

Grace Fellowship Church

Gabe Hoffman

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You're Invited...

Isaiah 61:1-4

Hi everybody. It's so good to see everybody. Now most of you may or may not know me. My name is Gabe, like Dad said. I always like to claim that Dad is my dad, because oftentimes when we're out eating in places, people actually think Marci is the one who belongs in the family because she just looks like she belongs and is just more attractive than I am, and so that's just how that works out.

Have you seen this yet? By the way, this is totally not to do with anything. Check it out. It's a wallet/phone combo, so I can actually call my phone, and then I can call my wallet in case I lose it. So it's, "Find my wallet." It's really sweet. You might want to think about that, because it's pretty cool.

You may have seen my family. This is my wonderful family. Now, we have Marci. We've been married for 10 years this year. Very excited about that. Then we have two boys, Josiah and Jeremiah. Josiah is in here this morning like a whole bunch of you kids, which is really cool. I'm glad you are in here, and if you make noise (you know how they make noise), it's totally cool

with me because that's exactly how my kids are. I have become pretty good at staying focused through kids.

Anyway, and then we have the little girl named Karis. Karis is two. Well look at this. Look at that. Pigtails. That's some cute stuff. I really love the boys. I love wrestling. I love Nerf swords. I love shooting each other and beating each other up, but pigtails are cute. That's just *so* cute.

In fact, yesterday we were at the mall. Karis asked me, "Dad, can we go? I want to go." I was like, "We'll go to the mall. Why not? We'll give mommy a chance to get out of the house." We're at the mall, and I'm thinking I'll buy her some earrings because that's cute. Earrings are cute. We were at the mall, and we were going up to this store where they have all the cute stuff, and she's like, "No." Then we go to the next store, and she's like, "No." Meanwhile, right now, have you been to Mall of Georgia? It's sponsored by some dealership right now, and there are these cars with bows on them everywhere throughout the mall. Every time she sees one, she says, "Daddy, I want a car." Shoot! It's going to be a few disappointing years until she's 16. No car for her.

So for the past year, we've been out in Monroe. Oh, important side note before I talk about the Mill. You might have heard, you might not have heard, we're actually expecting our fourth child. We're really excited about that. It's pretty fun. We just found out. I really think two boys and two girls would be awesome, so if you want to pray that way, just throwing that out there.

Just like our family is growing, the family out in Monroe is growing. A lot of really cool things are happening. One of the cool things that's happening is do you remember a band called

Smalltown Poets? Do you remember that band? The lead singer's name is Michael Johnston. He and his family are moving to Monroe next week, and he's going to be helping out with worship a lot. So that's really exciting.

Now Keter and Lael are still going to be involved. You remember Keter and Lael? They've led up here before. They're still going to be involved. They're still there. They just have jobs, and they're going to be having a life. They only have so much time, and so they're going to be investing a lot of their time in worship, having worship nights, and in their missional community. That's the Mill. That's where we meet, in the Monroe Cotton Mill. Really cool stuff is happening out there.

For Thanksgiving, we fed maybe 350 people from the community who just wouldn't have had a good Thanksgiving meal otherwise. Every week, we have this little house out there where it's just full of the neighborhood kids, and they're getting loved on, and that is *really* exciting. In fact, actually it's not really so much every week as it is every other week. Because the way some of the parental rights go it tends to be every other week we have a big influx of kids, and they're getting loved on.

I think the thing I'm most excited about Monroe is... How many of you are from Monroe, just raise your hands? Yeah, I see. Now how many of you are in huddles out in Monroe? Keep your hands up. See, most everybody. It's really exciting because out in Monroe, we're actually getting to start from the ground up building everything on missional community groups. We're getting to make discipleship a core part of everything we're doing. So if you want to figure out more about

the missional community groups, if you want to get disciplined, if you want to get in a huddle, come on out to Monroe, because we would love to do that, especially if you're over near Loganville.

Some of you are over near Loganville. Quick drive. Now if you're over near Parkview, Brookwood, man, this is probably the place to be. It'd be a bit of a drive. Now if you're in Grayson, like we are right now, it's really not too far. That's sort of like, to me, the borderline because we're actually selling our house and trying to move out to Monroe. So, that's what's going on out in Monroe.

