

The Writer's Examination Guide



WRITE FAITHFULLY.
WRITE BEAUTIFULLY.
WRITE FROM REST.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS EXAMINATION GUIDE...

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that belongs to the writing life.

It is not the exhaustion of having written too much. Most of us know the opposite problem — the blank page, the blinking cursor, the manuscript that hasn't moved in weeks. The exhaustion I'm referring to is the weariness of writing from the wrong place. Too often, we produce words from anxiety rather than attention, from the need to be seen rather than the desire to truly see, and from treating the page as a performance rather than an offering.

If you have ever finished a piece and felt vaguely hollow — not because it was bad, but because something was missing and you couldn't name what — you know exactly what I mean.

What's missing, I've come to believe, is not more discipline, consistency, or output. Rather, what's missing is a posture of what Augustine called *otium sanctum* — holy leisure. It's not laziness, but the unhurried attentiveness of a soul that is writing from rest rather than strife. Writing from an abiding sense of our union with Christ rather than writing to prove something.

When we write from that posture of holy leisure, we begin to perceive what was always there, woven into the fabric of creation — what the ancient church called the transcendentals.

Truth. Goodness. Beauty.

These are not aesthetic preferences or theological abstractions, but attributes of God Himself. And every act of faithful writing reaches toward them, whether we know it or not.

When we are writing to perform — for our audience, for our platform, for our own sense of worthiness — we cannot see clearly enough to write truly. We cannot order our loves rightly enough to write well. We cannot attend to language carefully enough to write beautifully. That is why these questions exist.

Below, you'll find **The Writer's Examination**. True to holy leisure form, it is not a checklist, but an invitation to slow down and to sit with your work the way you would sit with God. Unhurried. Honest. Expectant. To ask yourself the hard questions:

- Have I seen this clearly?
- Is this ordered toward the right end?
- Is the craft earning the content?

These questions will not make you a better writer by themselves, but they will help you become the kind of writer who writes from rest. One who notices what is actually there, and handles hard things with care and beautiful things with gratitude. Who writes not to be seen, but because she has seen something — and wants, with great faithfulness, to give it away.

That is holy leisure on the page, and an offering of worship. Take your time with these. They are not meant to be rushed.

Cara Ray

Author of *The Pursuit of Holy Leisure: Enjoying God in Everyday Places*

Truth

HAVE I SEEN CLEARLY?

Did I stay in the difficulty long enough to render it honestly, or did I rush to the resolution?

Am I reporting what is actually there — or what I wished were there, or what I feared was there?

Is there a complexity I flattened, a tension I smoothed over, a question I left unanswered because it was inconvenient?

If I'm writing about sin or darkness: does the sin feel real — genuinely terrible — or have I made it easy to dismiss?

Would a reader who has actually lived this recognize it?

"Truth is not an abstract principle, but a Person." — John 14:6

Goodness

IS THIS ORDERED TOWARD THE RIGHT END?

What does this piece of writing ultimately ask the reader to love? Does that thing deserve that love?

Am I writing about darkness in a way that invites the reader to dwell in it, or to see through it?

Is the suffering in this piece purposeful — does it mean something — or is it merely decorative?

If I stripped away all the Christian language, would the piece still point toward redemption — or would it point toward despair?

What do I want the reader to do, feel, or become after reading this? Is that a good end?

"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." — Mark 10:18

Beauty

IS THE CRAFT EARNING THE CONTENT?

Is the language doing real work, or is it decorating something I haven't thought through?

Read it aloud: does the rhythm carry the reader, or does it bump and stall?

Is there one image, one sentence, one phrase that earns the reader's trust — that makes them believe I have actually seen this?

Am I reaching for abstraction when a concrete detail would land harder?

Does the ending feel discovered, or assembled? (Assembled endings are almost never beautiful.)

"One thing have I asked of the Lord... to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord."
Psalm 27:4

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