

THE GREAT ANNUAL EXAMEN

A Prayerful Reflection on the Year Behind and the Year Before

By Lydia Martin

The Daily Examen, created by St. Ignatius of Loyola 500 years ago, is a prayer for daily reflection. It builds awareness of God's presence and helps us notice His movement. The Examen is a conversational reflection—not a rigid ritual. It fosters intimacy by revealing where God is near, active, and inviting.

The Great Annual Examen adapts the Daily Examen for an entire year. Looking back over twelve months can locate your soul on life's journey and, by God's grace, guide you forward. Many experienced this year as undoing, overwhelming, or simply surviving. Others discovered joy, breakthrough, or long-awaited gifts—each worthy of gratitude and holy attention. May this tool help you notice where you are, how you are, and what God may invite next.

Before starting, remember: this reflection aims for revelations—not resolutions—by helping you notice God's presence and work in your life. Use a **journal, notebook, or a few sheets of paper to write**. Writing slows your pace and fosters honesty, prayer, and clarity. Focus on reflection, not goal-setting.

Now, let's focus on how this reflection will guide you. This question-and-prayer exercise helps you reflect on the year and anticipate the next. Called an Examen, it invites you to review your year with God. **The Great Annual Examen** covers five areas: **physical, emotional, relational, vocational, and spiritual health**. Vocational health includes *not only paid work but how you spend your time and energy—through employment, caregiving, study, retirement, or transition*. The spiritual section is more expansive, allowing space for prayerful reflection and discernment.

If a question feels overwhelming, pause or skip it and return when ready. This reflection is not a test, and there are no correct answers. Move at your own pace and trust the process.

Sit with each category and move slowly. This is not an exercise where the "first response is right." Linger with a question often brings deeper truth. Quick answers may miss important insights.

You may want to do this over several days rather than in one sitting. As we reflect with honesty and grace, we better recognize patterns to release, gifts from God, and invitations to accept—so we enter the new year with more wisdom, freedom, and hope.

How to Use This Reflection

Many find it helpful to move through this reflection over several days, allowing insight and awareness to unfold. Choose what fits your season and capacity.

Option 1: Three-day rhythm

- **Day 1:** Section One (General Examination)
- **Day 2:** Section Two — Physical, Emotional, Vocational Health
- **Day 3:** Section Two — Relational and Spiritual Health + Prayers

Option 2: Five-day rhythm

- **Day 1:** Section One (Questions 1–5)
- **Day 2:** Section One (Questions 6–10)
- **Day 3:** Physical and Emotional Health
- **Day 4:** Vocational and Relational Health
- **Day 5:** Spiritual Health and Prayers

Choose either option based on your availability and preference.

Move slowly. If resistance or emotion rises, pause. Ask the Holy Spirit for counsel, courage, and comfort as you go.

Section 1: General Examination of My Life

These first ten questions are meant to gently “prime the pump” for mindful, prayerful reflection on your past year.

Take your time with these questions. You may find it helpful to return to some of them more than once as insight unfolds.

1. What are the most significant events that have happened to me—or within me—this past year?
(Consider external events, internal shifts, transitions, or turning points.)
2. Where have I experienced the greatest breakthroughs this past year?
(Physically, emotionally, relationally, vocationally, spiritually, or in other areas of life.)
3. What has been the most significant struggle I’ve carried this past year?
4. What has been the deepest loss I’ve experienced this past year?
(This may include tangible losses or the loss of hopes, expectations, or seasons.)
5. What area of my life has most consumed my attention, energy, or mental space this past year?
(Health, relationships, work, uncertainty about the future, etc.)
6. Where have I felt most vulnerable this year?
(Emotionally, spiritually, relationally, physically, or otherwise.)

7. Where have I most experienced the presence of God this past year—and what was happening in those moments?
8. Looking back over the past twelve months, where have I experienced the greatest sense of consolation
(*peace, contentment, joy, shalom, beauty, connection*)?
9. Looking back over the past twelve months, where have I experienced the greatest sense of desolation
(*preoccupation, heaviness, anxiety, disconnection, discouragement*)?
10. What is **one word** that best summarizes this past year for me?

