

*If you are a guest with us for the first time today, my name is Rick and I serve as the lead pastor here at Christ Fellowship. Before we jump into the message and all of that, I've got a little news that I want us all to celebrate, and that is this: This week at Love Miami, 2700, two thousand seven hundred of you folks, of you people volunteered and showed up at Feed My Starving Children. So, give yourselves a hand. That is a record for us. We packaged, check this out, 318,000 meals to feed starving children all over the world. Man, I love that! You know, we always ask ourselves as pastors, if Christ Fellowship went away, in other words, if we suddenly didn't exist, like tomorrow we were not here, would our neighborhoods, would our city miss us. Would they even know that we were gone. You know, I know they would miss Christ Fellowship. They would know that we were gone. We are glad that we are here to serve them. Give yourselves one more big hand. What a congregation!*

*If you are with us for the first time today, we have been in a study of Genesis since January, and last weekend we launched a series within that book called "The Flood", and we are looking at the Biblical flood as reported in Genesis, chapter six. We started that last week. If you were not here, you definitely want to go on line and check out that message to kind of get that information. It kind of sets up everything that we are going to continue to talk about. With that in mind, if you have your Bibles, open them to Genesis chapter six. If you don't have one, don't sweat it, it will all come up on the screen for us.*

*I also want to take a moment to welcome all of our campuses all over Miami Dade County, as well as those of you who are joining us online today. Genesis, chapter six: We are going to jump right in. I want to set this up by sharing this with you. Back in November of 1996, God called me to Miami. His purpose for bringing me here became crystal clear to me, and that purpose was to lead Christ Fellowship to become a movement of God in this city. In other words, not just a building, not just a location, but rather a movement of God in this city and a movement of God that would actually penetrate the culture, transform people's lives forever, and then spread the gospel all over Miami Dade County. That was His calling. That was why, as I knew, that He brought me to this city.*

*Now folks, you talk about an intimidating mission. You talk about an intimidating calling, especially for somebody like me that basically has no talent. I mean, it was like "Whoa! God, what are you calling me to do?" And yet, I knew that was His calling and that purpose was absolutely crystal clear in my mind. However, something else was also crystal clear to me, and that was this. Before I would be able to lead Christ Fellowship to become this movement of God, before that could happen, I would first*

*have to lead us through a storm. By that I mean a storm of resistance, because for those of you who were here back then, you know that there were people who were literally hell bent on stopping this movement, and they were prepared to do anything. They were prepared to do whatever it takes to stop this movement.*

*We had the message at Bank United; whatever it takes to take this movement, this gospel into the city. They were prepared to do whatever it took to stop what you are seeing right now. So, in 2002, this attack against Christ Fellowship came like a storm. Folks, I knew in my heart that the future of Christ Fellowship in terms of what God wanted us to be was teetering in the balance. Get it, eventually this attack was aimed back at me. It was aimed at me; it was aimed at my family; it was aimed at my calling, and I'm not going to drag us through all of that other than to say it was so painful and it was so hateful that it nearly drowned my will to push us through that storm. I mean, there were times when folks, I felt like I was trying to navigate this church, not only through this storm at sea, but it was like I was trying to get us through this thick fog, because the discouragement that came my way, the despair that came my way, the anxiety, the pain that came my way, made it hard for me at times to even be able to see clearly, to see the way ahead.*

*Christ Fellowship, here is what I love. There was this one truth that stayed in the back of my mind, and it was knowing that truth, that literally God used to push me through that time, to push me through that storm; and what I knew was this: This is what I knew. I knew that we had the favor of God on this church. I knew that, and folks in though those times when I was so discouraged – you know what discouragement is. It is when you don't have courage. For those of you who were here, you know there were times when I lost courage. But it was knowing that we had God's favor on our lives that encouraged me, that fueled me with courage, so that those times when I couldn't see the vision that God had for us because of the fog, the one force that cleared the fog for me every time, that cleared my mind every time, was this truth: I knew that I had found favor in the eyes of God. Folks, I'm telling you, knowing that, to have found God's favor, is so powerful in our lives.*

