



# KNU International English Church

A LOVING COMMUNITY THAT CHANGES OUR WORLD

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## The Gospel of Restoration Isaiah 61

Hello. My name is Josh, and I'm an alcoholic.  
I'm a porn addict, a compulsive gambler, a smoker, and a semi-regular crack user.

I'm a shopaholic, workaholic, me-aholic.

I'm the child of abusive parents, and now I'm a codependant adult.

I beat my wife, and I'm more than \$100,000 in debt.

I am a rape victim, and I'm a sexual abuser.

I'm grieving the loss of a loved one.

I'm a racist, a legalist, a moralist, and a recovering hypocrite.

I am depressed and lonely.

Sometimes I have thoughts of suicide. I may even have a plan.

I look like I have a lot of friends, but really I have a very hard time developing meaningful relationships.

I'm struggling with problems with my parents, and my marriage is falling apart.

I'm obsessed with my looks, and I have an eating disorder.

I'm addicted to the internet, and I am a flagrant procrastinator. Not a good combination!

I have deep resentment and hidden anger.

I am addicted to romance.

My life is dominated by anxiety.

I use profanity often – especially when I'm not at church.

I can't stop gossiping, no matter how many times I tell myself I'm going to stop.

I'm beginning to lose hope in God.

I am actually an atheist.

I doubt everything all the time.

I value achievement more than love.

I'm struggling to become the person God wants me to be, and I'm beginning to give up.

I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I am lost, captive, blind, despairing, mourning, helpless, and hopeless.

I am broken. I am a sinner.

Some of these are true of me. All of these are true for someone in this room.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "Some of these are true of me. I am broken. I am a sinner."

Hello. My name is Josh, and I'm comfortably middle class.

By global standards, I'm definitely in the top 10% in terms of annual income.  
I am a faithful church goer.  
I am a good athlete.  
I am a techie, a musician, an artist.  
I am moderately generous.  
I am well-educated, well-rounded, well-organized, and well.  
I have a good job.  
I am part of the global elite.  
I am very smart.  
I am reasonably confident.  
I am arrogant.  
I am cool.  
I choose to be uncool, in a very cool way.  
I am good with money.  
I have a good family.  
I am healthy.  
I am a good Christian.  
I am moral.  
I am mostly happy with my life.  
I am pretty much free to do what I want.  
I have enough clothes and food and warm, safe house.  
I can see a doctor whenever I want.  
I am mostly in control of my life.  
I am holy.  
I know the Bible well.  
I know right from wrong, and I don't do the really bad stuff.  
I have more blessings than I can count.  
I am friendly and loving.  
I have overcome significant obstacles to get where I am today.  
I work hard.  
I have more money saved than I want to admit to you.  
If I'm honest, I've had a pretty easy life.  
I often feel like I deserve something better – higher income, more respect, better treatment, and on and on.  
I am faithful, patient, loyal, and kind.  
I'm a pretty good person with a pretty good life.

Some of these are true of me. All of these are true of someone in this room.  
Turn to your neighbor and say, "I'm a pretty good person with a pretty good life."

The problem is that we live live with these two polarities. Both of these are true of us. We are broken and sinful, and yet at the same time, we are pretty good people with a pretty good life. This is true of all of us. We tend to swing wildly between the extremes. One day when life is going well, we feel complacent, good, and in control of our lives. Another day, when life starts falling apart or we start to fail again, we feel like a terrible piece of pond scum squished under the shoe of life.

That's why we need **Isaiah 61**.

- <sup>1</sup> *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,  
for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.*
- <sup>2</sup> *He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.*
- <sup>3</sup> *To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,  
a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair.  
In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory.*
- <sup>4</sup> *They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago.  
They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Foreigners will be your servants.  
They will feed your flocks and plow your fields and tend your vineyards.*
- <sup>6</sup> *You will be called priests of the LORD, ministers of our God.  
You will feed on the treasures of the nations and boast in their riches.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Instead of shame and dishonor, you will enjoy a double share of honor.  
You will possess a double portion of prosperity in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.*
- <sup>8</sup> *"For I, the LORD, love justice. I hate robbery and wrongdoing.  
I will faithfully reward my people for their suffering  
and make an everlasting covenant with them.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Their descendants will be recognized and honored among the nations.  
Everyone will realize that they are a people the LORD has blessed."*
- <sup>10</sup> *I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God!  
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation  
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.  
I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels.*
- <sup>11</sup> *The Sovereign LORD will show his justice to the nations of the world.  
Everyone will praise him!  
His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring, with plants springing up everywhere.*

The early Christian theologians called the book of Isaiah "the Fifth Gospel." Isaiah often talks about the "good news" or "gospel" in terms that sound very familiar for Christians. Chapter 61 is one of the classic texts of Isaiah's Gospel, and it teaches us three important truths about God's Gospel of Restoration.

First, **the Gospel of Restoration is for the broken.** Isaiah 61 is all about restoration for the broken. It is good news for the poor, comfort for the brokenhearted, release for captives, and freedom for prisoners. The simple but hard truth is this: If you aren't broken, restoration is inaccessible for you. The pathway to restoration moves through the gate of brokenness.

Several of the men at church have been reading an outstanding book called *Samson and the Pirate Monks*. It tells the story of a former pastor's struggle with

sexual addiction. No matter how or how much he prayed, he could never get free of his addiction. The key to healing for him was total surrender – finally admitting that he was completely defeated by his addiction.

In the book, the author, Nate Larkin, tells the story of the German army in Berlin at the end of World War 2. They had clearly lost the war. They were being bombed every day, almost all day. Defeat was obvious. The only question was whether they would surrender and to whom they would surrender.

