The examination of conscience, unlike school exams, does not test us to see whether we are prepared. Rather, the examination of conscience is a way of preparing. It can be used, first, as a way of preparing for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and, second, as a tool to advance in the spiritual life. It is a spiritual practice that we can incorporate into our daily or monthly routine.

3. The third step to making an examination of conscience is to look at our life since the last time we went to confession or made an examination. Relying on the help of the Holy Spirit, we recall the ways that we fell short of loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving ourselves. An examination of conscience looks not only at the things we have done (sins of commission) but also the things we have failed to do (sins of omission).

4. Finally, after examining our lives and the ways in which we did not love as we were called to love, we express our sorrow to God and ask him for his help to avoid these sins and the near occasion of sin. We end by making a firm resolution, with the help of God's grace, to avoid these sins.

There is no way to fail this examination if we are open and honest with ourselves and with God. "Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in mercy" (Ps 103:8).

**Sample Examination of Conscience Guide for Young Adults and Adults**

When asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus answered by saying: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" (Mt 22:37-40).

Using Jesus' great commandment of love of God and love of neighbor, the following questions are meant to serve as a sample guide for reflection.

**How do I relate with God?**

- Have I loved someone or something (power, pleasure, possessions, etc.) more than God?
- Have I spent time in personal prayer each day with the Lord?
- Have I used God's name lightly, carelessly, or in cursing?
- Have I been involved in superstitious practices?
- Have I attended Mass every Sunday and on holy days of obligation?
- Have I paid attention and participated during Mass?
- Have I regularly showed up to Mass late or left Mass early?
Have I observed Sunday as a day of faith and family?
Have I worked unnecessarily on Sundays?

**How do I relate with others?**
- Have I honored and respected my parents?
- Have I treated my siblings with respect?
- Have I cared for my elderly and infirm relatives?
- Have I been obedient to those who exercise legitimate authority over me?
- Have I damaged the reputation of another?
- Have I gossiped? Have I spread rumors about others?
- Have I harmed anyone physically or emotionally?
- Have I encouraged someone to have an abortion?
- Have I stolen anything that does not belong to me?
- Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
- Have I held a grudge or refused to forgive someone?
- Have I led other people into sin by my example or influence?
- Have I been unfaithful to the vows I have made, especially the vows of marriage?
- Have I engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage?
- Have I refused to help the poor or the marginalized?
- Have I failed to practice the corporal or spiritual works of mercy?
- Have I been racist or discriminated against others?
- Have I been judgmental of others?
- Have I been charitable with others?
- Have I missed opportunities to go the extra mile and help someone in need?

**How do I relate to myself?**
- Have I used profane or crude language?
- Have I abused alcohol to the point of drunkenness?
- Have I used illegal drugs?
- Have I excessively gambled?
- Have I looked at pornography?
- Have I entertained lustful thoughts or fantasies?
- Have I misused the gift of sexuality and not respected my body or the body of another?
- Have I had an abortion?
- Have I failed to follow the Church’s teaching on being open to having children?
- Have I dressed immodestly?
- Have I lied?
- Have I been jealous of other people’s goods?
- Have I been prideful or arrogant?

**Where can I find other examinations of conscience?**
Additional resources for examinations of conscience are available on the USCCB website. There are examinations for children, young adults, single people, and married people. There is also an examination in light of Catholic social teaching. These can be accessed by using the following web address: [www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm).

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