

Taking up...

Lent's also a great time to take up something that will bring you closer to God. Why not try the **Prayer of Examen**. It's a prayer of looking back—not what's gone wrong but where God has been moving in your day. The prayer is best used regularly, it can be done in the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee. Most people find it helpful in the quiet time before going to sleep and you can remember these 5 points by counting them off on your fingers...

1. No matter what I'm worrying about...stop!

God is with me—quiet perhaps, but always there.

I remember that God has created all things. Everything I have is a gift from God.

Is there something that I would especially like to give thanks for today?

2. I ask God to shine his light into my heart

so that when I look back over the day I might see it from His perspective, working in the things that have happened to me.

3. Now I remember the day starting from when I woke up

I remember the people I met and the things that happened—was it a 'good' day or a 'bad' day? Was it unusual? Who did I meet? Did I come across something surprising: a long-lost friend... or an awkward enemy?

Does something special come to mind... something I was told... a beautiful sunset... something on the TV?

In all the things that happened how did I feel? Was I joyful or sad, angry or frightened?

Maybe I felt great and was happy? What caused my feelings and did they change during the day?

God guides us through our moods and feelings. Normally, the way of God is (in a deep sense) peaceful and consoling. If your day was disturbed or if you were uneasy, can you sense where that uneasiness was coming from? like a sailor buffeted by different winds we are affected by different things—the better we come to know these swirling breezes, the easier it will be to see the perhaps subtle movements of God in our lives.

4. An important question to ask is: what can I be proud of today?

There will be things—if you can't think of anything then you haven't looked hard enough! I will give thanks for this.

But also, did I turn away from God during the day? Maybe I turned a blind eye when it suited me? Did I recognise God in that homeless man, the annoying child or the spiteful parent in the school-yard?

I will say a prayer asking forgiveness for anything I may have done to hinder or ignore God's love during the day that has passed.

I will ask especially for the graces of healing and strength.

5. The final part of the prayer is to look forward to tomorrow

We are a people of hope—let us remember that God will be with us wherever and whatever is before us.

If we practice the Examen, we will grow to know ourselves, our moods and with the help of God, see in our prayer the way that God is moving in our lives. As our hearts become more sensitive we will recognise God more quickly so that eventually we will be sensitive to the God who is not just in 'holy' things but who is in all things.

My Spiritual MOT this Lent

- un contrôle technique spirituel pour le Carême !

You can start anywhere when you talk about your Spiritual life. But here are a few ways of thinking about maturing and developing your life as a Christian:

A **Rule of Life**, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the centre of everything we do. You make it to provide guidelines to intentionally pay attention and remember Him. The meaning of Rule comes from the Greek word for "trellis" and the Latin word for mark on the wall. A trellis is a tool designed to enable a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, becoming more fruitful and productive. In the same way, a Rule of Life can be the trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually.

The purpose of any Rule is to unite us in a local church in our intention to follow Christ, keeping us faithful to our unique grace and calling. A Rule serves as an anchor for us, a kind of banister to support us as we move forward in our journey with and for God. It is how we do life together, expressing the longings of our heart for God. It is meant to be a framework for freedom, providing healthy boundaries while leaving plenty of room for flexibility and individuality. Remember, a good Rule works best when it challenges us, it cannot be so easy that we are not stretched, at the same time, it cannot be so demanding that we are overwhelmed and discouraged.

We can consider each of these as ways of creating a Rule:

Purpose: To enable us to share in glorifying God the Holy Trinity.

Knowing God: To commit ourselves to regular participation in an act of worship.

Growing in Christ: To commit ourselves to regular prayer and intentional study of our faith, and where possible to seek guidance from another (a 'spiritual director') to resource us as we seek to journey with Christ.

Building community: To offer time, treasure and talents to work constructively with our fellow Christians in building community within the church and in the places where we live.

Living beyond ourselves: To seek purposefully to find a specific way or ways to relate our faith to the wider world in which we have been placed by God our Creator.

And it's good to think of what we can do but Lent is a preparation for Easter and we should be rested and refreshed in order to celebrate the Great Feast! So why not, using the Scriptures to guide your prayer, consider *prayer*, *rest* and *relationships* as foundation stones for your Rule of Life.

Prayer

- ♦ Be a lover of God, seeking to live in the love of Christ above all else. *Psalm 27:1-4; Matthew 22:36-38. Deut.6:4-9* Jesus identified loving God as the greatest commandment, a summation of all Scripture. We want to be a people who know God in our experience (heart and soul) as well as with our minds.
- ♦ Befriend silence. *Ps. 37:7; 1 Kings 19:11-13; Ps. 62:1-2*. Our tendency is to fear and avoid silence, not befriend it. Yet silence is one of God's great gifts, especially in our noisy culture. What makes our silence unique is its quality of being "before the Lord."
- ♦ Allow Holy Scripture to shape and form Christ in me. *2 Tim. 3:16-7; Ps. 19:7-11; Matt. 4:4*.

We love the Word of God, affirming that maturing in Christ requires a life where we read, memorize, meditate, enjoy, study, and obey Scripture. Our focus is that Christ be formed in us, not simply the accumulation of more information about him.

