

The background is a dark, green-tinted image of a saint, likely St. Ignace of Loyola, holding a large open book. The saint has a halo and is wearing ornate, patterned robes. The book he holds is open, showing text and a cross on the right page. The overall tone is solemn and religious.

The Examen

A HALF DAY RETREAT

Welcome

Before we begin

“All the things in this world are gifts of God,
created for us, to be the means by which
we can come to know him better,
love him more surely,
and serve him more faithfully.”

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Welcome to this half day self-guided retreat exploring the prayer of examen.
Together, over the next few hours, we will explore the life of Saint Ignatius and what led him to compose this way of prayer, before moving slowly and prayerfully through the five sections of praying the prayer of examen. The method presented here is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius in his ‘Spiritual Exercises’.

- 1. Become aware of God’s presence.**
- 2. Review the day with gratitude.**
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions.**
- 4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
- 5. Look toward to tomorrow.**

Praying the prayer of examen is a practice which has been so beneficial in helping me to identify the presence of God in my everyday life. My sincere prayer through this retreat is that you too will be able to find the parts of your life where God is at work.

May you encounter the Lord in real and beautiful ways over the next few hours.

With care,



David Towns
Monastic Retreats

Written for
national retreat week
renew:all

• DO YOU HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE OF PRAYING THE EXAMEN?

What is your current experience of the prayer of examen?

If it is a new practice for you, what is your current understanding of praying the examen?

Do you have any questions, concerns or fears about praying the examen?

• WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LAY DOWN?

As you enter into this time of retreat there may be situations in your life which are causing you great distress or personal turmoil. For the next few hours, leave them here in the hands of the Lord, they will still be here for you later but you don’t need to hold them for the next few hours.

What is the Lord inviting you to surrender to him during this time? Make a note of them here.

Preparation

“Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”

ABBA MOSES - DESERT FATHER

Throughout history God has met with people in specific places. Elijah encounters the ‘still small voice’ on Mount Horeb, the desert fathers find the presence of God in the wilderness of Egypt and the disciples themselves encounter the risen Christ around a breakfast fire on the beach. Place is important.

As you come to this practice of examen place is important, try to find a space where you feel comfortable and which is free from distraction. It doesn’t need to be a picture perfect spot a chair in a corner can be just as sacred as the most ornate cathedral.

If you wish to make this retreat away from home, there is a directory of monasteries at our website (www.monasticretreats.co.uk). I’m sure they would be happy to host you for a morning or afternoon.

Here are some recommendations for things that may be helpful to have with you as you prepare a space to retreat

- A bible
- Your journal or a notebook and pen
- A candle
- A holding cross or rosary or pebble
- A glass of water (or a cup of your favourite tea)



Use this space to reflect and journal on the current state of your heart.

How have you arrived at this time of retreat?

- What is bringing you joy?
- If you were sitting down over a cup of tea or coffee with a trusted friend, what would be the first thing you would want to share?

• A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Sometimes confession can feel fitting before going on a retreat, here is a prayer you could use if it feels right for you today.

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have wandered and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.
We have offended against your holy laws.
We have left undone those things that we ought to have done;
and we have done those things that we ought not to have done;
and there is no health in us.
But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us sinners.
Spare those who confess their faults.
Restore those who are penitent,
according to your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may live a disciplined, righteous and godly life,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.*

The Examen

As we walk together through the prayer of examen we will pray this prayer using the following five steps.

- 1. Become aware of God's presence.**
- 2. Review the day with gratitude.**
- 3. Pay attention to your emotions.**
- 4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
- 5. Look toward to tomorrow.**

As we explore these five steps together we will be focusing on the following six areas of our lives to help us examine all aspects of our lives.

- Spiritual Health
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Relational Life
- Work Life
- Home Life

“God gives each one of us sufficient grace
ever to know His holy will, and to do it fully.”

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Step One

Become aware of God's presence.

The prayer of examen begins with us becoming aware of God's presence. Hopefully by settling in and preparing you are beginning to feel his presence with you. God is always present with us in every circumstance and in every moment we just need to look for him. What follows are some practical activities to help you become more aware of the presence of God with you right now.

• GOD IN YOUR BREATH

“The Spirit of God has made me,
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

JOB 33:4

Breath slowly and deeply. Open your hands and rest them lightly on your lap or table. Become aware of the sensation of your breath flowing in and out of your body. Feel your chest rising and falling. The coolness of the air as it enters your nostrils and the warmth of it as you exhale. Become aware of your feet on the floor. Close your eyes when you are ready and spend time breathing deeply. Whenever you are ready continue.

• SITTING WITH JESUS

With a slower breath now picture Jesus sitting with you.

What does his face look like? What is his expression towards you? How does this make you feel?



• GOD IN YOUR MOVEMENT

The labyrinth is an ancient symbolic pattern that dates back 4 to 5 thousand years, across faiths, civilizations and cultures. It can be seen represented on coins, murals, pottery or laid out on the ground, on mounds or in fields. They are seen to appear more frequently at times of social and political turmoil, such as during the medieval period, and again in our own time. Over the last 10 to 20 years there has been a resurgent interest and many new labyrinths have been built. Perhaps this is related to our present unsettled traumatic times.

On the following page there is a simple finger labyrinth for you to trace with your finger. As you do this become aware that God is with you in every part of the labyrinth, when you begin, as you trace the twists and turns, when you finally reach the centre and when you head back towards where you began. Just as in life Jesus always walks with us.

- When you are ready...slowly trace the labyrinth path with a finger, use a finger on the hand that you do not write with, just let your thoughts come to the surface and let them flow... Jesus is with you every step of the way, you are never alone. You are always loved by God.
- When you reach the centre...consider your thoughts... stay in the centre for a while and spend some time in prayer and reflection receiving God's love and blessing.
- When you are ready...return along the same path... return gratefully, prayerfully ... you might like to sing or say aloud a line from the psalms or a favourite hymn.



