

HINDSIGHT'S 2020

EXAMEN

LOOK BACK

&

MOVE

FORWARD

GRATITUDE

RULE OF LIFE

CONFESSION & REPENTANCE



**GOD IS STILL
INVITING US INTO
HIS PRESENCE.**

INTRODUCTION

Hindsight's 2020.

As we approach the end of one of the hardest years we've ever collectively experienced, it would seem easiest to just try to forget the year and move on. Maybe our hope is in the calendar switching to a new year. Maybe we're just hanging on until that happens.

Whatever this year held for you, we know one thing has been true: God has been present in the midst of it. Even when we haven't seen him or felt him near, he has been with us. He is Emmanuel.

In the midst of all of the devastating events of 2020, God is still inviting us into his presence.

He invites us to bring the difficult things before Him, He invites us to celebrate even the smallest of gifts in gratitude, and He invites us to trust him with all we've experienced.

We've created a simple tool based on simple practices that have been around for a long time that will help us do just that - answer those invitations from God.

We hope you'll take some time together with your family, a trusted friend, or your small group to dig in and make this new year a little different. A different that will last.



GOD WANTS US TO
SEE WHERE HE'S
BEEN WORKING IN
OUR LIVES IN THIS
LAST YEAR.

YEARLY EXAMEN

Taking time to review where you've been the past twelve months is an important step before moving forward. So much of the time we move so fast through life that we don't even know where we've been or what God has really done. In a season like this, we may just want to skip the review altogether. But we believe God wants us to see where he's been working in our lives in this last year.

We want to slow down a bit and take a longer look at 2020, inviting God to show us where we've been.

Developed 400 years ago, the Ignatian Prayer of Examen is a simple prayer practice that allows you to look with God back over your last twenty-four hours.

In the Examen, we slow down, spending a few moments asking God to speak about where we've been and how we've lived. Where have we seen God move? Did we love him well? Did we love others well? Did we move closer to him? Farther away?

In this version of the Prayer of Examen, we'll look over the last year at four major categories: physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health.

There isn't a right or wrong way to do it. The important thing is that you do it. The other important thing is to remember as you look at your year that God loves you.

EXAMEN CONT.

There is nothing you've done or experienced that he's not aware of. He's been present for it all. Regardless of what your year held, he's still loving you and he's still with you.

Shame has no place in this prayer. It is the language of the enemy, not of our God. There may be some conviction and a reminder of the ways God wants us to live, but shame won't be a part of that equation.

Find a quiet place where you can sit with each category, working through the questions slowly. This is not an exercise where the "first response is the right response"—slow is the key. In fact, thinking deeply about each question, you will probably find that a longer look and lingering reflection will allow issues and concerns to rise that a quick response will simply overlook. Take your time and allow God to speak. Let his grace surround you as you begin.

SECTION 1: BE STILL AND INVITE GOD TO HELP

Find a quiet place where you can be alone with God. Remove as many distractions as possible (i.e. silence or turn off your cell phone, turn down the noise, remove yourself from crowded spaces, etc.). Before you begin, take a few moments to BE STILL before God. Quiet your heart, mind, and body.

Read through Psalm 139 as you begin.

Say an honest prayer to God, voicing any fears you have. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts as you reflect on your year. Invite God's love to lead you.

SECTION 2: GRATITUDE

Gratitude cultivates our hearts and minds, orienting them toward the good things of God. When we spend time saying, "thank you," it really does change us.

Take a moment to reflect on the things that make you grateful from this past year. Make a list in the space below of the things that stir gratitude to God from your experience of this year. Be specific. Take some time to thank him for the good things from your year.

EXAMEN CONT.

SECTION 4: GENERAL EXAMINATION OF MY LIFE

In the past year:

- What were the most important events that happened to me or in me?
- What were the greatest breakthroughs in any of the following categories: physical, emotional, relational, vocational, spiritual, interpersonal, etc.?
- What was the greatest struggle?
- What was the greatest and deepest loss?
- What was the area that consumed my thinking and attention?
- Where did I feel most vulnerable?
- Where and when did I most experience the presence of God and why?
- Where and when did I experience the greatest sense of consolation—closeness to God?
- Where and when did I experience the greatest sense of desolation—feeling distanced from God?
- What is ONE word that might sum up this past year?
- What are the things that stir the deepest gratitude in my heart from this past year?

