

Biblical Reflections

1 BEAUTY FROM ASHES: EDUCATE

Isaiah 61:1–4 invites us to see the tender heart of God for a wounded world. The prophet speaks of the One anointed by the Spirit, sent to bring good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and comfort those who mourn.

These are not distant words. They reveal the character of God: merciful, attentive, and compassionate. As Christians, we hear in this passage the voice and mission of Jesus, who came near to the hurting and offered healing, dignity, and hope.

Education is one of the many ways God brings this kind of restoration to people and communities. International Ministries' global servants and ministry partners equip people all over the world with knowledge and skills. Yet, education is not simply the transfer of information or methods; it is an investment in people whose hearts are being shaped by the love and compassion of Christ. When leaders are trained to listen well, serve humbly, pray faithfully, and respond wisely, they become vessels of God's grace to their congregations and communities alike.

This vision is at the heart of the Master of Theological Studies Latino/a degree program, which trains leaders throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. For the last 10 years, IM has collaborated with Palmer Seminary to provide an online program, fully taught in Spanish, and financially affordable and accessible to ministry partners in their own countries. Students receive holistic training that equips them to address the spiritual, emotional and social needs of their own communities.

Through the Talita Cumi Girls' Club, we see that education is not limited to formal classrooms or degree programs. Here, faithful mentors invest in young girls as they disciple, encourage, and guide. Many girls come carrying hidden pain. Through Scripture, friendship, and compassionate care, girls begin to discover that they are deeply loved by God. Little by little, ashes give way to beauty, mourning gives way to comfort, and fear gives way to hope. This is the restorative work of God.

We see this same holistic, restorative vision at work in South Africa through the ministry of Global Servants Anita and Rick Gutierrez. Drawing on their background in family medicine, they train local "health builders" who address lifestyle-related

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diseases out in their own communities. Health builders also receive education in nutrition, gardening, poultry-raising skills, and fruit tree propagation. Equipped with practical knowledge and a desire to serve others, they are able to teach others. This creates new opportunities for healthier families and stronger communities.

Isaiah reminds us that those whom God restores will rebuild what has been broken. Through education, leaders, mentors, young girls, and health builders are nurtured, equipped and empowered to become a blessing for others.

May God continue to minister to and through each of us, creating a ripple effect of restoration from one life and one generation to the next.



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2 | BEAUTY FROM ASHES: HEAL

Isaiah 61:1, CEV reads: “The Spirit of the LORD God has taken control of me! The LORD has chosen and sent me to tell the oppressed the good news, to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives.”

For most of my adult life, I interpreted “heal the brokenhearted” as emotional comfort for those who are sad or mourning. However, hearing the stories of our brothers and sisters in South Asia has opened my eyes to a richer meaning. In places where medical care is unavailable or economically inaccessible, serious illnesses are heartbreaking and tragic. Simple infections can become deadly.

This was also the situation in the time of Jesus. In the Gospels, Jesus heals many. Most were common people, like daily laborers or farmers, who would not have been able to afford doctors. Luke writes, “After the sun had set, people with all kinds of diseases were brought to Jesus. He put his hands on each one of them and healed them” (4:40). We perceive them as crowds, but each person had an identity and a story.

Luke does not share these details, but we can imagine them: a man no longer able to work in the fields; a woman unable to care for her children; an only son who represented hope for his parents and their future. Their illnesses had a heartbreaking impact on their families. Jesus healed all of them with a touch, restoring them to community, to family and to life.

Today, IM partners and global servants continue the healing ministry of Jesus. Anita and Rick Gutierrez train and equip “health builders” in South Africa. They combat lifestyle-related diseases like HIV/AIDS, high blood pressure, heart and artery disease, diabetes, and malaria. In South Asia, doctors and nurses set up medical clinics to provide care in remote areas. Many locations are a day’s walk, or more, from the nearest hospital. Christians pray for healing in Jesus’ name and rejoice as they see neighbors restored from the verge of death to strength and vitality. In places hostile to Christianity, pastors have been arrested for praying like this. But in faith, they continue to do so.

Written by Members of IM's Global Mission Team

Emotional and psychological healing are also key parts of the ministry of IM global servants and partners. Kit Ripley serves with Cornerstone Counseling Foundation. She provides clinical mental health counseling and art therapy for Thai and tribal survivors of trauma. Mylinda Baits works with servant leaders and those who do the hard work of rescue, relief, and restoration. She creates spaces where they can be nurtured and renewed.

The healing work of Jesus continues through IM global servants, partners, and volunteers. Their work is giving people a future with hope and healing the brokenhearted. From the ashes of emotional, psychological, and physical illness, lives are changed, and beautiful new lives spring forth.



3 | BEAUTY FROM ASHES: RESTORE

Read Isaiah 61:1-4.

We recognize these words from the prophet Isaiah as those read by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, early in his ministry. It was this passage that Jesus declared to be his mission statement. Restoration is the work of the kingdom of God. When the Spirit of God is at work, we see restoration. It can be through the work of healing or liberation, or in ministry to individuals or with communities.