Bible carts? Let's do the Bible carts, because I want you to open up your Bibles to Isaiah 61. We're going to dive into the Word this morning. Have you seen your handout? It has some blanks on it. I actually am fairly confident I can hit all these blanks, which is no commentary at all on anybody in particular, but I think I can do it. Oh, your first blank, in case you already missed it, you're invited to Monroe. All right? Shameless plugs aside, nothing wrong with that.

Like you guys, this week is Watch Week, and we're doing it much the same as you are. What we want to do is take a moment at the first part of this year to listen to what it is God has for us this year in Monroe, because we have a fairly clear, broad vision of what God is calling us to. We have a very clear understanding of where we're going, but what are the steps to get there? That's what we want to look at. I think if I could articulate quickly what the vision he's calling us to out in Monroe, I can do it best out of Isaiah 61, so let's read the first, maybe, four verses.

"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, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 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. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." (Isaiah 61:1-4)

That's our heart for Monroe. We want to rebuild a city. That's part of why we're at a mill, restoring this thing. We're taking something that was actually used for the systematic oppression of people and turning it into something that's a blessing. We're taking a burden off and turning it into a huge blessing.

We are about the restoration of community. We want to restore communities that have been split along a lot of different lines. Yeah, I mean, there are the racial lines, but it's mainly just the rich and poor lines, lots of other lines, but we want to restore community. We want to restore life into the next generation. We're about the restoration of the next generation.

As Watch Week approaches, I was thinking about how it was to articulate Watch Week. I thought Dad and Brian did a really good job of it, because as I was contemplating how to explain Watch Week, it sort of... You have fasting, right? That means not eating. You are aware of that?

Resting: That means not doing stuff. Prayer: It's like not talking, which for me, that's all right. I cannot talk for a long time. For a lot of you, that's kind of tough, isn't it? So those words are defined by what they're *not* instead of what they are, right? It's the *absence* of something instead of the *presence* of something, which is generally not a good way to define things. It's not very attractive.

If you think about what you're running away from instead of what you're running towards, that's never a good thing, right? No comment on politics. If you don't know what that's about, then you will in a few days.

The absence of something instead of the presence of something is never a good way to define it. Out in Monroe, we spent six weeks or so talking about this thing of covenant and commission, these twin themes of the Bible. If you look at the way those words play out, I'm fairly sure Dad has talked about a number of these things. So covenant and commission. Relationship and responsibility: The relationship with God, the relationship with each other, and our responsibilities to do things. Abiding and bearing fruit: That process of digging the roots in before you start bearing a lot of fruit. Does this somewhat sound familiar?

Resting and working: See, these things are in tension. They're not the same thing. You rest and you work. Being and doing: Two totally different things, but very related. If you look at what we're trying to do this week, it's mainly about these things. It's about covenant. It's about relationship. It's about abiding. It's about being. It's about all the things on that side. What struck me was the word that describes most of these things is *invitation* instead of *challenge*.

It's an *invitation* to these things and not a *challenge* to do these things. This isn't a to-do list you can check off; this is an invitation to the presence of something. I don't know how many of you guys can relate to this. I tend to be good at one of these sets of words more than the other. I tend to be good more on the challenge side than the invitation side.

So if Josiah falls and scrapes his knee, he's bleeding. I think that's a good time for a learning opportunity. Anybody else? Any dads do that? Like, *Oh this is a really good time to teach them that jumping off the stairs is bad. Or, Running on cement is not a good thing.* Or like if my wife calls me and she is lost, my first thought is, *Well where did you turn wrong? How did you get lost?*...which tends to be a little challenging. Half of you tracking with me? There are at least a few of you who tend to be better at challenge instead of invitation.

As I've been sort of learning about that tension between challenge and invitation, I've been trying to grow in it. A lot of you are going to think that by me saying those things about people who like challenge... Now I know there are a few of you in here. I know my dad tends towards challenge. That's nothing. A good challenge in the morning is wonderful. Now you probably know that about Dad. You probably know that. If you're not sure, just ask your spouse if you're better at offering some challenge or offering some invitation. If you think that's a criticism of anybody, then you're probably over on the invitation side of things. If you're feeling like, *Oh, that's kind of mean*, it's cool. The challenge people love it. It's all good. You can just say anything. It's like, "Oh, well thanks. I appreciate that. That's fair. Fair criticism."

