

## Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”

By James Martin, SJ

### Chapter 1: Everyone Can Pray

1. James Martin, SJ opens his book with the declaration “Everyone can pray” (p. 1). Do you believe that? Why or why not?
2. Martin offers ten reasons why believers don’t pray (pp. 3-9).
  - *They weren’t taught.*
  - *They consider prayer something reserved for holy people, not them.*
  - *They’ve been told they’re praying “wrong.”*
  - *They’re turned off by religion and are therefore turned off by prayer.*
  - *They’ve never been encouraged to think about what they already do as prayer.*
  - *They’ve had “bad” experiences with prayer and feel they have failed at it.*
  - *They don’t see the point, since God already knows that they’re thinking.*
  - *They’re too busy.*
  - *They’re lazy.*
  - *They fear change.*

Which ones do you see most frequently in others?

Which ones do you see most frequently in yourself?

## Questions from the book "Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone"

By James Martin, SJ

### **Chapter 2: Walking to school**

1. "Children often relate to God in any way they please. This allows them to be more open with God than adults are" (p. 24). Can you remember a time when you felt the freedom to relate to God in this way as a child?
  
2. Martin writes. "As I look back on my ordinary childhood experiences, then, I can distinguish three common ways of prayer: first, petition; second, conversation; and third, moments of mystical experience" (p. 24).

What experiences, if any, with these three forms of prayer did you have in your own childhood?

How did they shape your faith?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 3: Why pray?**

1. Martin describes ten reasons to pray in this chapter (pp 26-33). Which reason is the most compelling to you?

- *God wants to be in a relationship with you.*
- *We pray because we want to be in relationship to God.*
- *We have to.*
- *We are in need.*
- *Prayer helps us.*
- *Prayer is also a way to unburden ourselves ...*
- *Prayer ... helps us to praise God.*
- *Solidarity*
- *We pray to be transformed.*
- *Petitionary prayer*

Why?

2. If you currently pray, how would you describe your motivations to do it?

If you don't pray, how would you describe why you don't?

3. Do you believe Martin's suggestion that the real reason for prayer is that God is inviting us to prayer?

That the desire for prayer comes from God? Why or why not?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 4: Praying without knowing it**

1. What frustrations with prayer do you have if any?

What do you wish the experience of praying was like for you ?

In other words, what hopes do you have for prayer? Can you express these desires to God?

2. What are some ways you might already be praying “without knowing it” (p. 37)?

What might this realization teach you about the nature of prayer itself?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**

**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 5: What is prayer?**

1. What is prayer? Before reading this chapter, how would you have answered this question?

How would you answer it now?

2. “In time you’ll come up with your own definition of prayer. More important, you’ll experience prayer. And experiencing it is more important than defining it” (p. 59).

How do you hope your experience of prayer will change or develop over time?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 6: Beginning a friendship with God**

1. Do you consider God as your friend?

Do you think God desires your friendship? Why or why not?

2. Martin writes about being encouraged to “mine what we know about human relationships for ways to understand our relationship with God” (p. 60).

As you think about your human relationships, what about these relationships helps you understand your relationship with God?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 7: Everyone need help**

1. There is, says Martin, a “common belief that we shouldn’t ask God for help, or that asking for help is childish, or that it is a lesser form of prayer, or that it is wrong” (p. 92).

Have you ever felt this way?

After reading this chapter, are you more comfortable asking for help?

2. Does it come more naturally for you to pray for yourself or for others?

Why do you think that is?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 8: Now I lay me down to sleep**

1. What role do “rote prayers” play in your faith community (p. 118)?

What role do they play in your personal life?

2. “Rote prayers are a wonderful way to encounter God. Enjoy rote prayers – but don’t let your spiritual life become rote” (p. 132).

Can you think of some of the strengths and weaknesses of rote prayers?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 9: I am here**

1. Have you ever prayed “the examen” (p. 138)? If so, what has been your experience with this popular form of prayer?
  
2. Martin writes: “The examen is an antidote?” (p. 153). What does he mean by this?

How might you use the examen in your personal prayer life moving forward?



# the EXAMEN

The *Examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

- 1** Ask God for light.  
*I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.*
- 2** Give thanks.  
*The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.*
- 3** Review the day.  
*I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.*
- 4** Face your shortcomings.  
*I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.*
- 5** Look toward the day to come.  
*I ask where I need God in the day to come.*

Version of the Examen from *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer* by Jim Manney © Loyola Press

[WWW.IGNATIANSPIRITUALITY.COM](http://WWW.IGNATIANSPIRITUALITY.COM)

*For use with chapter 9*

## **The Examen Prayer**

*For use with chapter 9*

Taken from The Examen Prayer - Timothy Gallagher

### **Introduction to the Examen**

- growth in relationship with God occurs through mutual self-revelation
- the examen is a way of praying that opens our eyes to God's daily self-revelation and increasingly clarifies our own responses to it.
- the examen is truly prayer, something we ask God to do, and not human achievement
- the examen is our way of being regularly available to God so that divine light and love can heal our darkness and point the way toward spiritual growth.
- NOTHING in the spiritual life can replace prayer that seeks this awareness of God's daily leading in our lives.
- St. Ignatius calls the examen "the key spiritual exercise"
- the examen is NOT the self-evaluation of a heart in isolation but rather a colloquy, a conversation, a dialogue between two hearts.