*Now, let me turn a corner and pull that over to our study today, because God loves to pour out His favor on His people. In fact, listen to Genesis 6:8. The Bible says, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of God." Folks, I love God's favor. In fact, I love having God's favor in my life more than I love my life itself. I want to know, "God, have I found favor in your eyes?" And do you know what, so do you. You want to know. So, with that in mind, here is my proposition. Listen to this: There is something in us, and I think that is true whether you are a Christian or even if you are not a Christian. Maybe you*

*are here today and you are saying "I'm not sure I believe this stuff." It doesn't matter. I believe there is something in all of us that longs to find favor in the eyes of God. In other words, there is something in you and there is something in me, that has been wired into us by our Creator, that longs to find the favor of our Creator.*

*Folks, that is especially true when you are trying to navigate your way through a storm in your life, a storm in your marriage, a storm in your finances, a storm in your job. You want to know when you are trying to get through a storm, you want to know, "God, have I found favor in your eyes?" Yet, at the same time, we may not fully understand what it means to find favor in the eyes of God. In fact, you might be saying, "Rick, what does that mean, to find favor in the eyes of God?" Maybe you are thinking, "If that is true, how do I get that? How do I get God's favor?" Well, those are the two questions that I want to raise today and then answer those questions not of my own accord, but rather from the Word of God, specifically from Genesis, chapter six, and mainly through the life of a man by the name of Noah. With that in mind, here are the two questions.*

*Number one: What is God's favor? What does that even mean? Let's find out. Let's pick this up in verse eight. The Bible says, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of God." Stop there and let me reset the stage from last week. To begin with, you recall that the human race in Noah's day had become so corrupted that God actually decided to wipe it out. In other words, the people of that day so displeased God that God was no longer even for those people. In fact, you get the idea. Listen to verse six. Let's look at what the Bible says. It says, "The Lord regretted (Can you imagine this?) The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.(7) So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race that I have created..." Get it: God's heart was broken. God was troubled. God was saddened with this corrupt human race. (8) But Noah found [what?] favor in the eyes of God."*

*Stop right there, and let me tell you first of all when the Bible talks about favor, let me tell you first of all what God's favor is not. To begin with, God's favor, having God's favor, is not God doing favors for you. You know, you listen to some pastors and some TV evangelists, and you would get the idea from them that having God's favor means God is going to do all of these favors for you. It's the idea that God is like this genie in a bottle, a genie in a lamp, and you kind of rub the lamp and God jumps out and says "Let me grant you three favors, or wishes." So, if it's that idea that God is the genie in the bottle, and you drive along through the parking lot and you can't find a parking place and you are like: "Hey genie God, do me a favor and find me a parking place."*

*Now, there is nothing wrong with praying for a parking place, but the idea with these folks is if you have God's favor, He is going to do you a favor and open that parking place up. You pull in there and say, "Thank you genie God for the favor." "Hey genie God, I need some money. Can you do me a favor and give me some money? Thank you genie God." You see folks, the trouble with a genie God mentality is that it sets people up for disappointment with God, and they finally figure out that God is not a genie in a bottle. He doesn't just jump out and grant you wishes, and grant you favors, like Aladdin. He doesn't do that. In fact, there will be times when you are driving around and the parking place doesn't open up. My point is, having God's favor is not the idea that God is going to do all the favors for you.*

*You say, "What then is God's favor?" God's favor has two facets. Having God's favor is when God is pleased with us. Look at verse six. It will give you the idea. "The Lord regretted that He made human beings on the earth and His heart was deeply troubled." Translation: God was displeased by this entire race of people. He was displeased with them. (8) "But Noah (Here comes the contrast.) But Noah found favor in the eyes of God." You say, "Meaning what?" Meaning this: Meaning there was something about Noah that brought God pleasure. There was something about this man Noah that when God looked at him with His eyes, that pleased God. Let me put it to you another way. There was something about Noah that made God smile. There was something about Noah that when God looked at his life, it just made God smile. And folks, that is a part of what it means to have favor with God. It is the idea that God is pleased with us. So that is one facet.*