Step Two

Review the day with gratitude.

Although step two begins with reviewing your **day** you can apply this to any time frame, personally, I pray the prayer of examen every week and look back on the week that has past. The key here is to reflect on whatever time span you are reflecting on with a posture of gratitude.

We are going to look at six key areas of our lives. Think and reflect on each one slowly and prayerfully looking for the presence of God in each. There may be some areas which are easier than others. Be gentle with yourself and see what surfaces. There is no right or wrong way to do this.

As you spend this time reflecting you may see moments in your life where you have not been at your best, that word you said in haste, that thought which was uncharitable, that action which you now regret. As you make notes on each section bring it all, all is gently welcome here.

In step one we became aware of God's presence with us here and now, our challenge in step two is to trust Him to surface and bring to mind what he wants us to become aware of.

The prayer of examen is not about judgement but about noticing.

• SPIRITUAL HEALTH

- What has recently stirred your spirit?
- Where have you felt the presence of God?
- What are you most grateful for in your current spiritual state?

• PHYSICAL HEALTH

- How does your body feel at the moment?
- How is your sleep, exercise and food consumption?
- What part of your body are you most grateful for?

• MENTAL HEALTH

- What has been a source of joy this past week?
- What has caused you anxiety this past week?
- How would you sum up your current mental state?

• **RELATIONAL LIFE**

- Who brought you joy this past week?
- Who did you find challenging?
- What relationship are you most grateful for?

• **WORK LIFE**

- With what attitude have you been approaching your work?
- Do you find it a pleasure or a chore?
- Where is there life and joy in your work?

• **HOME LIFE**

- Has your home been a place of rest and refuge for you?
- If you had to describe the atmosphere of your home this past week, using only one word, what would it be?
- What physical space in your home are you most grateful for?

• **LOOK BACK**

Now you have reflected on these six areas take some time to look back prayerfully over what you have written. What you have recorded here will form the rest of this retreat.

As you read back your reflections, consider if there is anything else you need to add.

Is there anything you have avoided?

The presence of God is here, this is a safe place to bring all of your life. There is no judgement here.

Step Three

Pay attention to your emotions.

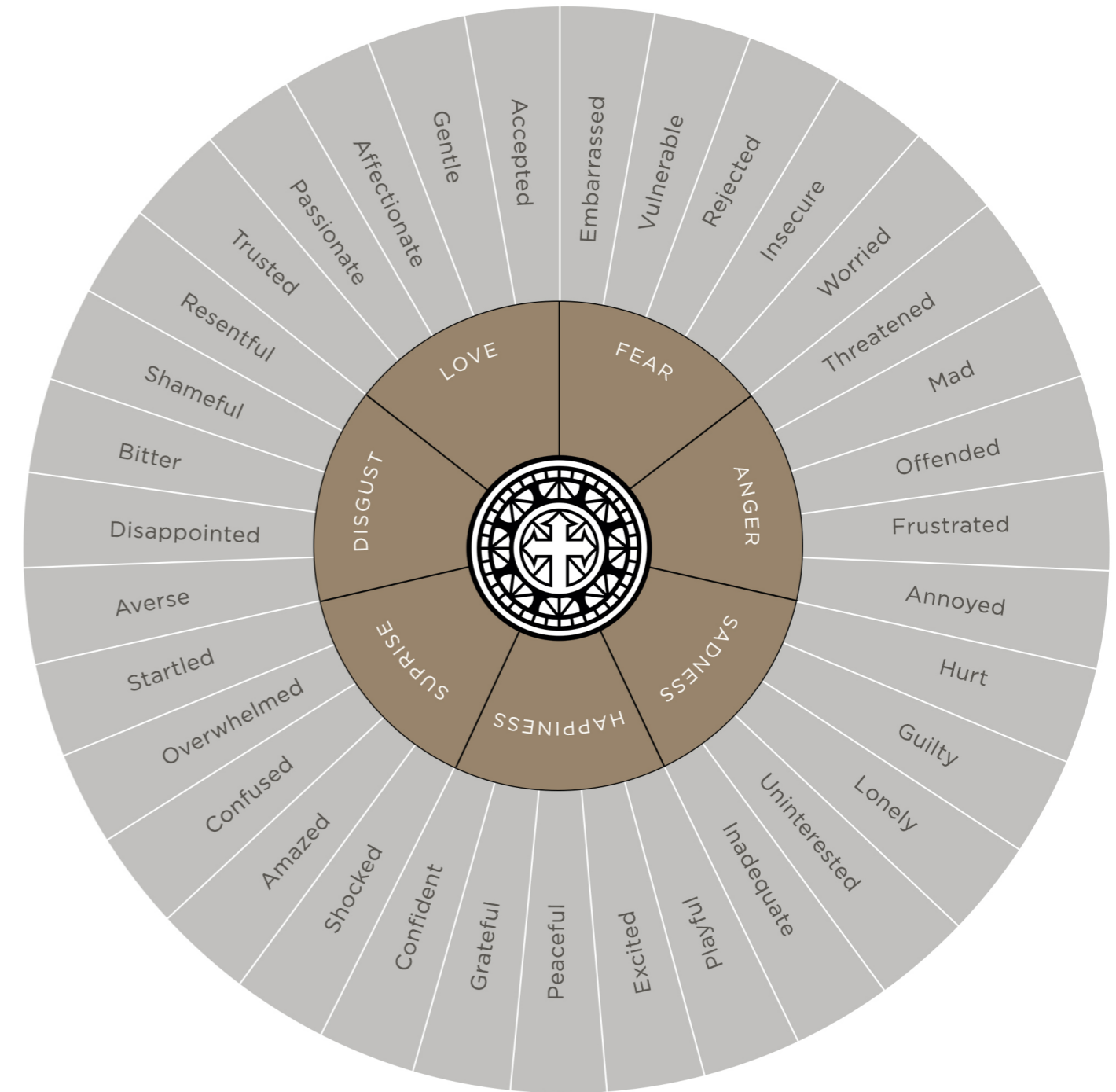
Now you are going to look back in greater depth over what you have written.