On invitation and challenge though, not only are we good at one set of things instead of the other, corporately we tend to be better at one side or the other. Corporately, I think it's not too much of a stretch to say when we stick a big sign up on the door that says "Prayer and Fasting," we're not going to get a long line of people jumping up and down to come in here, because that sounds like, *Man, that tough. I don't know if I have time in my week to do those things. I don't know if I'd be too excited about that.*

I think that's interesting, but I think it has a lot to do with the fact that we define those things in terms of the absence of something and not the presence of something. That's your second blank. You're invited to the presence of something and not the absence of something. There's something a little bit wrong with our definitions, I think, so I want to take a moment and just look at how the Bible defines these words. How does the Bible talk about these things? How does Jesus talk about these words? Let's see how they talk about what they *are* instead of what they're not.

If you're already in Isaiah 61, let's flip back to Isaiah 58, starting in verse 6. This is really handy because in case you're wondering what kind of fasting God wants, it's just right here. Verse 6: "No, this is the kind of fasting I want..." (Isaiah 58:6) Again, if you want to scan through that, he has just gone through a list of the sort of ritualistic fasting that was typical of the time.

Now he is saying, "...this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes

to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help." (Isaiah 58:6-7)

That's sort of touchy, isn't it? I mean, that's funny.

"Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the LORD will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply. 'Remove the heavy yoke of oppression. Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.

The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a builder of walls and a restorer of homes. 'Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. Then the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken!'" (Isaiah 58:8-14)

Wow. That's kind of interesting, isn't it? Isaiah 58 is about the invitation to fruit. The stuff we're wanting, the stuff God is calling us to in Isaiah 61. If you flip back, all those things are promised as a result of fasting and Sabbath. Does that make sense? What he is talking about there, in

fasting and in Sabbath, is he is defining those words in terms of what they're moving towards, and not what they're moving away from.

Now some of you might think...and I think it's fair...now these are sort of Old Testament things, right? Sabbath, fasting. That's kind of where we hear those words. It's sort of Old Testament ritual sort of stuff. So we're going to take a look at what Jesus has to say about it in Mark 2. Go ahead and flip over to Mark 2. Because see, somehow these things of fasting and Sabbath are tied together there in Isaiah 58, and what we're going to see is somehow again they're tied together in this Mark 2. Near the end, verse 18.

What you have to keep in mind again is that the Pharisees are pretty uptight about this whole Sabbath thing. There's a reason for that, and that's because the people of Israel spent a long time in exile. If you just want to look at 2 Chronicles 36:21, for instance. It talks about how the reason the people went on exile was to give the land the Sabbath God had commanded.

So the Pharisees have this idea: *If only we could all keep the Sabbath. If we could all (as Israel) keep the perfect Sabbath, then the Messiah will come back*, which is fairly good. Somehow they missed it, right? Look at Mark 2:18. "Once when John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people came to Jesus and asked, 'Why don't your disciples fast like John's disciples and the Pharisees do?' Jesus replied, 'Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. They can't fast while the groom is with them. But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'" (Mark 2:18-20)

Fasting is about the invitation to the bridegroom. What he's saying there, what that word picture is saying is somehow through that means of fasting, we have access to the presence of the bridegroom. Because once a bridegroom is gone, if you want him back, you fast, because you can't do it while he's there. Does that make sense? It's kind of interesting. I never really put that together in terms of what fasting was an invitation to, but clearly right there in Mark 2, Jesus defines it as an invitation to the bridegroom.

Now skip forward a couple of verses, and Mark puts together again this idea of Sabbath. Verse 23: "One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. But the Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?'

Jesus said to them, 'Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God...and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!'" (Mark 2:23-28)

So Sabbath was something that was made for us and not something we are made to do, that there is a gift and a blessing of Sabbath. The Sabbath is an invitation to something.

Now if I were to offer you guys, just for a year... What if on eBay, or something maybe like that, I auctioned off the gift of a 36-hour day? Would we have any takers? I mean, how much would that be worth, having more time? There are no rich and poor people when it comes to time. We're all constrained by the same tick-tock of our watch. We are all on pace. We all have the same amount of time. We all want *more* time, and in fact, it seems like the more we try to get, the less we actually have.

Sabbath is about that very thing. Sabbath is about the invitation to a rhythm. Now rhythm is something that's sort of easy to explain, but I have a really good way of explaining it. I'm going to need a volunteer. I need a really strong volunteer. All right? Anybody? Any volunteers?
Strong. Yeah, I'm sorry, man. It's going to be heavy.