*But here is the facet I want to concentrate on today. Having God's favor is when God is for us. You know, we sing that song, "God is for us; He will never leave us. He will never fail us." But listen, Noah was about to lead his family. Noah was about to lead his family through a storm of epic proportions. Noah was about to lead his family through a flood, the likes of which there had never been, and the likes of which has never been since. But here is what Noah knew that he had, and if you are a Christ follower, you have the same thing. Here is what Noah knew he had. Noah knew that he had the promise of God's favor. By that I mean he had the promise that God was for him. Here is what God's favor is. God's favor is the promise of His provision, the guarantee of His presence to accomplish His plan. Let me say that again: God's favor is the promise of His provision, a guarantee of His Presence to accomplish His purpose, His plan. God's favor is the promise of His provision. Put another way, God's favor is the promise that He will provide for you; that He will come through for you, that He will help you. Knowing that God will provide, that God will come through, gives us hope.*

*That is so important when you are trying to navigate a storm in your life. You see, when you are going through a storm day after day, week after week, what you sometimes need to help you through is just a little bit of hope, right? It's what you need. It's what I need.*

*Let's look at Noah's life. Check this out. After the flood was over – you know, the flood lasted forty days and forty nights, and if you think it rained, it rained folks. It was a flood that just rained. After forty of flooding, for months all Noah could see was water. I mean, he was surrounded by water, to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west, and day after day, week after week, month after month, all they did was float with no sign of dry land. Every day Noah would throw open the hatch and he would search for a tree top sticking out of the water; a hilltop sticking out of the water; any sign of dry land. But all he could see day after day, week after week, month after month, was water to the north, water to the south, water to the east, water to the west. You've got to know it was getting pretty frustrating inside of that ark. Tempers were probably starting to flare. How long can you take the smell of elephant poop and giraffes, and all of that? How long can you take that, but all Noah could see, day after day, week after week, month after month was water to the north, water to the south, water to the east, and water to the west.*

*You too have stood where Noah stood. You too have been flooded with sorrow. You too have been flooded with anxiety over your marriage. You too have been flooded with stress at the office and on the job. You too have been inundated and deluged with anger in your heart because of the way things are in your life, and you wonder day after day, week after week, month after month, is this ever going to stop. You wonder if God is ever going to deliver, is God ever going to come through? Listen, when you are going through something like that, what you need is precisely what Noah needed. You just need a little hope. You need some reassurance that God is going to come through.*

*God gave Noah that hope. He gave him that reassurance. Every day after the flood, Noah would send out a dove to search for dry land. Day after day, week after week, month after month that dove would fly back: cold, wet, and shivering. No where to sit - no where to land. This went on day after day, week after week, until finally, at last, we read this in chapter eight. Listen o verse ten:(8:10) "He (that is Noah) waited seven more days and again sent the dove from the ark. (11) When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf. And then Noah knew." Knew what? He knew there was hope. Right? Folks, that olive leaf was more than evidence of dry land. It was evidence that Noah had God's favor, and that God actually*

*was going to come through. By the way, don't we love it when God sends us an olive leaf? There is hope.*

*Let me tell you. God loves to do that. He loves to send olive leaves. He answered: "I can help you with those finances. We're going to get through this together." Somebody says that evil that you did is unforgiveable. Jesus says not only do I forgive you, but start all over in your life. The physician looks at you and shows you the x-ray and says "You have cancer. It is terminal, and you are going to die." The great physician looks at you and says, "I am the resurrection and the life." And He hands us an olive leaf. Sometimes that is what we need, and for some of you I believe you came here tonight because God wanted to use this message to hand you an olive leaf, to tell you that He is going to get you through this storm; that He is going to provide for you; that He is going to come through for you. Amen? Do you believe that? God's favor is the promise that He is going to provide.*

*Number two: God's favor is a guarantee of His presence. Back to Noah: God's presence went with Noah into that ark. Listen to Genesis 7:13: "On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, together with the wives of his three sons entered the ark." They go inside the ark. Verse 16: "Then the Lord shut the door." I love it. Noah didn't reach out and close the door. Noah is over here doing something else and all of a sudden he looks and God's presence grabbed that door and shuts it from the inside. You say, meaning what? Meaning, "Noah, you are not going through this alone. Noah, my presence is going to be with you." Let me tell you, isn't that what you want to know? Isn't that what I want to know? When I am about to navigate a storm, when I am trying to lead my family, my church, my friends, my wife through a storm, don't we just want to know that God is with us; that His Presence is going with us? That is exactly what Moses wanted to know. I*

