

## Praying Backward: The Examen of Consciousness

### Pray for light.

Since we are not simply daydreaming or reminiscing but rather looking for some sense of how the Spirit of God is leading us, it only makes sense to pray for some illumination. The goal is not simply memory but graced understanding.

### Review the day in thanksgiving.

Gratitude is the foundation of our whole relationship with God. Each of us loves to receive beautiful gifts and that is what the last 24 hours contain—gifts of existence, work, relationships, food, challenges. So use whatever cues help you to walk through the day from the moment of awakening—even the dreams you recall upon awakening. Walk through the past 24 hours, from hour to hour, from place to place, task to task, person to person, thanking the Lord for every gift you encounter.

### Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.

Our feelings, positive and negative the painful and the pleasing, are clear signals of where the action was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all of those feelings as they surface, the whole range: delight, boredom, fear, anticipation, resentment, anger, peace, contentment, impatience, desire, hope, regret, shame, uncertainty, compassion, disgust, gratitude, pride rage doubt, confidence, admiration, shyness—whatever was there.

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### Choose a feeling—positive or negative—and pray from it.

That is, choose the remembered feeling that most caught your attention. The feeling is a sign that something important was going on. Now simply express spontaneously the prayer that surfaces as you attend to the source of the feeling—praise, petition, conviction, a cry for help, a longing for healing, a lament.

### Close your prayer with The Lord's prayer.

An adaptation by Dennis Hamm, SJ, from "Rummaging for God: Praying Backward Through Your Day," America: May 14, 1994 (pp.22-24.)