Did you know out at the Mill there was a reservoir that was used? In case there was a fire, this thing would empty out and put out the fire there at the Mill. Keter decided it'd be a fun idea to climb down into this old lakebed and just have a look around. He found a little something. This right here. We thought it was a cannonball. Paul, you want to come up here and help me? You look like you're just one to help. Paul is a good friend. All right, thanks for holding that. Yeah. How much do you think that weighs?

Paul: Fifty pounds, maybe 40.

Gabe: You really want to come check it out afterwards because it's incredibly dense. It's like not normal. It's made of something otherworldly, iron, steel. Iron. So Paul here is doing a little bit of work, right Paul?

Paul: Yeah.

Gabe: I don't know if that's quite enough work is the trouble. I think we need more work. We want to bear a lot of fruit this year, and I'd like to give you the challenge. A little more fruit. Yeah. See, that's a cool thing. We get the opportunity to just strive and bear fruit, right? You good with that for another 10 minutes?

Paul: Ten seconds.

Gabe: Yeah. All right, you can put it down a little bit. Back up. That's good. There we go. All right. See, hold on real quick. Let me come over here. I made something to illustrate what this is all about, so heads up in the front row. All right, these are just weights. The cords aren't actually that interesting. Microphone cables are microphone cables. All right, Paul, you have to come help me out. Yeah. All right, you can sit down. Thanks, Paul.

You see, Sabbath was given to people. Well first, it was given to us in the garden, wasn't it? Sabbath was given to us. God made the entire universe. He made us on the sixth day, and the very first thing he offers to us is the Sabbath. On the seventh day, he invites us into the garden to do all these things over here, to have relationship with us. Keep the Sabbath.

Again, if you look forward in Deuteronomy where God is giving us the commandment of the Sabbath, he is giving it to people who have for every day of their lives been slaves, cranking out bricks. Bricks, bricks, bricks. More bricks. Sometimes with less hay. To people who were slaves, he gave this commandment that said, "You are not slaves. You are invited in to relationship with me. For six days, you work. For one day, you rest."

He set up their calendar in such a way that their day started with sundown, and you start with rest. Your day starts with rest. Your day starts with stepping into dependence. So if we want all of these things over here, if we want a lot of challenges and a lot of bearing fruit, well we have to go over here. Not nervous are you, man? We want to push on this thing.

A pendulum is actually a really easy way to move something that's really heavy around. It's about this rhythm between rest and work. It makes it really easy. It makes it super easy. I mean, this thing is moving, and if I try to catch it, it would just about yank me off stage. See? Wow. So rest and work: Rhythm.

This year, what we want to do is we want to push on this thing, on this way; we want to push for more work. Jackie, are you nervous? You all right? I promise I won't hurt you. I've been testing this thing. Rest and work: This rhythm. Sabbath is about the invitation to rhythm. That's your blank there. It is the invitation to rhythm. You don't have to do the same thing over and over again. It's not striving endlessly; it's about rhythm. You're free to enter into relationship.

That's sort of interesting because I think there's another set of words that help us understand what the invitation of the Sabbath is really all about. It's the invitation to a moment in time instead of space. Time and space: That sounds kind of out there, doesn't it? Time and space.

You see, we're fairly familiar with how time and space work. Again, there's a tension between those things, but we use our time, and we get more stuff, more things, and more space. Every year, we have the opportunity to spend our time to get stuff, and that's kind of how we go in America. We create bigger things.

Have you ever been to Barcelona and seen Sagrado Familia, that really awesome cathedral? Pretty sweet, isn't it? They've been going on that for how many years? Like 60, 70 years. It was designed by Gaudi. He designed a lot of Barcelona. It is really cool. He has created this amazing monument. So we're fairly familiar with how time and space work in that way, but see, it works in the other way as well.

We can use space to create time. How many of you remember Aaron doing "The Little Drummer Boy" thing? Yeah. I mean, that was pretty sweet, wasn't it? It was an incredible moment. Christmas Day is about creating a moment. I love the anticipation on my kids' faces. Literally, Josiah tends towards jumping up and down. Like, a *lot* of jumping up and down. It's amazing. I love it. I don't do much jumping up and down personally, but I'm really glad you people exist, because if everybody were like me, it'd make football games really boring.

We're creating a moment there. We're buying all this stuff. We're using the holidays. We're doing all this stuff to try to create this moment in time, a moment that's really special. That's what God is after. We have a God who is different than any other god, and this is where Israel so often got it messed up. They thought their God was just like all the other gods out there. The other gods out there want temples. They want your treasures. They want all your *stuff*. That's what idols are all about. "Here's stuff for you, god." Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is a different sort of God because he's asking for our moment in time. He's asking for our time. Not just our stuff, but a moment in time.

