

# THE EXAMEN

an introduction...

hassled you to within an inch of your sanity before you lost your cool. Simply listen. Try to empathise. Maybe even apologize.

You might also want to pray with your kids, thanking God for their highlight and asking God to help them in their lowlight.

## Other ways to ask the 2 questions:

*When did I give and receive the most love today?*

*When did I give and receive the least love today?*

*When did I feel most alive today?*

*When did I most feel life draining out of me?*

*When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, to God?*

*When did I have the least sense of belonging?*

*When was I happiest today?*

*When was I saddest?*

## INTRODUCING THE EXAMEN TO an 11year old son:

"I've just started doing the examen with my 11 yr old son. Every night, we get together and we answer two questions,

*What am I most grateful for today?*

*What am I least grateful for today?*

It's taken a while for my son to figure out what to look for. At first his answer was always, "I don't know." I had to help him some to get the idea of what to share, and I had to share my own most and least grateful, as well.

But slowly he's more able to think back during the day and recall his best and worst moments..

He's just beginning to understand what it's about and I can already see more awareness of spiritual things in him. He's expressed a desire to be on God's side several times in these examen discussions. Hopefully, it will lead to more.

By Marc Cardaronella 2013

"...For many years, we have ended each day the same way...



...We light a candle, become aware of God's loving presence, and take about five minutes of quiet while we each ask ourselves two questions:

*For what moment today am I most grateful?*

*For what moment today am I least grateful?*

Then we share these two moments with each other. Usually the entire process takes about 20 mins. When we are tired we can easily finish in 10. We call this process 'the examen'..."

...  
"Sleeping with Bread" by the Linns, p5-8.

The *examen* is an integral part of Ignatian spirituality and is used as a way of understanding how God is present and active in our lives.

God's influence is felt in what St. Ignatius calls '*consolation*' - a feeling of comfort, security, love, happiness, and peace. The Linns describe '*consolation*' as the things that give you life.

## THE EXAMEN EXPLAINED by Kimberlee Conway Ireton



"It's dinner time. The babies are finally sleeping, and I've somehow managed to get dinner made and onto the table. Every day, this feels like a bit of a miracle.

We gather around the table, Jack, Jane, Doug, and I.

I light the match and hand it to Jane. She lights the candle. It's Lent, so the candle is purple (the liturgical color for repentance), and I say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

Then we say together, "And renew a right spirit within me."

We hold hands around the table and Jane says grace. After her "Amen," we pass the food and start eating.

"Highlight, lowlight!" Jane says. "Dad first."

We go around the table and each of us shares the highlight of our day – and the lowlight.

What we're doing is actually a centuries-old Christian practice called the *examen*, modified slightly so the kids can understand. We've been doing it for a couple of years now. When guests come, we invite them to join us.

The purpose of the *examen* is to cultivate awareness of God's presence with us. By reflecting on the day, we have a chance to see where we sensed God's presence – and where we didn't.

One of the traditional ways of asking the two examen questions is,

*Where did I sense God most today?*

*Where did I sense God least?*

But many people (myself included) often don't have a "sense" of God...at least till they've been practicing the *examen* for a while.

So I find it more helpful to ask,

*For what am I most grateful today?*

*For what am I least grateful?*

That's what we ask our kids when they get stuck and can't think of a "highlight" or a "lowlight."

Our nightly practice of the *examen* around our dinner table helps Doug and me to recognize the gifts in our lives and to be more aware of God's presence with us. It also helps our kids reflect on their lives, to be grateful, and to notice what they like and don't like, which helps them discover who they are.

The *examen* also creates a rich tradition for our family of listening and being heard, which is, I hope, helping all of us learn how to hear and speak not just to one another but to God as well.

**PRACTICING the *examen* with Children:** To include your kids in the *examen*, choose a time each day when your family is gathered, perhaps for a meal or before bed.

... Explain that a highlight is something you're grateful for and a lowlight is something you're really not grateful for. Tell them your highlight and lowlight as an example. Then ask your kids to share the highlight and lowlight of their day.

... It may take awhile for young kids to catch on, and you might need to prompt them to remember what happened—"Well, you went swimming today and to the park, and Sam came over for lunch, and you fell and skinned your knee"—but if you keep asking and modeling day after day, they will get it.

... After you ask each question, listen to what they say. If you say anything in response, simply mirror back their emotions: "That must have been exciting!" or "Oh, I bet that made you sad." If you want, you could also extend the conversation: "Tell me more..."

In order for your kids to feel like the *examen* is a safe place to share, you (and all other family members) must listen with respect. If your child's lowlight is that you yelled at her, please don't take offense or remind her that she'd