EXAMEN CONT.

SECTION 4: GENERAL CATEGORIES OF MY LIFE

1. My Physical Health

List three words that describe my physical condition and well-being this past year.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How did I value rest? How did I sleep, engage in restorative recreation, or practice Sabbath?

What health choices did I give attention to?

What specific changes do I desire to make during this year that will help me honor God in my body?

2. My Emotional Health

What are three FEELINGS (positive or negative) that dominated my life this past year?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When was I the MOST JOYFUL this past year? What was I doing, who was I with, and where was I?

When was I the SADDEST this past year? What was I doing, who was I with, and where was I?

What area of my life gave me the greatest sense of internal stress? Internal joy?

How do I feel about my emotional well-being this past year?

What specific changes do I desire to make during this year to honor God in my emotions?

EXAMEN CONT.

3. My Relational Health

List the people who have been life-giving to me this past year:

What letter grade do I give for my over-all sense of having community?

A-Excellent B-Very good C-Average D-Really lacking in friends

How have I felt isolated? How have I felt connected?

Is my life style, work schedule, and present reality conducive to having the relationships I want and desire? If not, what needs to be different?

What are the invitations God is presenting in my relational health for the coming year?

4. My Spiritual Health

What three words describe my spiritual health over the past year?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How has my relationship with God grown over the last year?

The three most important spiritual take-a-ways from this past year that I never want to forget are:

What was my deepest spiritual struggle—the place of wrestling with God or the place of my deep lament?

What people do I feel the most spiritually connected to in my life?

What Scriptures or prayers have played an important role in this past year? How have they shaped me?

What are the invitations God is presenting for my spiritual health for the coming year?



IF WE CONFESS
OUR SINS, HE IS
FAITHFUL AND
WILL FORGIVE US
(1 JOHN 1:9)

SECTION 5: CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

Scripture says all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's best for us (Rom. 3:23). Scripture also says that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and will forgive us (1 John 1:9).

Confession simply means that we would "agree with God." We agree that what we've chosen isn't in line with his best for us. Maybe you've struggled with pride or selfishness. Maybe you've struggled with a stronghold that you need God's help to break. Maybe you've just not made time for him the way you want. Whatever it is, take some time to tell God about it.

Pray, asking what repentance ("turning away from or changing your mind") looks like in the coming year. Step into God's forgiveness, receiving his grace, mercy, and love.

***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
1 John 1:9***

SECTION 6:LOOKING TOWARD TOMORROW

As you enter into the new year, spend a few moments asking for God's blessing on the future twelve months. Read through the beautiful prayer of Thomas Merton below. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you.