A lot of times we call those *kairos* moments. He wants us to capture these moments, to offer up these moments to him as a sacrifice. He wants us to step into this place, into this moment of time, and offer it up to God.

I just want to ask. This might be a little too harsh, but that's all right. *Is there any part of your day, any part of your week, that isn't a slave to stuff?* Have you created any time in your day or in your week that is completely isolated in time, that you're offering up this time as separate time? My phone doesn't work during this time. I'm not going to play games. I'm not going to watch TV. There is some barrier you're putting up, saying, *This time is set apart*, because that's what holy means. Keeping the Sabbath holy simply means setting apart this time.

Is there any time you're offering up to God in that way? Are you doing that? Because that's what God is asking for. He's saying, "Look, six days a week, go for it. Work, work, work. But one day, I want for myself. I want you guys to be in relationship with me one day out of six." So

Watch Week is about that very thing. Did you get your blanks? You can invest time to create space. Prayer, about worship, is an invitation to time. Spending time with God is what he's asking for. He's not asking for you to do stuff; he's asking for your time. So you can invest time to create space, or you can invest space to create time. You can invest *stuff* to create a moment and offer that to God.

That's what we're going to do this week. We're going to fast. We're going to do something with our bodies. That stake idea is really cool, isn't it? We're going to do something with stuff to say, *This moment is different*. We're going to create some room in our lives. In our house, it's going to be a big deal. This week, no TV, no video games for the whole day or for the whole week. That hit somebody personally.

It's a big deal for us, but I think that's going to be really cool as a family to set apart some time as a week. See, there are these rhythms to life. You can, every day, little bit at a time, one day a week, give him a whole day. Then once a year, we set apart a good bit of time for God. So that's what the invitation is this week. Through your bodies, through fasting, through us coming together, through all the things on this side, we're going to give God some room to show up.

Look at Luke 4. That's not too far away. This is Jesus talking about the stuff in Isaiah 61. Luke 4:16: "When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

'The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.'

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. 'The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!'" (Luke 4:16-21)

The invitation is to a person, because, you see, Jesus actually hadn't done all that stuff just yet, and he said, "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" (Luke 4:16) because in their presence was the person of Jesus. We're going to invite you guys this week to make room for the person of Jesus, to push back on all the world of stuff and make room for the person of Jesus.

You see, the invitation is that there is good news to people who are poor in time. You can be set free from the captivity of stuff through the rhythm of Sabbath. Blind people can see what God is doing. We can have the opportunity to see what God is doing if we just stop for a moment and see what God is doing. He wants to show that to us.

The invitation is you are free to stop ceaselessly striving and to just stop for a day and rest. You are not a slave to stuff. The invitation is you are being offered a chance to create moments in time, to create this sort of palace in time, as how I like to think about it. You create these

moments, these *kairos* moments, and you are creating the structure in time, this temple to God in time, that nothing can destroy, and that's the sacrifice God is wanting.

If you're feeling like you're really stuck, if you're feeling like you're trying to kind of work and you're trying to kind of rest, and your life cannonball is kind of swinging pretty pathetically, or you're just trying to hold it up in the air, what we want to offer you is this year do something different. Give this thing a swing and get your life in rhythm. Give a chance for God to show up and for fruit to really come in.

This morning, in closing, what I want you guys to do is push back on the world of stuff. Push back on all the things that are calling for our attention right now and enter into this moment. Music is almost a magical means of weaving together a moment for God. What I want you to consider is how this week through fasting... I want to give you that opportunity at the bottom of your sheet. What are you going to do this week with all your stuff to create some room and some time for God to show up? Let's take this moment and let's just see how God shows up. Let's see what he's going to do if we give him a chance to show up. Let's pray.

God, thank you for this invitation of the Sabbath. Thank you that we don't have to live as slaves. Thank you that we don't have to be a slave to stuff. God, maybe the Pharisees were right insomuch that if we can just keep a real Sabbath the Messiah really will show up, and God that's what we want to do.

We want to acknowledge your presence. You promise you're going to show up whenever two or three are gathered in your name, and I don't think you're talking about proximity, but you're talking about in your presence. You will show up when we make space for you, when we intentionally set aside a moment. God, we invite you into this one. We together as a body come together and ask you to show up in our lives right now, this week, and we ask that you help us make this year different. I love you, amen.