You may notice that some questions stay with you longer than others. Pay attention to those—often they are invitations from God.

Section Two: Five Areas of My Life

As you move through these five areas, resist the urge to evaluate or fix. This portion of the Examen is about **noticing**—bringing your real life before God with honesty, curiosity, and trust.

1. My Physical Health

1. What are five words that describe my physical condition and well-being this past year?
2. How many hours of sleep can I honestly say I get on most nights?
3. What choices—or circumstances—have most shaped my physical health over the past twelve months?
4. Where have I felt supported by my body this year? Where has my body felt strained, tired, or neglected?
5. What specific intentions or hopes do I have for my physical health in the coming year?
(*For example: rest, movement, medical care, gentler rhythms, nutrition, or attention.*)

2. My Emotional Health

1. What are five emotions (life-giving or life-draining) that have most shaped my inner life this past year?
2. When was I **most joyful** this past year?
What was I doing, who was I with, and where was I?
3. When was I **most sorrowful** this past year?
What was happening, and what did I most need in that season?
4. What area of my life has generated the greatest internal stress or emotional weight?
5. How do I honestly feel about my emotional well-being as I look back on this year?
6. Are there any emotions I've tended to avoid, minimize, or push past—and if so, why?

3. My Vocational Health

1. What are five words that best describe my work, vocation, or daily responsibilities this past year?
2. This past year, have I tended to **live to work** or **work to live**? (Circle one)
3. How do I currently feel about my vocational journey? (*Note all that apply.*)
 - ☐ I want to make a change this next year
 - ☐ I want to continue as I am
 - ☐ I would like to use this next year to prepare for a vocational shift
 - ☐ I want to reassess and discern my vocational direction
 - ☐ I want to reposition my relationship to work
 - ☐ I believe I work _____ hours per week. Next year, I hope to work _____ hours per week. To move toward this, I may need to:
4. Does my current work offer a genuine sense of purpose or contentment, and what specifically drives that feeling—or its absence?
5. Where might God be inviting me toward greater freedom, alignment, or trust in this area?

4. My Relational Health

1. List the names of people who have been **life-giving** to me this past year:
2. What letter grade would I give my overall experience of community this year?
 - A — Deeply connected
 - B — Strong and meaningful
 - C — Present but limited
 - D — Lacking or strained
 - F — Isolated or disconnected
3. Is my current lifestyle, schedule, and pace of life conducive to the relationships I desire and need? Why or why not?
4. Are there any relationships that need attention, honesty, repair, or gentleness in the coming year?

5. My Spiritual Health

1. What five words describe my spiritual life this past year?
2. How would I describe my prayer life this past year?
3. How do I feel about how I lived a life of worship this past year—through prayer, obedience, love of others, daily rhythms, generosity, rest, work, and trust in God (not only through singing or Sunday gatherings)?
4. How do I feel about my church experience over the past twelve months?
5. What has felt nourishing in my relationship with God? What has felt lacking?
6. How has my image of God shifted, deepened, or been challenged this past year?
7. What five words describe my image of God right now?

8. In what ways has my relationship with God been tested, stretched, or refined?
9. What are **three spiritual insights or invitations** from this past year that I do not want to forget?
10. Where has my deepest spiritual struggle or lament been, and how might God be meeting me within that space?
11. Who are the people with whom I feel most spiritually connected?

Prayer of Gratitude

Close this section of **The Great Annual Examen** with a time of prayer. Slowly and intentionally thank God for what He has given, revealed, sustained, or redeemed over the past year. Express your heart's gratitude for the people, events, and growth you've witnessed, naming each detail as you reflect on your thanksgiving.

You may find it helpful to use the acrostic **G-R-A-T-I-T-U-D-E**, naming one specific gift for each letter. (For example: **G** — I am grateful for my sister, Gloria.)

Prayer for the Future Year

Reflecting on the past year and God's presence within it, look now toward the year ahead. With openness and trust, place yourself before Jesus. Consider praying these words slowly:

*Lord Jesus,
here I am.*

*You know the year behind me
and the year before me.*

*I trust myself to You.
Teach me to listen,
to follow,
and to rest in Your care. Amen.*