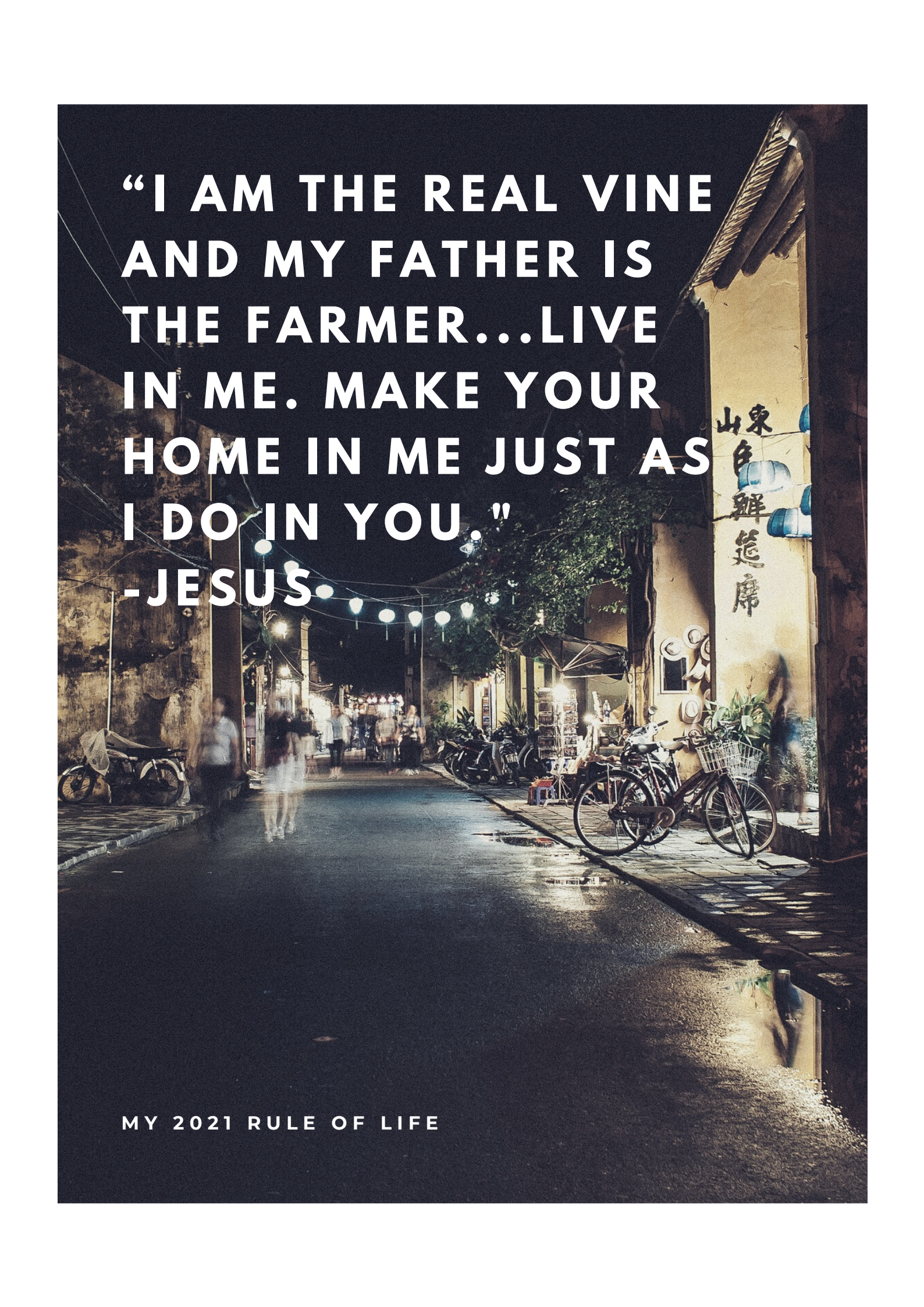
My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.



TAKE A MOMENT TO PRAY THROUGH YOUR UPCOMING YEAR.

- Where do you need God's loving presence?
- Where do you need Him to carry you?
- Where do you want to see and hear Him more?

Write your own prayer for the coming year.

A night street scene in a traditional Chinese town. The street is wet and reflects the warm glow of string lights and lanterns hanging from the buildings. On the right, a yellow building features vertical Chinese calligraphy and blue lanterns. Several bicycles are parked along the sidewalk. In the background, more people and lights are visible, creating a sense of a lively, historic neighborhood.

**“I AM THE REAL VINE
AND MY FATHER IS
THE FARMER...LIVE
IN ME. MAKE YOUR
HOME IN ME JUST AS
I DO IN YOU.”
-JESUS-**

MY 2021 RULE OF LIFE



A RULE OF LIFE IS LIKE A SPIRITUAL BUDGET FOR OUR LIVES...

RULE OF LIFE

In the first section of this exercise, we took time to prayerfully look back at our past year. We took time to be still, to be thankful, and to assess where we were physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

These next several questions are here to help you form a general plan to answer the question, “OK, after ALL of that reflection I just did...what now?”

To help us answer that question, we are going to craft a “rule of life.” A rule of life is like a spiritual budget for our lives. Just like we plan out where our money goes in a budget, we want to design our lives around certain things that will help mold us into becoming more like Jesus in the midst of our crazy world. A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what he did.

