

# Habits For A Hungry Heart

## Practicing A Spiritual Examination

For thousands of years those who follow God have examined themselves in order to evaluate their faithfulness in following. The psalmist meditated on God's word and made certain that he would not follow the way of the wicked (Psalm 1). Jehoshaphat charged his appointed judges to "consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the LORD" (2 Chron 19:6). The Apostle Paul evaluated his own life and actions to ensure that he was not just "running aimlessly" (1 Cor 9:24-27). In the 16th century Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Jesuits, developed an approach to assist every Christian in the discipline of self assessment. Ignatius himself was known for practicing this examination three times each day. In the morning he reflected on the previous night's conclusions and reaffirmed his course for the new day. At noon he considered the events of the morning and at night, the events of the afternoon. Each examination was about 15 minutes in length and covered five topics successively. Ignatius' model is a pattern of prayer centered around acknowledging, asking, admitting, repenting and resolving.

### Acknowledging:

Ignatius believed that, since the first word necessary to achieve human maturity is "thank-you," the examination should begin by recalling all the natural and supernatural gifts we had received over the time period under review. The focus is on finding concrete examples of God's love for us which then opens us to begin seeing God in all parts of every day. As a result, we begin to recognize that all we have and are is a gift. Gratitude becomes a way of life.

### Asking:

Pray for the grace to see ourselves and our day through God's eyes. When we assume a divine perspective we become more aware of, and effective in, working with God for God's purposes. At this point in the prayer we are attempting to put off our own selves and desires so that we might put on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5; I Cor 2:16).

### Admitting:

Here we consider our human sinfulness—that which we have said, thought, done or not done which has alienated us from God. Once a thought word or deed is identified, write it down, remember it and make it a focal point of examinations in the following days, weeks or months. What triggers the sin? What sustains it? Why is it there? What can you do to be rid of it? The goal is to eradicate vice and implant virtue.

### Repenting:

The second word of human maturity is "I'm sorry." After having assumed God's perspective we become amazed at the ease with which we disobey. We know God to be a God of grace. The cry for pardon is natural; the desire to change, sincere.

### Resolving

Recognizing that "apart from [Christ we can do nothing" (John 15:5), we resolve to work with Him to change. Our part is in the doing, God's part is in the empowering. If love is to be sincere (Romans 12:9) then our love for God is seen in our efforts to respond to what we know about ourselves as we learn to follow His lead and live by His ways. At its core this discipline is a prayer of intercession and meditation. No description of it can substitute for the experience of this prayer for yourself. In the examination we ask God to help us move from the theoretical to the practical. This is the reason many saints of old considered a daily examination to be a primary spiritual discipline. If practicing it three times each day seems like too much to start, set aside 15 minutes each night, or shoot for two or three nights in a week.

### Helpful Hints

- Keep a written record of your conclusions and your progress. This helps you track God's activity and your faithfulness.
- As you consider the time period under review you may find it helpful to compare your actions, words and thoughts to a biblical listing of godly traits (Fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22; the definition of love in I Cor 13; the Ten Commandments)
- This discipline must be organic, living and fluid.

When the form becomes a formula (rigid) the fruit dries up.

- The focus of this exercise must be on the Lord and God's action in your life. Remember that God is a God of grace who loves you deeply and fully accepts you where you are. As you open yourself to God, God embraces you and begins the work of transforming you from within.
- Adapt it to fit your needs and schedule.