The Russian Army was coming from the east. The Russians wanted revenge. The Germans had engaged a bloody, extremely deadly war in western Russia, killing millions of innocent Russians. The Russian army now surrounded Berlin on all sides, and they were pushing in seeking a bloody revenge for a bloody war. That surrender was not going to end well.

On the western side, the American army was watching from across the Elbe the drama unfold between the Germans and the Russians. The remnants of the German army decided that, if they had to lose, they would rather surrender to the Americans than be destroyed by the Russians. They knew most of them would be killed if they surrendered to the Russians, but they guessed they might be treated fairly by the Americans. Many of the last survivors of the German army actually fought through the Russian lines to surrender to the Americans.

The truth is that we are defeated. We pretend to be strong. We pretend to be holy. We pretend to have our act together. We want to believe we are good and faithful and strong, and we want others to believe it too. But we aren't. We are broken sinners. We can build defenses against sin and our addictions, but we will lose every time – unless we surrender to a higher power.

God is waiting for us across the river. The only requirement for God's help is total surrender. We have to acknowledge that we are broken and defeated and surrender ourselves into God's care. Then the restoration process can begin.

God's Gospel of Restoration is available only for the broken. This is a huge part of the Christmas message. Realizing that she was pregnant with God's Son, Mary sang: "He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Luke 1:51-53). For Jesus and Christmas, there are only two options: be broken and be restored by God ... or be proud and be broken by God. God's Gospel of Restoration is available only for the broken.

**Second, the Gospel of Restoration happens in community, with community, for community, and through community.** Notice that Isaiah's vision of restoration is both individual and communal. Individuals will be released from captivity, but together they will rebuild their city and restore their communities. The whole economy will be renewed. God will give honor and prosperity to the whole land.

Then the community as a whole will stand as an example of God's goodness. "Everyone will realize they are a people the Lord has blessed" (61:9). By restoring his people as individuals and as a community, "The Sovereign LORD will show his justice to the nations of the world. Everyone will praise him!" And God's blessing will be contagious. It will spread. "His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring, with plants springing up everywhere." (61:11). This is the renewal of the ancient

promise to Abraham: “I will bless you ... and I will bless all nations on earth through you” (Genesis 12).

The greatest proof of God’s love is a loving community. The greatest proof of God’s goodness is a community living good lives together. The greatest proof of God’s power to restore broken people is a people who are living restored lives together. This is the Gospel of Restoration.

This is why we share our stories of how God has healed us. This is why we take time to anoint people for healing when we take communion. This is why we pray for each other. This is why we meet in small groups. This is why we go out to eat with each other and welcome new people. This is why we take a Sabbath instead of working all the time. This is why we pursue God’s radical transformation in our own hearts as well as serving others. Restored people in a restored community are the best advertising for the God of Restoration.

Third, **the Gospel of Restoration leads to deep joy and gratitude.** You might think that brokenness leads to sadness and despair. But it doesn’t. At least, it doesn’t have to. Brokenness by itself, yes, that’s absolutely depressing. But brokenness as a step toward healing – that is encouraging and freeing.

Some of the most joyful, most grateful, most hope-filled people I’ve ever met are addicts who are on the path of recovery. They are so grateful just to be alive. Every day is a gift. Every job, every friend, every family member, every positive interaction is a gift from God. They know they don’t deserve those. They know they have lost them before and can lose them again, so they learn to appreciate every blessing that God gives. Amazingly, they even learn to be grateful during the difficult times because they know from experience that even the bad times have something to teach us.

There is something absolutely freeing about giving up. And there is something absolutely oppressive about holding on by our own strength.

When we hold on, when we keep believing that we can do life by ourselves, when we keep believing that if we try hard enough, or study hard enough, or work hard enough, or pray hard enough, then we will be OK; we will be good enough – when we think like that, we become oppressed and burdened by our own responsibility. What is “enough”? How do we know when we’ve studied enough or worked enough or prayed enough or given enough? It’s never enough. We could always give more. We are constantly in danger of falling short.

One of my Muslim friends told me that it is as if we are walking through life on the edge of Allah’s sword. If we stray to the right or to the left, then we fall off into the abyss of God’s judgment. Talk about stress! But that’s the logical conclusion of holding on by our own strength.

On the other hand, we can surrender to God’s mercy and say, “Yes, I’m a sinner. Yes, I’m broken and wounded and addicted. Yes, I am powerless to be the holy person you want me to be. If there is any hope for me to be good, God you’ve got to be good in me. I just can’t do it on my own.” That prayer is actually amazingly freeing. God is a God of restoration, and the Gospel of Restoration starts with this kind of prayer of brokenness. When we accept our brokenness, and let God start the restoration, then we will slowly find ourselves singing out with Isaiah, “I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation” (61:9).

I am a hugger. I love giving hugs. I love getting hugs. I think the world would be a better place if we would just show some love and hug more. In the spirit of hugging, I want to suggest that our response today is four kinds of embrace.

- **Embrace your own brokenness.** Accept that you are a sinner and that you can't change yourself. Then surrender to God's loving care.
- **Embrace the Gospel of Restoration.** Don't be content to wallow in your sin. Expect God to do work in your heart and life.
- **Embrace community.** Don't try to go this road alone. It won't work. Find a small group. Find a place where you can be really honest, and pour out your heart to your brothers and sisters in Christ so that we can be healed together.
- **Embrace joy.** Celebrate life. Develop an attitude of gratitude. Remember your brokenness and remember that you are getting better than you deserve. Every day is a gift. Live grateful.
- **Embrace change.** If we live like this, if we really embrace God's Gospel of Restoration, then God is going to change us and God is going to change the world through us. Get ready for that. We will change as individuals. We will change as a church, and we will be part of God's restorative change in our world.

God will restore the broken as a sign of his beautiful goodness. Embrace your brokenness, and embrace God's restoration.