The word “rule” has all kinds of weird connotations in our culture, but as one author writes, “The Latin word we translate ‘rule’ was originally the word for a trellis in a vineyard. In the same way a vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground, so it can bear the maximum amount of fruit, and keep free of predators and diseases, we need a rule as a kind of support structure to organize our life around “abiding in the vine,” (John 15:1-8) as Jesus imagined.

We want to produce fruit, so crafting a “rule of life” will help us be intentional about connecting with Jesus in the coming year. This exercise isn’t meant to be a “goal setting” practice, but is meant to help you find rhythm and space so you can stay connected to God even when trials come.

MY 2021 RULE OF LIFE

There is no one “right” way to design a rule of life, but here are a few tips to keep in mind before you get started:

1. Take baby steps – It’s very easy to want to jump right in and overload yourself with all kinds of different spiritual practices that will help you live and love like Jesus, but the error of jumping into this pool instead of wading in is that you might end up drowning. By this I mean that if you try and do too much at once, you might end up not doing any of it. Small steps are better than no steps at all.

2. Be specific – When creating your rule, be concrete. Get practical. For example, instead of saying “I will read the bible,” try instead, “I will spend 15 minutes every morning in the bible.”

3. Think holistically – As humans, we consist of a mental side, an emotional side, a spiritual side, a relational side, and a physical side. We are holistic. We are more than just our feelings. We are more than just our thoughts. We are more than just matter. When crafting your rule of life, be sure to include practices that will impact all of you, not just your spiritual life or not just your emotional life, etc.

4. Remember that this is a working document – Just as a budget can be adjusted dependent on your needs or the season or outside circumstances, so too, can your rule of life be flexible and change as necessary.

5. Focus on the goal – The goal of designing a rule of life is not to burden you with a bunch of stuff to do. The goal of crafting a rule of life is to help you align your life with the way of Jesus in order to help love God, love people, and make disciples.

Ok, are you ready? Let’s jump in. Reflect on the questions on the next page and use the allotted space to jot down your answers.

MY 2021 RULE OF LIFE CONT.

When/where do I feel closest to God? What practices naturally draw me towards him (i.e. daily devotion, prayer, sharing your story, living in community, Sabbath, silence and solitude, fasting, generosity, simplicity, etc.)?

What is most important to me? Who do I want to become? Based on my looking back at 2019, what has (realistically) received most of my attention?

Where do I want to change? Where do I feel powerless to change?

What practices suit your daily, monthly, and yearly rhythms? Based on your daily, monthly, and yearly rhythms, what practices will help form you into Jesus' image in a holistic way?

Write a prayer to God expressing your heart, your intent, and your desire to be shaped into Jesus' image. Invite the Holy Spirit to help lead and guide you on this journey.

Based on your answers use the chart below to start filling in your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms. Choose some categories where you want to focus that allow for a holistic approach and write them across the top as you begin.

RULE OF LIFE EXAMPLE

In the box below, write down what daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms you want to pursue to help you look, live, and love like Jesus.

Daily rhythms:

- 15 minutes reading the Bible every morning before work
- Prayer each morning
- Practice the examen each night
- Pray for and with my kids before school
- Exercise at the gym at least 30 minutes
- Limit phone usage/social media to 30 minutes

Weekly rhythms:

- Worship in Church every Sunday with my family
- Take communion every Sunday
- Attend my life group fully engaged every Wednesday
- Participate in Sabbath for a 24-hour period once a week
- Serve at church in children's ministry

Monthly rhythms

- Read 1 book
- Invite a neighbor or friend over for dinner
- Serve with my church in an area of need
- Go over budget with my spouse
- Spend time in nature
- Date night with spouse 2-3x per month
- See a therapist once a month

Yearly rhythms:

- Go on a weekend retreat 2x to rest, play, and be with the Lord
- Read through the entire Bible
- Go on vacation to rest
- Assess my rule of life for adjustments

MY 2021 RULE OF LIFE

In the box below, write down what daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms you want to pursue to help you look, live, and love like Jesus.