

# Day 1: Love

*“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

If you practice the Examen, you will get a lot out of it. I know you will. But none of that matters—you will have nothing or gain nothing—if love isn’t the foremost grace you receive and the main response you give back when you pray it.

The whole point is intimacy with God—an intimate relationship in which you share everything with Jesus, and he shares everything with you. There is nothing Jesus withheld from you—not his body, heart, life, or death. The work of a lifetime is to respond to that kind of love with openheartedness and generosity.

I asked someone once, “Do you know that God loves you?” My question was met with a dazed and confused stare. I went on, “You know, a feeling that you are known, a sense that you aren’t alone, some awareness that you are delighted in or enjoyed. Beyond what you’ve read or been told, do you know, deep in your heart and soul, that the one who made you loves you?” The blank look I received told me the whole story. I don’t know why some people know this love and why some struggle to feel it—I just know that some of you who picked up this book wish you knew more love than you do right now.

So, that is my hope for you. That somewhere in these pages, that somewhere on a chair in your home or on a bank beside a river, your soul would flood with warmth, your eyes would fill with tears, and your chest would burn with knowing—all because of the extravagant, relentless, gentle, generous love of God. I know some of you would rather not. You’re not the kind of person who “burns” or “gets warm” with feeling. I get it. And I’m still going to pray it happens to you. I

can't think of a better prayer for you as you begin your journey with the Examen than these verses out of Ephesians 3:16–19:

And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.

And as I'm praying Ephesians over you, I hope the Suscipe prayer (St. Ignatius included this prayer at the end of *The Spiritual Exercises*) becomes your prayer to God:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

Part of what I love so much about a liturgical church is all the prayers you can borrow—prayers that have been prayed for hundreds of years. But if even these borrowed prayers feel like too much effort or are not authentic to your experience, keep looking for what fits. Maybe this prayer from Thomas Merton's *Thoughts in Solitude* is more how you are feeling as you begin.

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.

If that's still too much, if you are skeptical or wounded or bruised or tired, then come to the Examen like you would pull up a chair to the fire pit in your backyard. Not the kind where you have to chop wood, gather kindling, light it, and stoke it. But the gas kind where you get to flip a switch and the flames magically appear. That kind of fire.

As Desmond Tutu said, “Like when you sit in front of a fire in winter—you are just there in front of the fire. You don’t have to be smart or anything. The fire warms you.” So, let it. Let the fire do what it’s meant to do. Just sit there in front of it until you thaw out—until you can feel your fingers again—until you can feel again. Let the sitting be your own version of a prayer.

## **All the MORE**

- As you pray the Examen today, ask that God would show you the deep and wide love that is for all God has made—especially you.
- Think about this remarkable quote in Corrie Ten Boon’s *The Hiding Place*, “Do you know what hurts so very much? It’s love. Love is the strongest force in the world, and when it is blocked that means pain. There are two things we can do when this happens. We can kill that love so that it stops hurting. But then, of course, part of us dies too. Or we can ask God to open up another route for that love to travel.” If you struggle to feel God’s love for you, confess that to God. Ask for help. Ask for help to see what blocks you. And then ask for a new path on which God’s love can travel to your heart.
- Is there anything keeping you from pulling your chair up to the fire? Tell God about it. And be gentle with yourself as you come. You may have been burned by the fire. It’s okay to feel a little scared.

Excerpted from *All the Things* by Katie Haseltine, 2021.