*In Exodus 33, Moses said this: Verse 12: Moses said to the Lord, 'You have been telling me, Lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' (13) If you are pleased with me – that is a part of God's favor, and we are going to talk about that – but "If you are pleased with me teach me your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember God that this nation is your people. (14) The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'*

*Child of God, nothing will give you rest, nothing will give you peace of mind when you try to navigate the storms in your life any more than knowing that God's Presence is with you. Let me tell you this. If you are a child of God, not only is His Presence with you, but His Presence is literally in you, because the moment you trusted Christ as*

*Savior, God's Holy Spirit took up His residence within you, took up His abode within you. That is why Jesus said, "I will never leave you. How can I leave you? I'm in you. I will never forsake you. How could I forsake you? My Presence is with you and in you. Watch what Moses said. I love this.(15) "Then Moses said to him, 'If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.' Moses was trying to lead God's people through a storm of Egyptian bondage. He was trying to drag them and pull them to the Promised Land, and Moses said: "God, if this is what you are calling me to do. God, if this is your purpose, if this is your plan in my life for me to lead these people, then God, I'll do it. But God, I don't even want to start this. I don't even want to go up from here, unless your Presence is going with me."*

*Who knows: Maybe you are here today. You came in the door, and there was a storm in your marriage. You are drowning financially. You are fearful of your future. You needed to know today, and I believe it is why God brought some of you here today. You needed to know that God's Presence, His very Presence is with you. He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. God loves to slam the ark door. Boom! Shut! To remind you that He is with you, and again, this message - You know, I'm just teaching this Book of Genesis. I don't know how this is going to land, but I do know this. God providentially brings people to a time like this because He wants you to hear this message - that His presence go with you, and get you through that storm that you are going through.*

*I will never forget 2002. I've never talked about this since. It has just been too painful. I will never forget the night that all of this thing came to a head. I was trying to lead this church through this storm to get us to where God wanted us. I'll never forget because it was at the Palmetto Bay campus. Normally on a Sunday night there would be 250 to 300 people there. That Sunday night we were literally packed to the rafters. It was packed to the rafters because there were people here - God bless them - to sink the vision . I will never forget, standing right down there, and somebody leaned over and said, "Rick, are you afraid?" Of course I'm afraid. I'm afraid every time I lead our church to do something.*

*Somebody asked me, "Are you afraid every time you start a new campus?" Yes. Because I know I can't do it in my own power. Unless God goes with me, I can't do anything. So I have this fear that I need God's Presence to overcome. I'll never forget standing right down here and trying to navigate fifteen hundred people who were all over the map, and I'm trying to lead us and guide us to get us through this storm. I am fearful, and I am confused. God help me. I'll never forget: Sitting right behind me on these steps were fourteen men that were for me. John Moore, Jerry Moore, at my back.*

*It was like God was saying, "I've got your back, Rick. I'm with you." The former pastor, Tommy Watson, who wasn't even here anymore, sat right there, for me. It was like God was saying to me, "Rick, I'll get you through this. I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to forsake you. I'm not going to hang you out to dry! My Presence is with you, Rick. These men are here to remind you." It is like you felt like Elijah. Remember Elijah's servant? They are going to battle and his servant looks around and says "We are going to get creamed. We are going to get destroyed. Who is going to help us?" Elijah said, "God, open his eyes." And he opened his eyes up and he saw the armies of God lining the hillside. It was God's way of saying, "My Presence is with you. I won't leave you. I won't forsake you." I'm telling you, that's what God is wanting to say to some of you today; that His Presence is with you.*

*That is a moment I will never forget. That just sealed it for me during that battle. I was standing right down there. I felt like things were going to get out of hand. This gentleman stood up. He was angry. He started right down that aisle. I thought he was going to bust me in the head. I was standing right there, and right in that second seat, there were pews back then, there was a little Spanish lady. She was about four foot nine. Her name was DD. That man got right down the aisle, and she took her purse and whacked him right across the face. I remember thinking, "I'm glad you are here." The armies of God were in that little woman. God's favor was on me.*

