

Good morning. Good morning, Sherwood Oaks. It is so good to be with you this morning. It is an honor and a privilege. As Sean was saying in that brief little introductory video.

We go back a ways back to 2008. So 16 years now this that Sean and I have been really, really good friends. So when we moved to Owensboro, Kentucky, Owensboro Christian Church, Sean was already on staff as a middle school pastor. And so our kids, we have three kids, and at that time they were around that age. So middle school, moving into high school.

So we were blessed to have Shawn serve as a middle school pastor where our kids were able to receive the benefit of that. And then shortly after we moved there, we moved Sean into about two years after that, we moved Shawn into the outreach pastor role. Cause that's where God was really leading him, which ultimately led then through a series of events, as you probably know if you've been around here for a while, to him serving as a pastor, the campus pastor here at the Bedford campus, and then stepping into the lead pastor role. So when we moved, when Laura and I, my wife over here, Laura, when she and I moved with our kids to Indianapolis back in 2012, about a few three years after that, I reached out to Shawn and I said, Sean, well, I'm starting up a new pastor's covenant group. It's a group of four pastors.

I'm serving as a facilitator for us to come together. And it's a three year commitment for us to share with one another, do life and ministry together, but a safe place where we can talk about what's going on on the inside, how we're doing, how we can really be holding each other accountable, praying for one another, encouraging one another. Would you be a part of that group? And Shawn very graciously accepted that. So we served together for three years, and then Sean started group after that.

And then my understanding is he now even started another group. So I am so grateful for Sean, Lauren. I love Sean and Amber, their kids. And when Shawn reached out and asked if I would come while he's on sabbatical, I'd kick off this new series. I don't know if I'm really one of his favorite Hoosier preachers or he just doesn't know very many.

I don't know, but honored to be here with you, and then also really honored, just with the hospitality of your church, walking around the hallways, sharing with people this morning. Last night, Laura and I, we were over at the home of Jamie and Lisa Crowhurst, just right over here. One of the elders here at the church, they hosted us. We had dinner together, along with Brad and Gail Pontius and then Peggy Welch, part of the church body. Real quick story.

What's so interesting is the relationships that are formed in the body of Christ, and many of you have experienced that. So I serve as a part of TCM, which is a ministry that's in Austria House Edelweiss, and many of you are familiar with that. It's one of the ministry partners of Sherwood Oaks. So I teach for TCM as a graduate school discipleship training center, and they have locations all over Europe and other places in the world as well. And so I was there

about a month and a half ago, I guess it was serving in Austria, and there was a group from Sherwood Oaks that was there serving short term workers.

And I said, wow, what an amazing thing. I'm going to be coming and preaching in a month and a half or so at Sherwood Oaks. So we got acquainted, and the group that I mentioned, they were there as short term workers, and I know they shared a video and so forth, but to me, it's just a beautiful picture of what it is to be a part of the body of Christ. It's about those relationships that we have with one another, and it is a joy for us to share together. So I want to just real quick, show of hands, how many of you were around?

I don't mean here, but I mean, on planet Earth in 1977. How many? Show of hands. Okay. A lot of us here, just so you know.

My eight. You can tell my. You can do the math on this. I was ten years old in 1977, and there was this classic Steven Spielberg movie that came out called Close Encounters, you may remember of the third kind. Close Encounters of the third kind.

It was one of Steven Spielberg's first big hits. It was starring Richard Dreyfus, where he played Roy Neary, an everyday blue collar worker from, get this, of all places. Anybody remember this? From Muncie, Indiana. Roy near, the main character, was from Muncie, Indiana.

And his life, the whole story is about how his life has changed because he has a close encounter of the third kind. He has a close encounter with a UFO. Now, if you're familiar with the movie, you'll remember that they begin to communicate, the scientists and the UFO's, with this. And so I've got this pulled up here. I just want to.

I'm just gonna play this and see if it jogs your memory of this movie or if you're new, then, you know, you can pick up on this. If everything's ready here on the dark side of the moon, play the five tones.

Uh huh. You remember that? Anybody remember those five? Dun dun dun dun. That was the way they communicated.

Well, the whole point of the story is how important it is to have connection. And the intriguing part, as a pastor and a follower of Jesus, the intriguing part is how humanity has always had a desire to have some type of close encounter with something beyond, something beyond just the natural realm or this planet. And there are all these other movies that have come out since close encounters, some even prior to that, where it's about what's going on outside. There's a yearning that we have in humanity for something more, something more than just these encounters here, and something that there's this vastness and something that can fill that void. So the key story to the story of the main character's life is that he changes after having a close encounter.

