



unhurried living

ANNUAL
EXAMEN

ISAIAH 61

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Introduction

I (Alan) have found the practice of the examen to be a priceless and grace-giving one for me. I tend to be a more “glass-half-empty” kind of person, so noticing the grace of God in my recent experience helps me realize just how graced my life actually is. Typically, I take a moment at the end of my day to reflect on my experience since the morning, looking for ways in which I experienced God’s grace in my life or through my life.

A daily examen is a practice whereby we reflect prayerfully on the experiences of our day to watch for God’s presence, God’s action, God’s grace. This enables us to gain wisdom for our continued journey with God in the days ahead.

This resource is meant to give you some windows through which to look back over a year rather than simply one day. The reflections and prayers below grew out of a time of listening to Isaiah 61 and looking back over a year in my life. The practice of an annual examen is much like a daily examen, but focuses on a longer look back.

An Opening Prayer

Thank You, Jesus, that You announced the inauguration of your ministry through this Isaiah 61 passage after an extended season of testing and solitude in the wilderness.

There, the word of love and affirmation of the Father was tested and tried in many ways. You came out of that season of testing ever more confident that Yours would be a Spirit-guided, Spirit-empowered life and ministry. You would extend the grace and glory of God into all kinds of brokenness, woundedness, enslavement, injustice and every other kind of human need, and You would maintain a deep sense of delighting first in the Father.

May that Spirit rest on us, guide us in our thinking, speaking, strategizing and planning. May we sense the gift it is to be enlivened and led by Your Spirit.

Isaiah 61

1 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the
brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the
prisoners,[a]
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
3 and provide for those who grieve in
Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.
4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for
generations.
5 Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
foreigners will work your fields and
vineyards.
6 And you will be called priests of the Lord,
you will be named ministers of our God.
You will feed on the wealth of nations,
and in their riches you will boast.

7 Instead of your shame
you will receive a double portion,
and instead of disgrace
you will rejoice in your inheritance.
And so you will inherit a double portion in
your land,
and everlasting joy will be yours.
8 "For I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with
them.
9 Their descendants will be known among
the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the Lord has
blessed."
10 I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of
salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his
righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a
priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her
jewels.
11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make
righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

USE THE SPACES BELOW TO JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS.

YOU MAY MAKE THIS THE BASIS OF A PERSONAL DAY RETREAT.

OR YOU MAY WANT TO SPREAD THIS EXAMEN OUT OVER MANY DAYS OF REFLECTION.

Receiving and Giving Grace

In the context of Isaiah 61, we need to receive grace before we are able to extend grace.

How have I received grace over the last year? How have I then been able to extend grace to others?

God's grace meets us as we experience favor, comfort, blessing, honor, new perspectives, and deepening roots. Grace grows us into oaks of righteousness (vs. 3) and invites us to join him in the rebuilding, restoring, and renewing work in places, structures and persons who have long been ruined (vs. 4).

Oaks of Righteousness

An oak of righteousness, planted by the Lord, puts His splendor on display. This is a different display that mere human excitement, enthusiasm, and thrill. Splendor is quieter, stronger, less hurried and more deeply rooted than these.

Oaks don't grow quickly. They can take two or three decades before they are big enough to provide significant shade. Oaks can live more than 200 years.

Where have I sensed the beauty of God over the last year? Where have I witnessed the elegance of God's hand at work in or around me?

As I look back over my year, how might God be teaching me to take a longer view of how I measure growth or productivity? How might the unhurried process of making disciples become more central to my way of working with God?

How might Jesus be inviting me to work with him to help others be well-apprenticed to Him--so well that they shine brighter with His splendor, bearing richly the fruit of His Spirit?

Reflecting on “Instead Of”

Look at the transformation Isaiah describes in this passage:

I am given...

Crown of beauty
Oil of gladness
Garment of praise
Double portion
Joyful inheritance

Instead of...

ashes (vs. 3)
mourning (vs. 3)
spirit of despair (vs. 3)
shame (vs. 7)
disgrace (vs. 7)

How have I seen God working in my life over the last year so that I received good things “instead of” something else?

Where in my life am I hungry for God to continue his “instead of” work, becoming more and more divinely beautiful, joyful, vigorous, overflowing and hopeful as I reach out to others who need similar grace?

Delight

Where have I experienced joy and delight over the last year? How might God be inviting me to a deeper experience of the delight of his kingdom? (vs. 10).

Praying Isaiah 61

On pages 8-13, you will find a paraphrased praying of Isaiah 61:1-11, broken up into smaller portions. Each section invites you to enter the spirit of Isaiah's kingdom "good news."

As above, use the spaces after each little prayer to take notes as you listen, reflect and pray.

Here are a few questions you can bring to each section to help you pray and reflect.

- *What insights does God's Spirit bring as you pray this passage for yourself, your family, your inner circle?*
- *What insights come as you pray in these ways for those you lead and for your place of work or ministry?*

Or, how does this passage:

- *Tell my story?*
- *Describe my present?*
- *Give insight into my future?*

GOOD NEWS, HEALING, WHOLENESS, FREEDOM

May Your Spirit rest on us, anointing us to proclaim good news to the poor, sending us to bandage the brokenhearted, announce freedom for captives, release for prisoners, a year of grace and of justice. (1-2a)

COMFORT, BEAUTY, JOY

Send us to comfort all those who mourn and to meet the needs of those among God's people who have been in grief. Enable us to bless them with Your beauty, with Your joy and to inspire praise in their hearts to replace the sadness and despair of the past. (2b-3a)

STABILITY, SPLENDOR

May we be a people who are called “oaks of righteousness,” people who are rooted and planted by and in You! We long to display Your glorious splendor in our lives. (3b)

RENEWAL, RESTORATION, RESOURCES

May You enable us to rebuild that which has been long devastated and ruined. Enable us to renew places that have been in shambles until now, even perhaps for generations. May You bring abundant finances and any other needed resources from surprising sources! (4-5)

INTERCESSION, MINISTRY

May we function as Your priests, bringing sacrifices of praise and intercession before You continually. Make us Your ministers, Lord, every one! (6a)

SERVING ABUNDANTLY

Bring the wealth of nations to us to enjoy and use for Your kingdom purposes...for the benefit of the nations. May we come to a place in our finances about which we can “boast” rather than feel shame or grief. (6b-7a)

HONOR AND JOY

Lord, would You remove our shame and give us honor and praise? Instead of living like despised servants, may we see ourselves as honored heirs, rejoicing in our inheritance. Give us joy that fills and continually overflows our lives. (7b)

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND BLESSING

Lord, we know that You love justice and You hate when people are selfish and rob others. In Your faithfulness, richly bless us and commit Yourself to us forever. (8)

LEADERSHIP AND HONOR

May those who are born anew among us become renowned far beyond merely local influence. May we be the birthplace of future leaders of regional, national and international influence. And may it be that everyone who looks at us must acknowledge that we are Your blessed people. (9)

SPIRITUAL DELIGHT, FORMATION

O Lord, we deeply delight in You. In the depths of our souls we find joy and pleasure in Your presence. You have clothed us with the garments of salvation and decked us out in the robe of Christ's own righteousness, which is more beautiful than a fine suit or even a wedding dress. (10)

GROWTH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

And so, Lord, just as you cause a sprout to push up out of rich soil and a garden to be the place where seeds grow forth in abundance, may You, O Sovereign Lord, cause righteousness and praise to spring up from our lives for households, cities, states and nations to behold and receive. (11)