As you look at each section again consider the emotions which surface for you. Again there is no right or wrong response, this is between you and the Lord. You may wish to use this word bank to help you identify your emotions or you may wish to use the emotion webs on the next few pages.

Loving	Agitated	Weary	Thankful
Longing	Seeking	Whole	Ambivalent
Nourished	Thawing	Hurting	Courageous
Busy	Discovering	Energized	Numb
Exploring	Encouraged	Encumbered	Brittle
Squeezed	Disillusioned	Free	Curious
Affirmed	Daring	Heavy	Apathetic
Neglected	Settled	Wanting	Engaged
Content	Hurried	Wandering	Wounded
Forgotten	Fulfilled	Delighting	Open
Connected	Foggy	Broken	Discouraged
Distracted	Hungering	Trusting	Hopeful
Rested	Known	Anxious	Unsettled
Withered	Abandoned	Disturbed	Burdened
Healthy	Alive	Joyful	Fragile
Overwhelmed	Flourishing	Tired	Peaceful

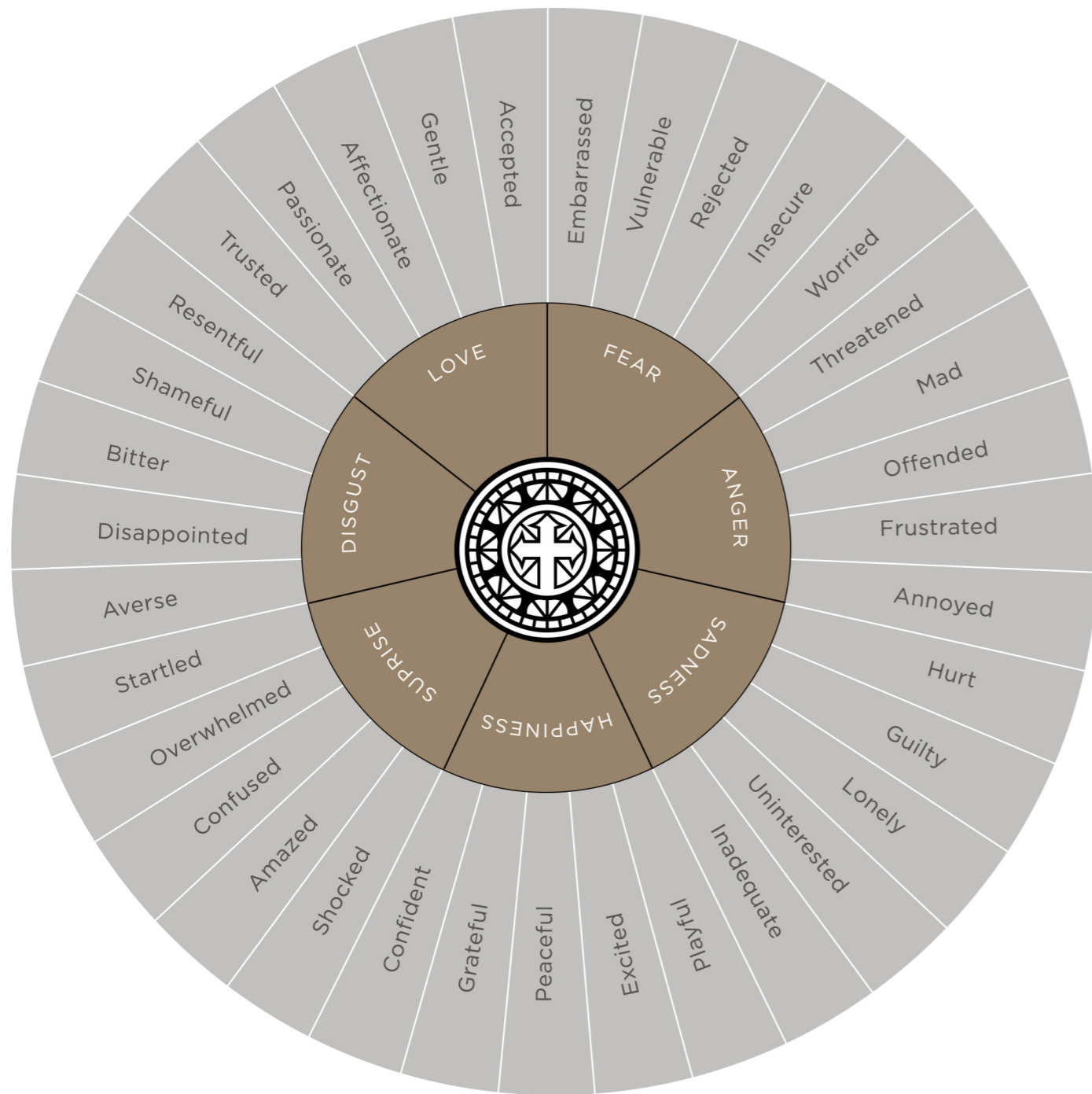
• SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Read back your reflections on your spiritual health, as you do look at the core emotions in the middle of this circle. From there, consider which of the outer emotions best describe your feelings. These are just suggestions and are by no means exhaustive. If none of them feel a good match add your own in light of what the spirit reveals. Make a note of what emotion feels most prominent in your spiritual health using the space at the bottom of the page. Repeat for each area of your life.



