

Workshop Notes

Workshop Title: The *Examen* in Nurturing a Listening Life
Presenter: Susan Porterfield Currie



*You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
You perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
You are familiar with all my ways....*

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.
(Psalm 139:23-24)*

Biblical and Theological Understanding

Paul (Acts 17:24-28, speech to the Areopagus in Athens):

“God who made the world and everything in it...” and marked out a people to know him “so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.”

Romans 8:26-27 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

Luke 24:32 “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Evelyn Underhill, The Spiritual Life

Just as physical life means, and depends on, constant correspondence with our physical environment, the atmosphere that surrounds and penetrates us, the energies of heat and light, whether we happen to notice it or not; so does spiritual life mean constant correspondence with our spiritual environment, whether we notice it or not. [p 41-42]

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Historical Framing: Ignatian Consolation and Desolation

context: _____ and _____

noticing: in _____ and in _____

noticing in _____

Examen, in prayerful conversation with God, attentive to the presence of God

Consolation: when and how am I being drawn _____ ?

Desolation: when and how am I being pulled _____ ?

chart: Affective Christian Spiritual Discernment

discernment criteria for those who are _____

in whom the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence produces _____

Safeguards and tests

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God... This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.... They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world... We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” (1 John 4:1, 2-3, 5-6, NIV)

- Does it align with the Scriptures?
- Does it find its home in the teaching of the historic orthodox church?
- Is it affirmed by the praying discerning Christian community?
- Does it keep unity?
- Is it characterized by the Christian virtues, producing the fruit of the Spirit?
- Time: Always pray these through, in conversation with God, listening, over time, and supported by Christian community. True consolation lasts; false consolation falls away.

*“True consolation, the work of the Spirit of God, will result in a life of holiness, service and generosity in response to the call of Christ.” (Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*, p 41)*

*of Jonathan Edwards' Religious Affections: “The real test of the validity of spiritual experience is the outcome—the fruit of the experience.... What mattered was not the depth of emotion or feeling; the true test was whether the experience led to genuine spiritual growth.. (Gordon Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*, p 48)*

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Deeper discernment: nuancing through attentive engagement in prayer

- *nuances of layers of discernment: exploring with the Holy Spirit*

- *nuances of response: particularizing the examen questions to match God's work*

REFLECTION prompts:

From your awareness of your false-self and your true-self, prayerfully frame personalized examen questions:

- *that help you notice your particular false-self propensities*
- *that help you notice your particular true-self invitations from God*

From your awareness of the Lord's work in you and invitations to you in this season,

- *prayerfully frame personalized examen questions*
- *that help you pay attention to this work*

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Using the Examen in Spiritual Direction / Companioning Ministry

examen as “looking back over” is particularly about

How you offered contemplative presence:

- How did I enter the day / meeting myself? What was going on externally for me, and internally in me, that might have affected how I came into the time and how I was able to be present in the time?
- How was I towards the directee / each person in the group -- in heart? in body? in soul?

How you protected and nurtured contemplative presence:

- Did the time feel spacious, trusting, open to God, present to his love?
 - What helped to nurture that?
 - What went on in my own prayer throughout the time?
- Were there moments that felt closed in, confusing, or losing a sense of safety, trust, God’s peace, Christ’s light, or the Lord’s love with us and between us?
 - What might have contributed to that – in the directee’s content, or in my responses?
 - If the latter, what was going on in me that led me to offer that response?
 - Was any of that coming from my false-self propensities?
 - How did I help, or how might I have helped, return us to contemplative presence?

Hold these awarenesses before the Holy Spirit now, asking him if there’s anything more he wants to show you in it.

examen as “looking back over”

as training for *examen* “in the moment” (in a direction session),
which is more about _____

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Affective Christian Spiritual Discernment

| <p>Consolation: the Lord's invitation to discernment through senses of</p> | <p>Desolation: the Lord's invitation to discernment through senses of</p> | <p>Biblical examples of God's character traits, or signs of his presence and invitations</p> |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "focus of the experience turns us towards God"* ● light ● peace ● energy, life ● spacious, freedom ● joy, hope, faith ● fruit of the Spirit ● integration of being ● "solid ground, living true"* ● maybe risky, but fundamentally safe ● "feeling drawn" * ● trust ● God's presence, even if unseen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "focus of the experience turns us away from God, in on ourselves"* ● darkness ● turmoil, unrest, unease ● sloth, ennui, acedia ● closed in, trapped ● hopelessness, despair (different from sadness) ● attitudes of the flesh ● disintegration ● "at odds with ourselves"* ● fundamentally unsafe ● "feeling driven" * ● fear ● felt absence of God, maybe evil presence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 Jn 1:5, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." ● Phil 4:7, "the peace of God, which passes understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds" ● ● ● ● Gal 5:18-23; Eph 5:9 ● ● ● Numbers 14 – exploring Canaan ● Acts 20:22-23 ● ● Mt 14:27-31, Peter walking on water ● Psalm 139:7-12 / [contrast: 1 Sam 28:5-7 Saul] |