**Transition** ● Begin the Examen by becoming aware of the love with which God looks upon you.

- See John 1:48, Mark 2:14, Luke 7:13, Mark 10:21

### **Step 1 - Gratitude**

- "to give thanks to God our Lord for the benefits received"
- by starting with gratitude, we open the window into the deepest reality of our spiritual lives:  
God's unbounded love for us and desire for our response, in love, to the love revealed in this giving.
- go through the day hour by hour or spontaneously
- let the Lord tell the concrete story of his love in the hours of this day

**Step 2 – Petition** Matt 7:7, John 14:13

- step one teaches us that all we do and have comes from God
- petition is asking for the grace that alone can make our examen fruitful, recognizing that even the rest of this prayer of the examen is a gift from God
- humbly and sincerely ask for the outpouring of God’s grace and love that enables us to do all things and so empowers us to practice the examen.

**Step 3 - Review**

- we review our spiritual experience of the day (spiritual desolation and consolation, affections, thoughts, feelings), ask God to shine light on our experience so that we may remember it well
- when experiencing desolation (heaviness), what was the cause of it?
- when experiencing consolation (energizing joy), what is the Lord desiring me to do with it?
- this step contains enormous potential for growth in our capacity to notice, understand, and respond fruitfully to the spiritual movements of our hearts and so to increase in Gospel love.
- watch for possible invitations from the Lord to moral growth

**Step 4 – Forgiveness** Luke 15:20

- “to ask forgiveness of God our Lord for my failings”
- should flow naturally from our review done in step 3
- this is the privileged daily space of the deep experience of knowing that we are loved and held by God in all our brokenness and littleness.
- in this step we reflect upon the times of our faults, the times in which we did not receive God’s spiritual visitation.
- our asking is simply the gateway for God to respond with his loving embrace and celebration.

## **Step 5 - Renewal**

- “to propose amendment with God’s grace”
- first four steps have looked back from the perspective of the present. This step looks ahead
- as you look ahead to the next day, you normally have a good idea of what to expect.
- in this step look ahead to foresee and plan specifically how we will respond to God’s call to growth.
- Which spiritual initiatives will lead most surely to growth?
- What specifically shall we undertake as we prepare for the coming day?
- Will we be able to live concretely the newness that we seek?
- this step will often - though not always - be concerned with seemingly small initiatives.  
small enough that they would be unnoticed by others.

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 10: What happens when you pray?**

1. Of all the things Martin says “happen in prayer” (p. 165), which have you experienced the most often?

Which have you experienced least often?

2. What has been the most surprising thing that you have experienced in prayer?
3. Have you ever had a mystical experience in prayer (p. 205-212)? If so describe it.

## Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”

By James Martin, SJ

### **Chapter 11: How do I know it's God?**

1. “How do I know what's coming from God and what's coming from me?”

Before reading this chapter, how would you have answered this question?

How would you answer it now?

2. Learning to distinguish between God's voice and our own thoughts can be one of the most challenging aspects of prayer. Martin offers seven questions to help (pp. 227-232).

- *Is the evil spirit involved?*
- *Does it make sense?*
- *Does it lead to an increase in love and charity?*
- *Does it fit with what I know about God?*
- *Is it a distraction?*
- *Is it wish fulfillment?*
- *Is it important?*

Which of these questions seems most helpful in establishing or growing your own prayer life? Why?

## Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”

By James Martin, SJ

### **Chapter 12: The gift of imagination**

1. How does imagination function in your spiritual life in general and your prayer life in particular?

Would you change anything about it?

2. Martin recounts a story of Timothy Cardinal Dolan, whose retreat director “suggested that he simply hold the Infant Jesus” during a time of prayer (p. 254). This simple imaginative prayer left a lasting impact on Cardinal Dolan.

Is there one scene in the Bible you’d like to enter into imaginatively?

## Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”

By James Martin, SJ

### **Chapter 13: Praying with sacred texts**

1. Martin mentions Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, who writes, “I find God largely in and through the Bible ... It is for me the most important way to come to know, love, and serve God” (pp. 265-266).

What is your relationship with the Bible today?

2. “Pray *lectio* in whatever way helps you encounter God through the sacred Scriptures or other writings. And let God encounter you in an way God desires” (p. 273).

How do you feel like God encounters you through Scripture?

Are there any patterns or themes to those experiences?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 14: Finding God at the center**

1. “Like two rivers, two traditions of prayer flow through history or Christian spirituality, the *apophatic* and the *kataphatic*” (p. 275).

To which of these traditions are you more naturally drawn? Why?

2. “Centering prayer moves us to our center, where God dwells, waiting to meet us” (p. 278).

What appeals to you about this form a prayer?

What intimidates you?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 15: Discovering God in creation**

1. “For people living during biblical times, creation was suffused with God’s presence. I still believe it is, and I am not alone, but in many places today others no longer share that collective belief” (p. 287).

What is lost when creation is no longer seen as “suffused with God’s presence”?

2. Are you able to connect with God in creation?

If so, where does that happen most naturally?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 16: Talking about prayer**

1. Martin writes about spiritual direction, retreats, faith sharing, and journaling in this chapter.

Which practice might you want to try or practice more regularly moving forward?

2. This chapter describes a spiritual direction conversation between “Joe” and “Cathy” (pp. 310-314).

What did you learn about spiritual direction from this interaction?

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 17: Topics in prayer**

1. How do you perceive challenges in your spiritual life in general and your prayer life in particular?

Do you see them as threats to be avoided, seasons for learning something new, or something in between?

2. Martin writes about “disentangling” certain “spiritual strands” (p. 350). What is he referring to here?

***(For next week also read For further exploration pp. 367-371 --- Resources available regarding the topics discussed in this book.)***

**Questions from the book “Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone”**  
**By James Martin, SJ**

**Chapter 18: Now what?**

1. Prayer is “meant to move us ahead, to help us serve God and others ... prayer should change us” (p. 356).

Have you experienced that call to “change” in prayer?

What did it end up changing?

**\*\*\*For further exploration pp. 367-371 - Resources**