



# *a Healing Lent*

# Practices for Post-Traumatic Growth Through a Pandemic

By Katie Haseltine, Director of Content and Community at the Center for Formation, Justice and Peace

Lent is traditionally a time for inner reflection, and this year, we will examine the effect of COVID on our lives. To grow from trauma, you must first become aware of it, so we invite you to reflect on how COVID has impacted you, your family and your faith community over the last two years. Let's take an inventory of our lives with the hope of coming into a new season marked by Easter resurrection.

## Introduction: The Prayer of Examen

Words like “unprecedented” and “extraordinary” are familiar to us now—common ways to describe this strange season in our collective history. We all learned new phrases like “flattening the curve” and “social distancing.” The strange reality about the wildly uncertain days we all endured (and continue to endure to some extent) is that they were and are so filled with the ordinary. Many of us worked, cleaned, read, gardened, talked to family and friends, and cooked meals through the pandemic—and we continue to do so.

Most days are filled with the ordinary, and yet our hearts were and are full of anxiety about all that we can't control or understand. Financial instability, work transitions, health fears and more can overwhelm us as we attempt to pray.

Especially for times such as these, I'm grateful for the Examen.

The Examen, made popular by St. Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises, helps us answer the question, “Where is God in my life?” For hundreds of years, believers have used the Examen to trace the footprints of God in their own experiences. The Examen teaches us how to find God in the

present moment—in relationships, challenges, frustrations, and feelings. The prayer “works” because we need only 24 hours of thoughts, feelings, and interactions to begin. We can show up as we are, feeling as we do, and before us lie hundreds of things to talk to God about—and to be grateful for.

The most common way to pray the Examen is daily. A 5-10 minute prayer in the morning or at the close of day provides a way to examine your heart, soul, body, and mind. Another way to pray the Examen is as an inventory. Which is what you are invited to do during this Lenten season.

For the next six weeks, we are going to use different forms of the prayer of Examen to take stock of the ways the pandemic has affected our hearts, souls, bodies, and minds. And then, using the information we gather from our daily Examen, we will ask for healing.

As we slowly stumble toward a new way of being as a society and as individuals, the Examen can provide a valuable check-in with yourself and with God. Use what you learn to create the life you want to live with yourself, with loved ones, and with God.

## Lent Week 1

### Breath Prayer

Inhale: Jesus

Exhale: Let me feel your love.

Pray the following Examen this week to identify the wounds in your heart from the last two years.

## A Prayer of Examen for Identifying Heart Wounds\*

*God, thank you.*

I thank you for always being with me, but especially I am grateful that you are with me right now.

*God, send your Holy Spirit upon me.*

Let the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind and reveal to me what is going on in my heart.

*God, let me look at my heart.*

God, show me a wound in my heart at this moment. This wound causes me to feel hurt, frightened, angry, resentful, or remorseful. I allow You to take me to that difficult place in my soul. Courageously, I sit in the midst of this difficult moment. Perhaps I ask You to hold my hand as I prayerfully relive the worst parts [of my COVID experience].

God, show me the strongest emotion I have at this very moment as I rehash this painful experience. Hear me as I speak aloud to You about how I'm feeling. I might say, "God, I am furious (or sad, or grief-stricken, or confused)." I sit with You and with these feelings for a moment.

God, I ask you to show me how this wound might become worse—growing in size or becoming infected. If I were to allow this wound to lead me away from faith, hope, and love, what might that look like? Concretely, in what ways might this wound tempt me to behave poorly? God, help me prevent this from happening. If I need grace to help me guard against this, I ask for that grace from You right now.

I sit in the silence for just a moment, giving You a chance to do whatever You want with me right now. It's okay if You seem to be saying and doing nothing at all. I trust that You will heal this wound in Your own time and Your own way.

I prayerfully daydream for just a moment, imagining a

day when I am no longer feeling wounded about this. What would that be like? What might be my attitudes, perspectives, thoughts, feelings, words, and actions if I were truly a recovered soul? What grace would I need to begin to heal? I ask You for that grace right now.