• EMOTIONS AROUND MY SPIRITUAL HEALTH

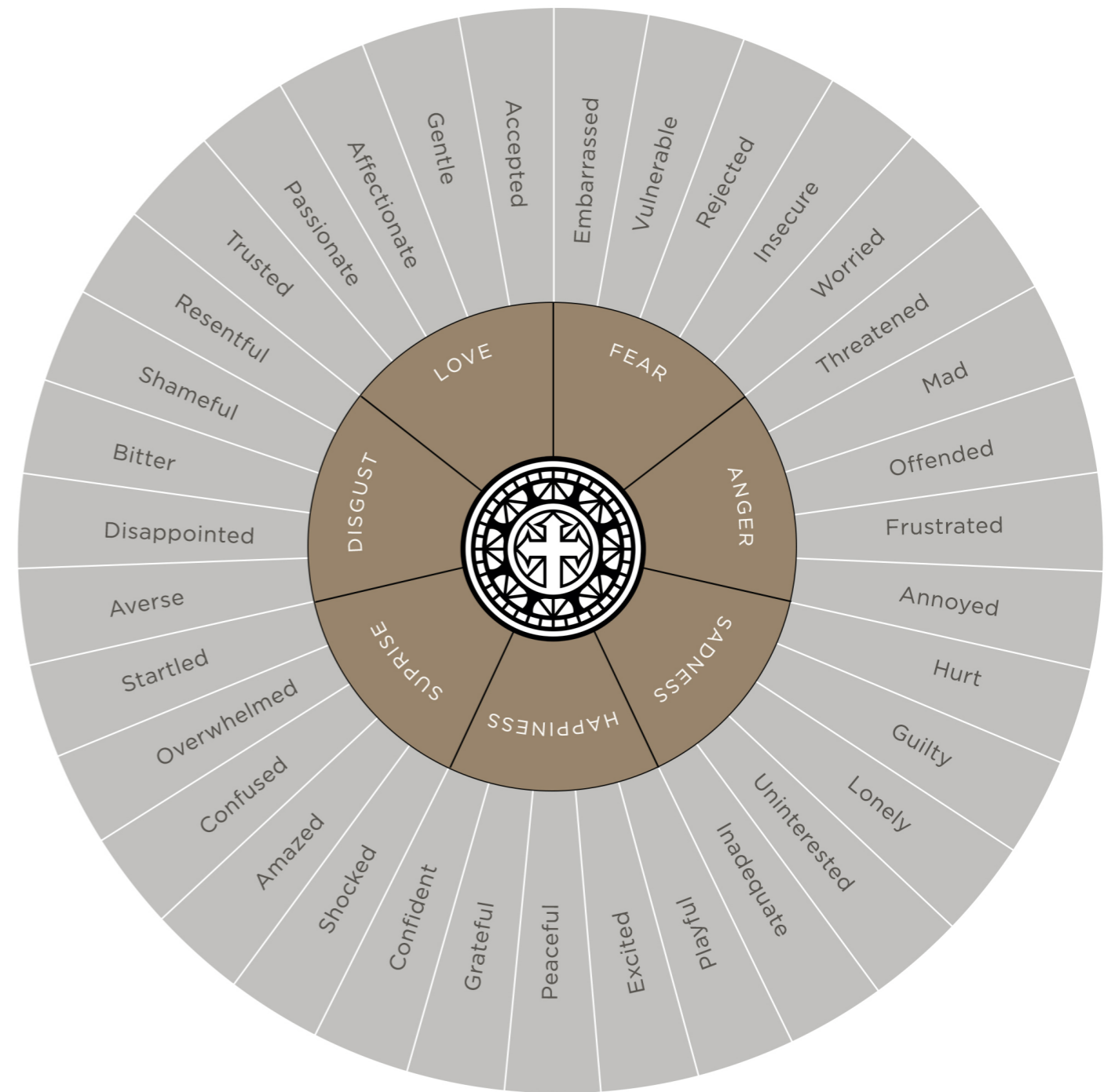
• **PHYSICAL HEALTH**



• **EMOTIONS AROUND MY PHYSICAL HEALTH**

A large, empty rectangular box intended for writing or drawing related to the physical health emotions.

