding Star](#) ritual during Epiphany last year, you can use that to guide your reflection. What was your word? Did you remember it throughout the year? Did it guide you? Do you think differently about your word at different points of the year?

The Ignatian Aspect is in the Closing

- Let go of the old year and the old year's wounds, thank God for the year gone by and ask to be open in the new one.

Jean writes, "This spiritual practice of reflection is powerful and honors one year as it travels back into the Lord's hands. Then my hands are empty to receive God's gift of the new year - full of hope, strength, blessings, joy, stretching, learning and as always a grand adventure, not alone, but with God."

If you are so intrigued by this yearly examen that you want to try it daily, the folks at Ignatian Spirituality have reimaged the practice in [Examen flip books](#). These are a cool online tool that can help you delve more deeply into a practice of the examen.

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