- ◆ Integrate contemplative practices and rhythms (e.g. Daily Office, Sabbath-keeping) to slow down my life. *Luke 5:15-16; Ps. 119:164; Deut. 5:12-15*. A great problem in Western culture today is our crammed schedules, endless to-do lists, and general busyness. Powerful, often demonic forces, keep us distracted and adrift spiritually. We affirm God's call to order our entire lives in such a way that the love of Christ comes before all else. Recognizing our humanity and our limits, we choose to observe contemplative practices in order to slow down to be with God, ourselves, and others

Rest

- ◆ Value my own dignity as a human being made in God's image through self-respect and self care. *Genesis 1:27, Luke 14: 17-24, Galatians 4:4-7*. An accurate whole grasp of the gospel leads us to an acceptance of ourselves that enables us to love others well. We are image-bearers of God; there is no greater compliment that could be given that could be given regarding our value and worth. According to the gospel, we are no longer slaves or orphans, but adopted sons and daughters. Jesus took our sin record, taking our death on the cross. At the same time, we are legally declared righteous in Christ and treated as if our record were perfect before God.
- ◆ Ruthlessly eliminate hurry: *Luke 10:38-42; Ps. 46:10; Prov. 19:2, 22:3*. The word ruthlessly was chosen intentionally because that is what it takes to eliminate hurry from our lives. It captures one of the great challenges before us as we seek to live authentic spiritual lives in our 24/7, multi-tasking world.
- ◆ Remember God's history of faithfulness with each new challenge. *Exodus 14:10-14; 1 Samuel 17:34-37*. We each face "Goliaths" and "Red Seas" during our lives as we journey with Christ. God invites us to remember His powerful acts through history and the specific ways He has delivered us from the "lion and the bear" (as with David). Forgetting leads to unbelief while remembering fills us with courage to follow Him wherever He leads.
- ◆ Receive God's limits as a gift. *Matt. 4:1-11; John 3:27; Eccles. 3:1-8*. God is God; we are not. God is perfect; we are not. While our culture resists the idea of limits, we embrace them. Limits are gifts and expressions of God's love and goodness to us. We recognize them as a friend, keeping us grounded so that we don't hurt ourselves, others, or God's work.

Relationships

- ◆ Love my neighbour as I love myself—embracing my singleness as I bond with others, or in relationship, giving first priority to partner and children. *Genesis 2:24-5; 1 Cor. 7:25-38*. We recognize both being partnered and singleness as vocations in God's kingdom, with deep significance for our walk with Christ. For the partnered, bonding with and serving our partner comes before all else but Christ. For those single, we affirm our call to be the bride of Christ, bond in healthy ways to others, and serve as parents who bear fruit for Christ.
- ◆ Walk in community while respecting each person's uniqueness. *1 Cor. 12:17-31; Hebrews 10:24-5; Prov. 27:17*. We place a high value on community, walking out our faith together as a local church family. At the same time, we affirm the biblical emphasis on the uniqueness of each person's individuality, gifts, and calling.

- ◆ Apply emotionally healthy practices in order to love well. *1 Cor. 13:1-3; Luke 10:25-37*. Jesus made it clear that the second greatest commandment is to love others. Part of our discipleship includes learning new skills—peaking, listening, clarifying assumptions and expectations, and clean fighting, among others. These "practices" are easy to learn but difficult to implement consistently, especially under stress.
- ◆ Listen more than I speak. *Proverbs 18:7-8; James 1:19, 26; James 3:1-12*. Scripture is clear that we are to be slow to speak and quick to listen; real maturity is reflected in our ability to control our speech. James states that if we are able to manage our tongues, we will be able to keep all our unhealthy passions in check.

A rule shouldn't be long or complicated and expect it to change. You may like to use this prayer as you consider your life this Lent.

Jesus our Way, Lord of the journey:

**surprising stranger on the Emmaus Road
guide to the spacious welcome of your Father's home,
companion both of our sorrows and our joys.**

We thank you for these lands in which we are both guests and hosts.

Walk together with us,

enabling us to be true signs of your presence.

Stretch our hearts and minds and spirits,

open our eyes and set our hearts on fire with love for you,

to share with you in transfiguring this cherished world,

for your honour and glory. Amen.

Fasting and Abstinence

Fasting is defined as voluntarily going without food in order to focus on prayer and fellowship with God. It's one of the oldest and most universal ways in which humans have tried to discipline themselves and concentrate on prayer. Fasting is tied to the principle in theology of the synergy between the body (Greek: *soma*) and the soul (*pneuma*). Christians do not see a dichotomy between the body and the soul but rather consider them as a united whole, and they believe that what happens to one affects the other (this is known as the psychosomatic union between the body and the soul). Saint Gregory Palamas argued that a human body is not an enemy but a partner and collaborator with the soul. Christ, by taking a human body at the Incarnation, has made the flesh an inexhaustible source of sanctification.

Living in a culture which is profoundly shaped by its relationship with food and wine we can say something profound about God and our world by fasting. So, why not think about fasting and/or abstaining during the 40 days of Lent? Or on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent?

The definition of abstinence is it lowers the quality of food (usually by not eating meat) and of fasting is that it lowers the quantity, and usually means not more than a light breakfast, one full meal, and one half meal daily each fast day.

If you want to know more about fasting try picking up a copy of Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster or download the PDF from <https://epdf.pub/celebration-of-discipline-the-path-to-spiritual-growth.html>

**The Church of England commends fasting
for those between the ages of 16 and 65 who are not on medication**