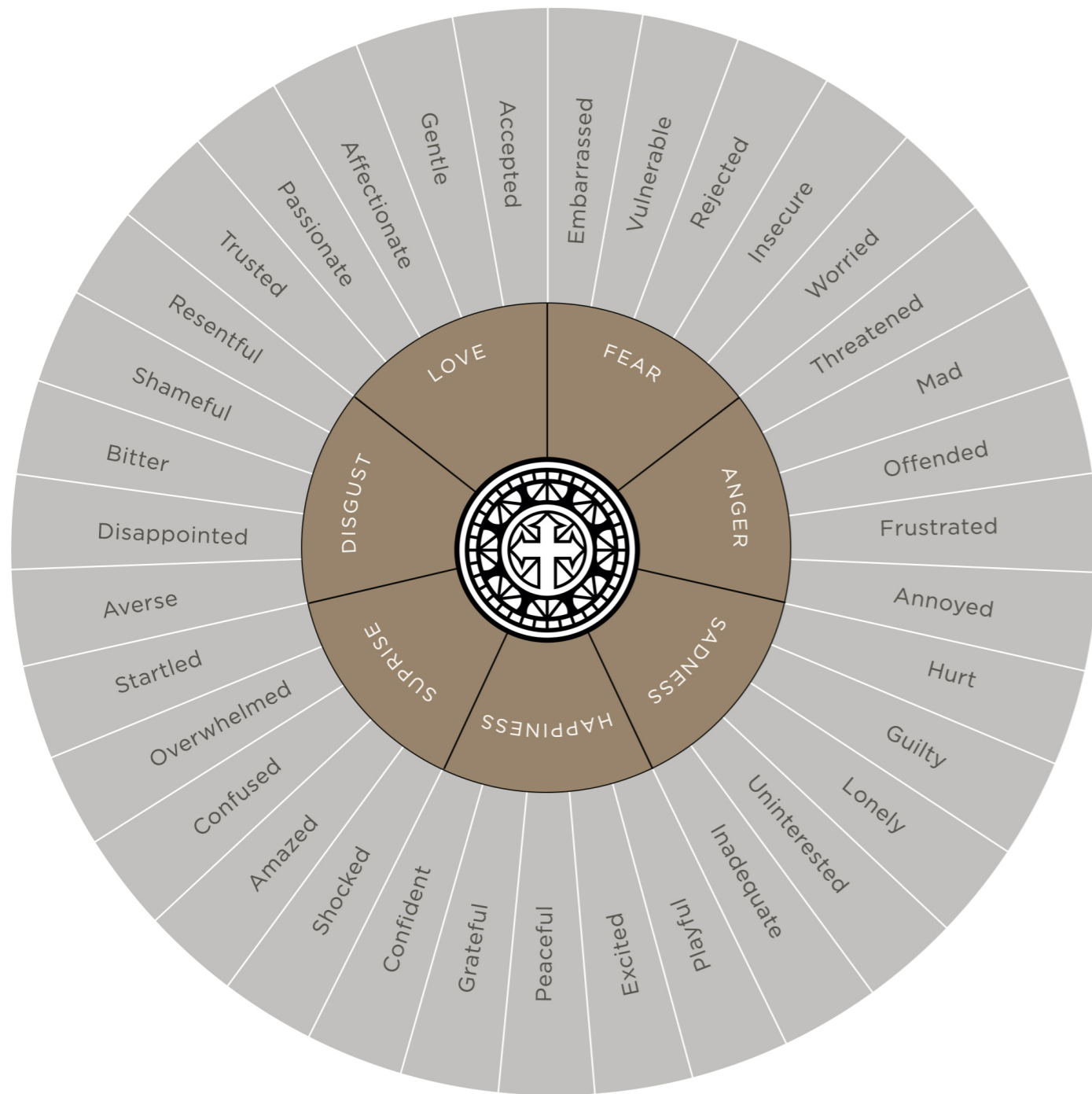
• **MENTAL HEALTH**



• **EMOTIONS AROUND MY MENTAL HEALTH**

A large, empty rectangular box intended for writing or drawing related to the mental health emotions.

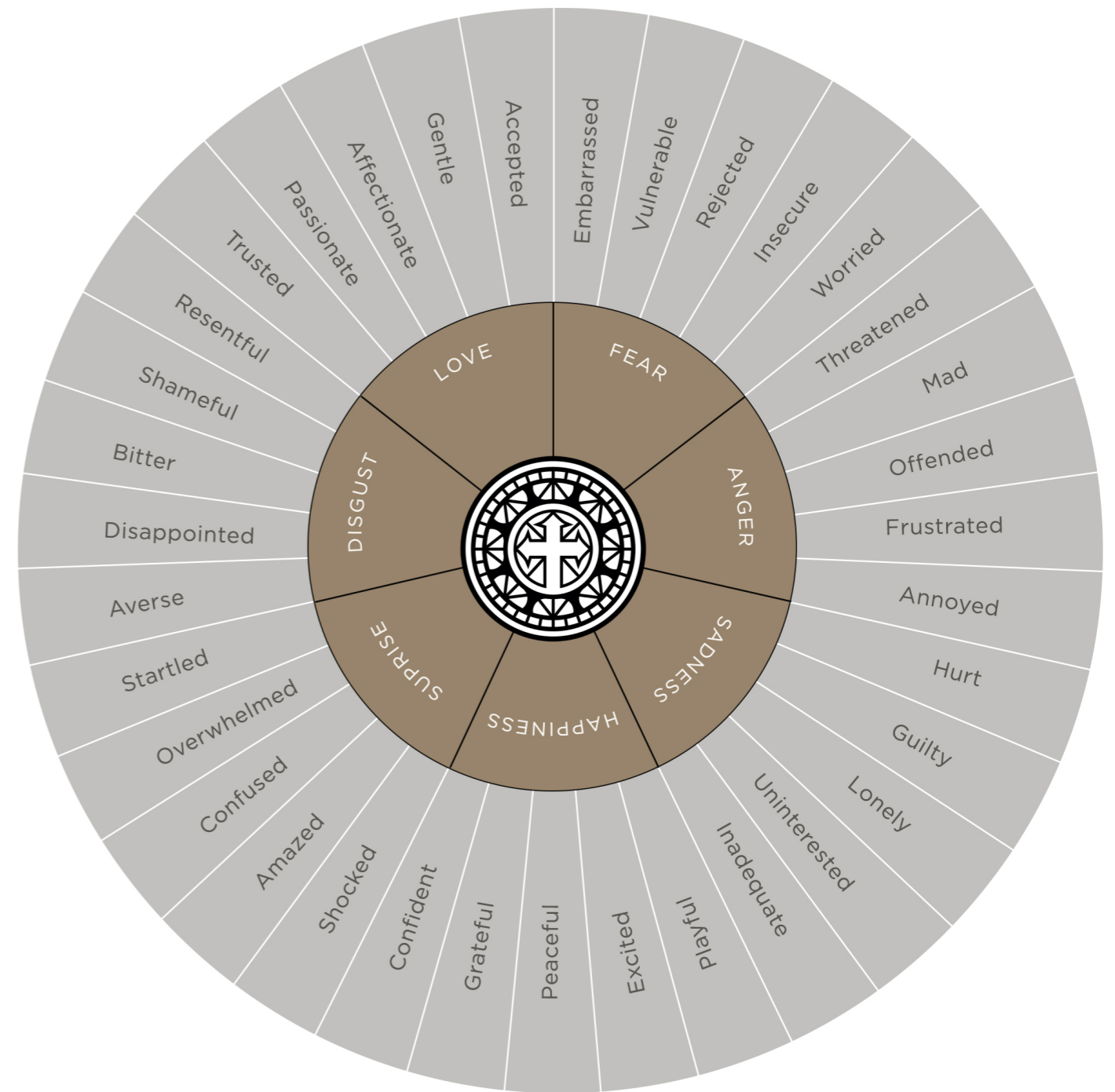
• RELATIONAL LIFE



• EMOTIONS AROUND MY RELATIONAL LIFE

A large, empty rectangular box provided for writing or drawing related to the emotions in relational life.