*God, let me be grateful and ask for forgiveness.*

Thank you for my emotions and my desires—all of which can lead me to your love and heart.

If I have failed to tend my heart in any way, forgive me and show me how to move toward faith, hope, and love.

*God, stay close.*

Be near to my heart and hold it close.

\*Adapted from Mark E. Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2015) and David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) by Katie Haseltine.

## Lent Week 2

### Breath Prayer

**Inhale:** Suffering Savior  
**Exhale:** Be near to me.

This week, use the following prayer of Examen to identify wounds in your body from the last two years.

## A Prayer of Examen for Identifying Wounds in the Body\*

*God, thank you.*

I thank you for always being with me, but especially I am grateful that you are with me right now.

*God, send your Holy Spirit upon me.*

Let the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind and allow me to see the ways my physical body has been impacted by the uncertainty, divisiveness, devastation, and reality of the last two years.

*God, let me look at my body.*

Where am I experiencing tension or tightness? What is broken or not working as it should? How have I been sleeping? What is my breathing like? Where do I notice stillness or calm?

*God, let me be grateful and ask forgiveness.*

I thank you for my body and all that it does for me on a daily basis.

I ask for healing and forgiveness for the ways in which I have mistreated or ignored my physical body.

*God, stay close.*

I ask that you draw me even closer to you this day and tomorrow.

Help me recall a memory from the day or from another time in my life where I felt loved. Help me stay in that memory, held in love, savoring it as I fall asleep.

\*Adapted from David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) by Katie Haseltine.

## Lent Week 3

### Breath Prayer

Inhale: Creator God

Exhale: Renew my mind.

This week, use the following prayer of Examen to identify wounds in your mind from the last two years.

## A Prayer of Examen for Identifying Wounds in Your Mind\*

*God, thank you.*

I thank you for always being with me, but especially I am grateful that you are with me right now.

*God, send your Holy Spirit upon me.*

Let the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind and show me my innermost thoughts.

*God, let me look at my mind.*

What have been my strongest thoughts over the past two years? What strong opinions did I hold? What attitudes did I carry with me? What presumptions or conclusions did I make? How did I perceive myself, my situation, and the people, places, and events around me?

Did my thoughts come from a place of spiritual freedom or unfreedom? Did they lead me toward or away from faith, hope, and love?

*God, let me be grateful and ask forgiveness.*

I give thanks for the thoughts that came from the true Spirit. I ask forgiveness if I allowed unfreedoms within me to influence my thoughts and if I nurtured thoughts that led me away from faith, hope, and love.

*God, stay close.*

Be near as I continue to notice the dominant thoughts of my mind. Gently lead me back to you hour by hour.

Adapted from Mark E. Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Chicago, IL:

Loyola Press, 2015) and David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) by Katie Haseltine.

## Lent Week 4

### Breath Prayer

Inhale: Bless the Lord

Exhale: O my soul.

This week, use the following prayer of Examen to identify wounds in your soul from the last two years.

### A Prayer of Examen for Identifying Wounds in the Soul\*

*God, thank you.*

I thank you for always being with me, but especially I am grateful that you are with me right now.

*God, send your Holy Spirit upon me.*

Let the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind and show me how this pandemic has impacted my soul.

*God, let me look at my soul.*

Where have I forgotten my belovedness and worthiness? Or that of others? Have guilt or shame been more pervasive this season than in others? What are the losses, changes, transitions, or disappointments that I've left unprocessed or held onto? Where have I lost my sense of purpose or meaning? Did I find self-compassion difficult during these many months?

Do I feel nearer to or farther from God two years into this pandemic? What lingering question stands between me and

closeness with God? Is there something I need to say to God? Is there something I am holding against God?

*God, let me be grateful and ask forgiveness.*

I give thanks for the moments I felt held, known, and loved. And for the times I felt drawn toward faith, hope, and love. I ask forgiveness for any darkness I nurtured and for all the times I chose to turn to anything but You to help and heal me.