*Folks, let me tell you something. It's not arrogant to say you have God's favor. In fact, it is arrogant not to say that. If I don't acknowledge God's favor, that means I can do this all by myself. I don't need God. When I acknowledge, and when you acknowledge – "God, we need your favor; or we're going to drown in this storm. We're going to sink in this storm. We will never make it." But when we say, "God, it's your favor, the promise of your provision, the guarantee of your Presence that will get me through this storm. I'll tell you what: If you look at churches like ours, Christ Fellowship, that has had this explosive growth, that's reaching the city, when you look at most pastors in a lot of churches like ours, you look at the pastor and you say "Man, the guy's tall. He's good looking. He's articulate. He's got brains", and you kind of go, "I can see that guy doing it." Folks, you look at Rick Blackwood and you say, "Ain't no way that guy could do it. He must have God's favor because that's the only way this guy could do what God has allowed him to do, and allowed us to do, because we have God's favor. Amen?"*

*One more thing: God's favor is always to accomplish His plan, not yours. Folks, make no mistake about it. God has a plan for you, just like He had a plan for Noah; just like He had a plan for Moses, and just like He had a plan for Rick. He wants to flood you with His favor, with His provision, and His Presence. So, that raises the final question.*

*Here is the obvious question: "How do I get God's favor? If God's favor is the promise of His provision, the guarantee of His Presence, to accomplish His plan in my life, how do I get that?" Well, here is what you need to know. Every Christ follower has God's favor. And here is why that is the case. It is because it is our faith in God that triggers His favor. Noah didn't have God's favor because he was a good man, although he was. Noah didn't have God's favor because he was a brave man, although he was. Noah had God's favor for one reason, and that is because he trusted God. He had faith in God. In fact, listen to Hebrews 11. The Bible says: "Without faith, without trust, without believing, it is impossible to please God. (7) By faith (Let's translate that to trust. We understand that even better.) By trust, Noah was warned about things not yet seen, (Rain. He had never seen a deluge. He had never seen an ark.) Trust in holy fear built an ark to save his family." Noah, go build an ark." "What's an ark?" "Don't worry about it, I've got the blueprints. Weather forecast? I've got the blueprint. Go build an ark. I will show you how. Noah, this is going to save you." "Okay, God. I trust you." Faith triggers God's faith.*

*You and I trust what God says about Christ, and that is that Christ is the Savior, and that if you trust Him, if you will call on Him, He will save you. When you and I trust that, when we believe that, it triggers God's favor in our life. Not only does He save you and give you eternal life, but that triggers His favor; and what is His favor? It is the promise of His provision, the guarantee of His Presence, to fulfill and accomplish His plan for your life. God has showered you with His favor, yet so few of God's people actually walk in God's favor, actually live, and bask in God's favor. God wants us to live in the fog. What does the fog mean? "The favor of God." "I can see through the fog because I'm walking in the fog." It's the favor of God! Live your life expecting God's favor. How do you live your life in God's favor? Live your life expecting God's favor, expecting God's provision, expecting God's Presence. By that I mean, when you are going through the storm, go through that storm praising God because you know He is going to provide for you.*

*When we praise God before He even comes through, the Bible says when we do that, God inhabits that praise. It's like He is up there and He is talking to Gabriel and they're having a conversation about whatever, and God hears you praising Him. Even though He has not even done anything for you yet, God says, "I hear somebody praising me and I haven't even done anything yet." When God shows up, His presence inhabits your praises. Yes, God is with you. He inhabits, He fills you with His Presence.*

*God's favor begins when you trust Christ as your Savior. Look at verse 7: "By faith, by trust, by belief, I believe in you God. When you believe in somebody it's not that you*

*just believe about them. If I say, "I believe in you", I trust you. By faith, here is what Noah was doing. He was believing in God. By faith, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family from the flood that was to come; from the judgment that was about to fall.*

*With that in mind, listen to what Romans 10:13 says: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." In other words, just like God said to Noah: "Noah, build an ark, and if you build that ark, you are going to get saved." God is saying to you and me: "I want you to trust Christ as your Savior. Call upon Him, and if you will call upon Him, you will be saved from the judgment to come. You will be rescued, saved from eternal death, if you trust Him." Not only that, not only will you be saved from the flood of judgment, but you will have God's favor.*