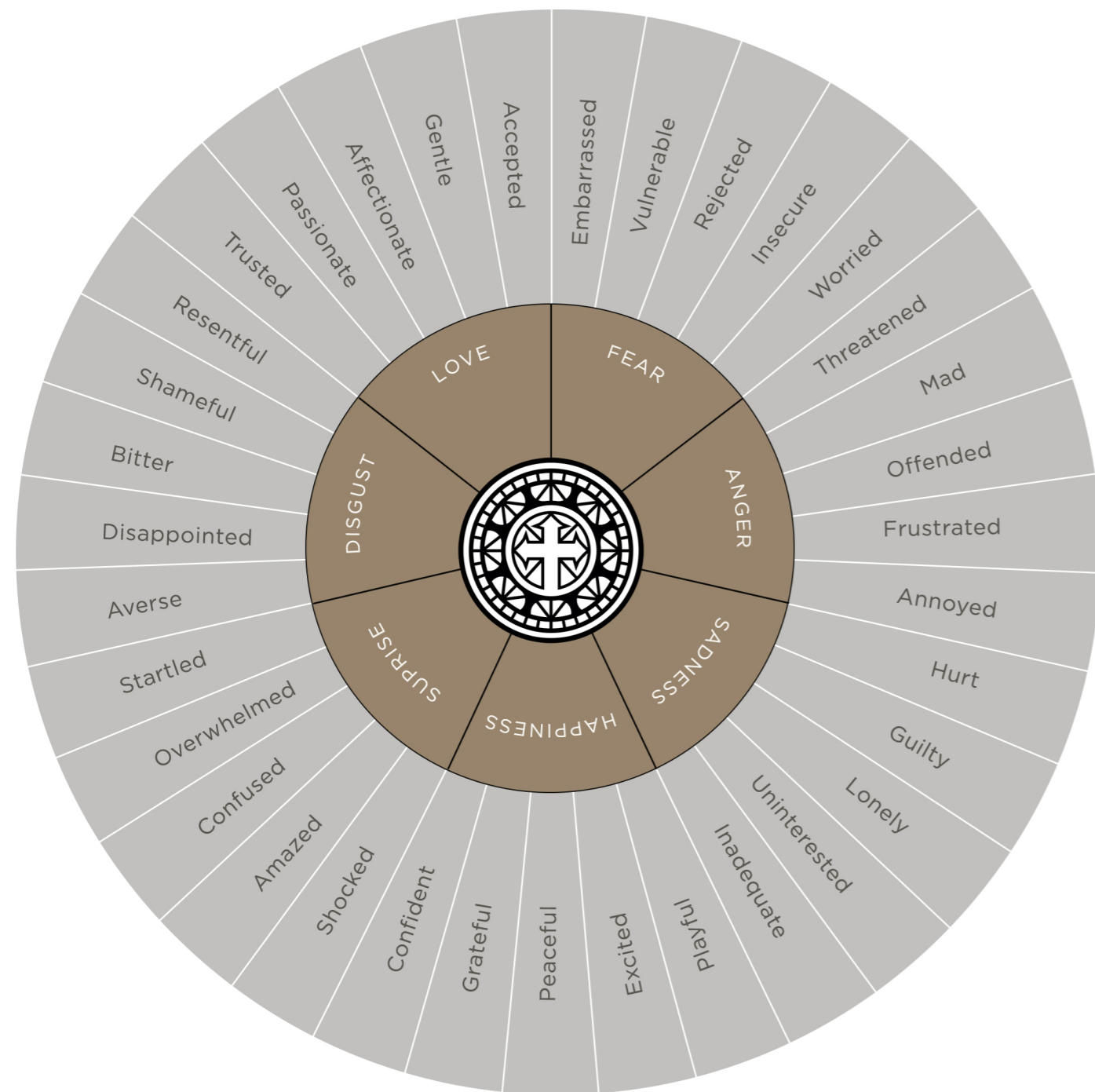
• WORK LIFE



• EMOTIONS AROUND MY WORK LIFE

A large, empty rectangular box provided for writing or drawing related to the emotions in work life.

• HOME LIFE



• EMOTIONS AROUND MY HOME LIFE

Step Four

Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.

How are you doing? Now may be a good time to have a stretch, grab a cup of tea or go for a walk.

So far in this retreat we have welcomed God's presence, prayerfully reflected on our lives looking at six key areas and then identified some of the emotions these reflections may have raised in us.

Next we are going to bring **ONE** of these areas to the Lord in prayer. You do not need to address all six, pick the one from the list below which feels the most appropriate for you today. It may be the one which is causing you the most anxiety or it may be the one which is causing you the most joy.

- Spiritual Health
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Relational Life
- Work Life
- Home Life

Now you have identified the area of you wish to bring to the Lord ,quietly hold it before him prayerfully. Be honest with God about your emotions and how you are feeling.

Remember this is not about judging it is about noticing.

You may wish to use visio divina or lectio divina to help you express your feelings to God.

On the following pages there are some suggestions which may help you with this, or you may just wish to spend this time expressing yourself in your own way to the Lord who loves you.