*God, stay close.*

My soul needs repair and refreshment. Be near and walk me step by step into greater faith, hope, and love.

*\*\*Adapted from David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) by Katie Haseltine.*

## Lent Week 5

### Breath Prayer

Inhale: Healer

Exhale: Speak the word and I will be healed.

This week, meditate on the following quote and pray for healing in your heart, mind, body and soul from the last two years.

“All healthy religion shows you what to do with your pain, with the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust and the undeserved—all of which eventually come into every lifetime. If only we could see these ‘wounds’ as the way through, as Jesus did, then they would become sacred wounds rather than scars to deny, disguise, or project onto others... If we cannot find a way to make our wounds into sacred wounds, we invariably become cynical, negative, or bitter. This is the storyline of many of the greatest novels, myths, and stories of every culture. **If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it—**

usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, and, invariably, the most vulnerable, our children.” —Richard Rohr

## A Prayer for Healing the Wounds of Our Heart, Body, Mind and Soul

1. To begin, compose yourself in God’s light and love. Picture yourself in God’s loving gaze. Ask for the grace to show up before God honestly and fully.
2. Bring to God one of the wounds you identified these past four weeks in the prayer of Examen.
3. Feel the wound as you first felt it and as you are feeling it right now. Try not to think about it, just feel it, identifying yourself with Jesus and all who have suffered in this life. Let yourself feel how much it hurts to hurt.
4. You are not alone. Welcome Jesus into the hurt and whatever else you are aware of feeling. Perhaps with the hurt comes anger, loneliness, sadness, shame. Welcome Jesus into it all, receiving from him whatever he is offering. In being willing to really feel it, you are letting go of your oppositional energy against suffering, which actually brings freedom from it.
5. Thank God for the healing that comes from identifying with Jesus as the wounded healer—One who doesn’t just feel compassion on you in your suffering but experienced wounds of His own and knows intimately how the human heart, mind, body and soul breaks and repairs.

## Lent Week 6

## Breath Prayer

Inhale: Holy Wisdom

Exhale: Guide me.

## A Prayer for Post-Traumatic Growth:

Studies show that the majority of trauma survivors do not develop PTSD, and a large number even report growth from their experience. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun coined the term “post-traumatic growth” to capture this phenomenon, defining it as the positive psychological change that we can experience as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances.

These seven areas of growth have been reported to spring from adversity:

1. Greater appreciation of life
2. Greater appreciation for and strengthening of close relationships
3. Increased compassion and altruism
4. The identification of new possibilities or a purpose in life
5. Greater awareness and utilization of personal strengths
6. Enhanced spiritual development
7. Creative growth

To be sure, most people who experience post-traumatic growth would certainly prefer to have not had the trauma. Nevertheless, people who experience post-traumatic growth are often surprised by the growth that does occur, which often comes unexpectedly as the result of an attempt at making sense of an unfathomable event.

## A Prayer of Examen for Identifying Growth Through

## the Pandemic\*

*God, thank you.*

I thank you for always being with me, but especially I am grateful that you are with me right now.

*God, send your Holy Spirit upon me.*

Let the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind and show me how I've grown over the last two years.

*God, let me look at my growth.*

Where did I experience a greater appreciation for life or beauty? Who am I grateful for, and who helped me through this season? In what ways did I show compassion and offer help? Did I make any new plans or decisions that I'm happy with? Where did I surprise myself with my own resiliency and strength? Where did I learn to let go or surrender to God? Did I experience any areas of creativity or flourishing?

*God, let me be grateful and ask forgiveness.*

I give thanks for the growth that comes in hard places.

I ask forgiveness for any ideas, feelings, or actions that kept me stuck.

*God, stay close.*

I want to see how you changed and grew me and others.  
Keep my eyes and heart open.

\*\*Adapted from David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008) by Katie Haseltine.