Ultimately, Jesus comes not just to restore things to the way they were, but to how they were created to be. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. As followers of Christ in all generations since, we are called and empowered to follow Jesus into his mission of restoration.

Written by Rev. Shawn Zambrows, First Baptist Church of Redlands, CA

Throughout the history of global mission, we've heard countless stories of people in hopeless situations. Yet they have experienced the kind of liberation and healing that leads to restoration of life, dignity, agency and influence.

This restoration takes many forms: a victim of human trafficking finding freedom and livelihood; a community using sustainable farming to improve the physical and economic health of all who live there; or raising up leaders who share the Good News of Jesus Christ, establishing church communities and making an impact on lives and neighborhoods around the world.

Restoration can involve entering into places of conflict to train others to work together for lasting peace—even among people who have hated one another for generations. Or it may include helping displaced individuals and families build new homes and thrive after being forced to leave their homeland due to danger, violence, war or destruction.

In all these ways and more, we have seen God at work through the people of IM and international partners. They are pursuing the work of restoration found in the mission of Jesus Christ. It is particularly evident that this work of restoration is of the Holy Spirit—we see it through the joy in the lives of those involved in the most seemingly hopeless work. It is evident in their work's creativity and innovation, and it is evident in the changed lives and communities.

God's work of restoration will continue through generations as restored people become those who do the work of restoration.



Questions For Biblical Reflection

*Written by young adults from across
our American Baptist family.*

EDUCATE

- 1) Isaiah 61 reflects God's promises for restoration. Often, God uses people—teachers, mentors, pastors, even friends and family—to help bring that restoration into the lives of others.

Who has God used to encourage your growth and faith? How has their investment shaped your life and reflected God's restoring work?

- 2) Education is more than a transfer of knowledge. It is one way God equips people to serve others and participate in the work of restoration. The people serving in the highlighted ministries train leaders, mentor young girls and equip health builders, so they can then go out and strengthen their communities.

What knowledge, skills, experiences or gifts has God given you that could encourage or equip others? Where might God be inviting you to invest in someone else's growth?

- 3) Isaiah reminds us that those whom God restores will help rebuild what has been broken. Through education, mentoring, and discipleship, people are equipped to bring hope and healing to future generations.

What unique role does education play in making transformation sustainable and generational? Where do you see a need for restoration in your community, church, or relationships, and how might God be calling you to participate in the work of restoration in that area?



VIDEO:

Learn more about how the Health Builders program educates community members in South Africa.

HEAL

- 1] Isaiah 61 speaks of healing the brokenhearted. Many people think of brokenheartedness as emotional pain like sadness or grief, but it can also be the result of physical illness, trauma, and suffering.

How does this broader understanding of "the brokenhearted" change the way you read Isaiah 61? What kinds of brokenness do you think God is especially calling the Church to notice and respond to today?

- 2] In Luke 4:40, people with all kinds of diseases came to Jesus for healing. Although Luke describes a crowd, each person had a unique story, struggle, and hope for the future. Jesus responded with compassion, caring for the whole person and restoring them to family, community, and life.

How does Jesus' example challenge the way you see those who are hurting? Think of someone in your life who may be carrying a hidden burden. How might God be inviting you to offer compassion, encouragement, practical support, or prayer?

- 3] God's mission from Isaiah 61 is to bring good news, freedom, and healing to the brokenhearted. IM global servants and partners continue the healing ministry of Jesus through medical care, trauma recovery, community health training and faithful prayer.

Where do you see God bringing healing and restoration in your church, community, or in the world today? Who are the people in your life engaged in this kind of healing work, and how can you support, encourage, and pray for them?

RESTORE

- 1] In Leviticus 25, God instructed Israel to observe a Year of Jubilee, also known as the Year of the Lord's Favor, every 50 years. It was a year to rest the land, forgive debt, and liberate the slaves. Isaiah 61 points to a future fulfillment of these promises, and in Luke 4:16–21, Jesus declares that he is the one who will fulfill them.

How did Jesus demonstrate restoration, and where do you see themes of rest, forgiveness and liberation in his ministry? How do these themes connect to the ministry or role God has called you into?

- 2] Throughout his ministry, he sought out those whom society had cast aside, restoring them physically and spiritually. This is the same work the Holy Spirit continues to do through global servants. It is also what the Spirit is calling you to do.

As you look around your life, who is the Holy Spirit calling to you to come alongside and minister to? Where is the Lord trying to use you, but you have been hesitant to respond?

- 3] Isaiah 61 was a message of hope for the Israelites returning from captivity to a city in ruins. God promised that he was not done with them, nor had he forgotten them. It was a promise of restoration. Before we enter the work of restoration, let's examine our own hearts.

What part of your life do you need to let the Holy Spirit restore? Is there a sin, broken relationship, wound, or place of weariness? Take a moment to ask God to reveal what needs to be restored in your life. Be reminded that it is the same God who promised restoration to Israel and fulfilled it in Jesus, who is faithful to restore you as well.