LECTIO DIVINA

As you prayerfully bring this part of your life to the Lord read the following passage using lectio divina. Lectio divina, Latin for divine reading, is an ancient practice designed to immerse us in



Scripture. Lectio Divina involves reading a text from Scripture multiple times and allowing the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to God's message.

Step One : Lectio (Read)

Read through the passage slowly for the first time.

What particular word, phrase, or image stands out to you?

You may wish to jot it down.

Step Two : Meditatio (Reflect)

Read through the text a second time, focusing again on the part or parts that stood out to you.

What might God be saying to you?

Step Three : Oratio (Respond)

Read the text a third time, and then begin a conversation with God.

You could journal your thoughts, or simply pray in silence if you prefer, but talk with God about how the text resonated with you.

Step Four : Contemplatio (Rest)

Read the text for a final time, and spend time in silence with the Lord. Allow God to speak to you in the silence of your heart. If you become distracted, don't get agitated: just draw your attention back to the Scripture passage and be still once again.

“Diligently practice prayer and lectio divina.
When you pray, you speak with God,
when you read, God speaks to you.”

ST CYPRIAN

LUKE 5:18-25

Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.”

Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.

• WHAT PART OF THIS TEXT STOOD OUT TO YOU TODAY?

Step Five

Look forward to tomorrow.

Another way we can pray is through visio divina, let your eyes wander across the image below, Prayerfully explore the painting and find yourself in it.



'Be Not Afraid' by Greg Olsen

The final part of the prayer of examen is to look forward to tomorrow. We do not always know what the future will hold but hopefully through this time you have found that God is present in your every day ordinary life in ways you may not have previously noticed. Take what God has revealed to you in step four and use it to look forward to tomorrow. Maybe you need to do something differently, reach out to someone, or just be more gentle with yourself?.

Whatever God spoke to you in Step Four think about how you can let that impact tomorrow.

Read through the following hymn and make it your prayer as we draw this retreat to a close.

I don't know about tomorrow,
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine,
For its skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said,
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;
But I know who holds tomorrow,
And I know who holds my hand.

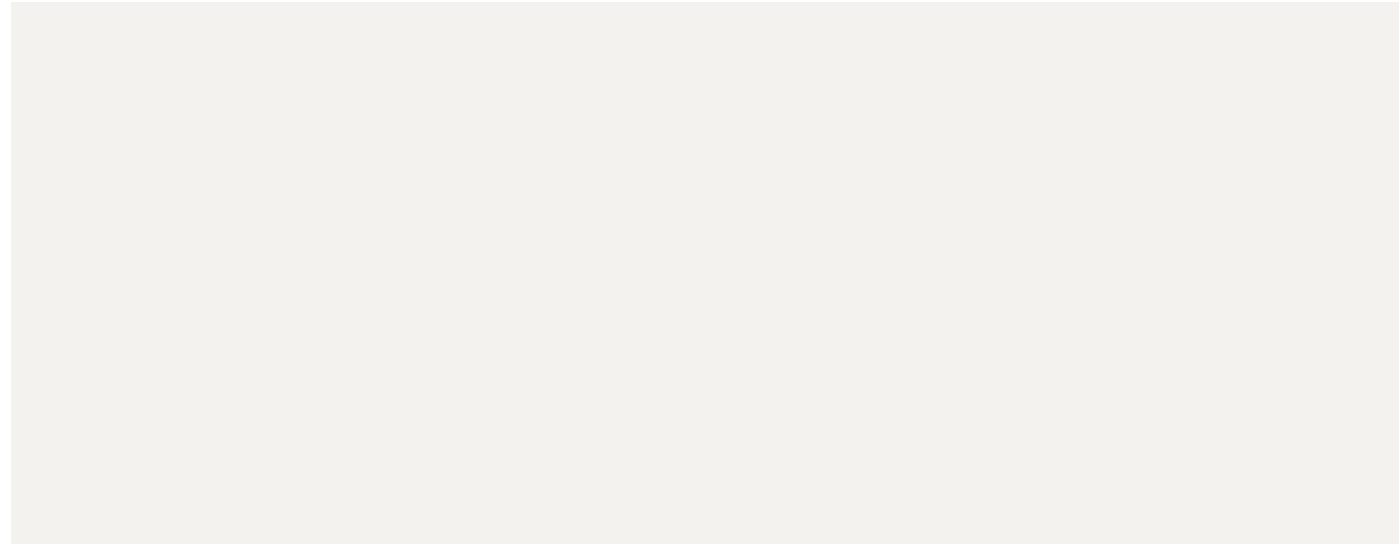
Every step is getting brighter,
As the golden stairs I climb;
Every burden's getting lighter;
Every cloud is silver lined.
There the sun is always shining,

I don't know about tomorrow,
It may bring me poverty;
But the one who feeds the sparrow,
Is the one who stands by me.
And the path that be my portion,
May be through the flame or flood,
But His presence goes before me,
And I'm covered with His blood.

Ira F. Stanphill (1950)

St Ignatius of Loyola

• WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO TOMORROW?



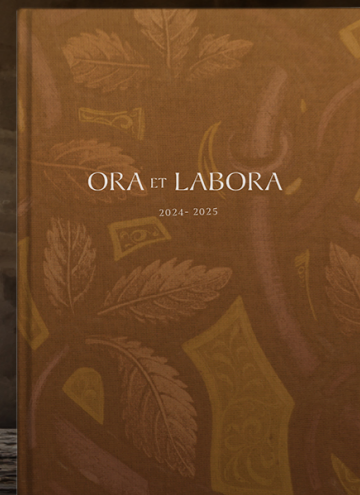
I hope you have found this time helpful, you can always go back and prayerfully reflect on another area of your life or return at a different time and follow through the whole process again.

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward to tomorrow.

MAKE THIS A REGULAR PRACTICE

If you have found the prayer of examen helpful you may wish to explore our daily liturgical journal 'Ora et Labora' where we include weekly examen pages to help you embed this into your spiritual practice. You can also find a guided practice on how to write your own 'rule of life' written by Br David Vryhof, the daily lectionary readings, introductions to each liturgical season and an invitation to night prayer.

www.monasticretreats.co.uk



The prayer of examen was introduced by Ignatius of Loyola in his '*Spiritual Exercises*'. Here is a brief history of his fascinating life and ministry.

1492

Inigo de Loyola was born in Azpeitia in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa in Northern Spain. He was the youngest of 13 children.

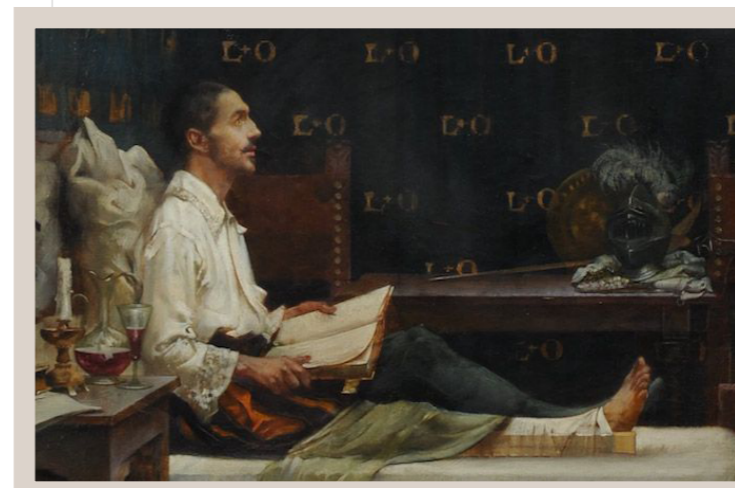
1508

At the age of 16, Inigo left his home to serve as a page for Juan Velazques, treasurer of the kingdom of Castile. He was frequently at court and developed a taste for the material world.

1521

He eventually became an officer in the Spanish army. On May 20th, at the battle of Pamplona, his leg was broken by a cannon ball and he was bedridden for the next year.

During his difficult recovery, Inigo asked for books about chivalry. There weren't any at the family castle where he convalesced, so he had to settle for a book about the life of Christ and biographies of the saints, which he found unexpectedly riveting.



The soldier had always dreamed of imitating heroes, but now the heroes had names like Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. Ignatius also noticed something strange happening to him. God he realized was working within him - prompting, guiding, inviting.

1522

In March 1522, Ignatius was well enough to leave home with a new-found zeal to serve God. He came to the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat and kept a vigil all night. He left his sword at the altar and gave his fine clothes to a poor man. He cast aside his life as a noble soldier and dressed himself in rough clothes and sandals so as to take up the poor life of a pilgrim.



He lived in a cave outside the town of Manresa. Ignatius began writing about the emotions that took hold of him - feelings of gratitude and anguish, consolation and sadness - while encountering scripture. It was here where he started work on what would become the *'Spiritual Exercises'*. A series of meditations, prayers and other contemplative practices meant to be used like a handbook.

1524

Ignatius felt a calling to the priesthood but did not have the educational requirements. To answer his vocation he had to go back to school, where he studied Latin grammar alongside children.

1529

Ignatius continued his education at the University of Paris. It was here where he introduced his classmates to the *'Spiritual Exercises'*. While studying here he boarded with two men who would not only join him in forming the Society of Jesus but would also be canonized as Saints - Francis Xavier and Peter Faber.

1534

Ignatius and six others (including Francis Xavier and Peter Faber) pronounce vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and form the Society of Jesus.



1538

On Christmas morning 1538, Ignatius celebrated his first Mass in the Church of St. Mary Major in the Chapel of the Manger in Rome.

1540

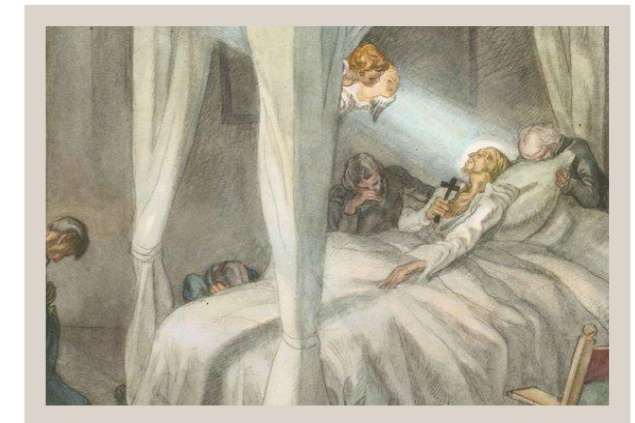
On September 27, 1540, Pope Paul III made the Society of Jesus an official religious order in the Catholic Church. Its members unanimously elected Ignatius as the first Father General.

1541

For the next 15 years Ignatius would lead the Society from two small rooms in Rome. It is here where he composed the Constitutions of the Society and wrote many letters to his growing number of brothers in the Society. The initial seven members of the Society would grow to over a thousand. Jesuit schools and churches were founded throughout Europe and Jesuit missionaries travelled as far west as Brazil and as far east as Japan. Ignatius continued to serve the poor and sick in Rome.

1556

Ever since his student days in Paris, Ignatius had suffered from stomach ailments which became increasingly worse. In late July Ignatius complained of stomach pains. On July 31 he succumbed to his illness and died.



1609

Ignatius was beatified by Pope Paul V on July 27 1609.

1622

Ignatius was canonized on March 12, 1622, by Pope Gregory XV. On this day the pope also canonized Ignatius' friend and fellow Jesuit, Francis Xavier.