Now, again, as a pastor and as a Jesus follower, that resonates with me, not because of some close encounter with UFO's or extraterrestrial, but because of the biblical stories over and over and over, that are told about humanity's close encounter with something that is beyond specifically a close encounter with God. So the key takeaway in all this is that our life changes when we have a close encounter with God. Now, there are so many stories that we could go through of all the people, characters in scripture, Old Testament, New Testament, whose lives have changed when they have this close encounter with God. But there's one that I want us to narrow it down and talk about this morning, going all the way back to the very first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis. And it's the story of Noah and his close encounter with God.

Here's what we read. Genesis, chapter six. We're going to go through a lot of verses here in Genesis six. So if you have a Bible or a Bible app on your phone, go ahead and turn there. But here's what we read.

Genesis six, eight. Noah, however, found favor with the Lord. Now, we don't know yet why he found favor. We don't know what that really means, that description there. We're going to unpack that in just a little bit.

But before we dive into that, let me go back and let's just do a little review, make sure we're all on the same page this morning. A little background to this individual who was favored by the Lord. Well, wasn't he special favored by the Lord? What did we learn about his life? Well, we're first introduced to Noah.

The previous chapter, Genesis, chapter five, verses 28 and 29. Here's what we read. That Lamech was 182 years old when he fathered a son. Way to go, Lamech. I mean, he still got it, 182 years old.

And he named him. He named his son Noah, saying, this is so interesting. This one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our hands caused by the ground. The Lord is cursed. So right out of the gate, literally, Lamech is prophesying.

He's foretelling of the impact of his son's life. What is going to happen with his son's life that somehow, we don't know yet how somehow God is going to use him to be a part of this reversal of the curse, the reverse of the curse. Now, what is this curse all about? Well, to find that, we have to go two chapters earlier. See, we're Genesis six, Genesis five.

Now, Genesis, chapter three, verses 17 to 19. So we read about Adam and Eve with their fall, as it is referenced where they turned away from God. And here's what we read. The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it from the ground by means of painful labor all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you. You will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust and you will return to dust.

So whatever is transpiring there within the text, the story where Adam and Eve, they chose to go against God's plan, that God's saying there are consequences. Don't we teach our children that? And our grandchildren there are consequences. There's brokenness of relationship that comes, there's a curse that happens as a result of this sin in our lives. So even though two chapters later, Genesis, chapter five, then we don't have the full picture of the significance of what Lamech was saying, that somehow Noah, his son's going to be used by God to reverse the curse.

We read this foreshadowing. Now, I want you to hold onto this theme, this foreshadowing, this premiere in the great story of the gospel that we read all the way back here in Genesis, in a story with Noah, this young child named Noah. Now we jump back into Genesis, chapter six. We see that the world around Noah has become corrupt, to say the least. People turn far from God.

Here's what we read, verse five. The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race become on the earth, that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. So we're not just talking about, oh, someone made a mistake. We're talking about rampant evil, that every inclination of the thoughts all evil, all the time. So that's verse five.

But then, in contrast, as we saw earlier where we started, Genesis, chapter six, verse eight. Noah, however, here's the juxtaposition. The contrast is what's happening in the world. But Noah, however, found favor with the Lord. Now we're back to that phrase where we started.

What does it mean to have favor with God? Does it mean you are healthy, wealthy and wise? Does it mean you found favor with God because you live in a brand new house, that you have a wonderful car, that you are married and you have two children, and you have a picket fence in front. I mean, what does it mean to have favor with God? Well, here's what the text tells us going on to the very next verse, verse nine.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries. And here's this interesting line that we read. Noah walked with God. Isn't that beautiful? What does it mean to have favor with God?

Having favor with God is not about the outcomes, resources, wealth, success. Having favor with God is about relationship with him. Or does it have favor with God? Noah walked with God. I love that description.

Beautiful picture of what we long for in our close encounters. Remember that close encounter with God? It makes me think of this old hymn. Some of you may. Some of you may remember this.

Where the words go, I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses. And the voice I hear as we tarry there, none other has ever known. He walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own. I love that little picture there of this intimacy with God. I picture Noah walking with God, or maybe metaphorically, God has his arm around Noah.

Hey, Noah. God. This close relationship, it's very personal, very intimate. And on one of these walks, through this garden with God, God says, and this is verse 13, genesis, chapter six. God says, oh, hey, noah.

I've decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them. Therefore, I'm going to destroy them along with the earth. Now, I don't know about you, but that's not quite the close encounter with God that I'm anticipating to have as I'm walking through the garden alone with God. It's not this feel good experience there. It's not this shaking of hands or high five with God.

Let's give each other a big hug or a kiss on the cheek. Now, what we see in the scripture, this is so confounding to us, at least in our culture, because this close encounter brings a message that no one wants to hear. We don't want to hear this message. Judgment is coming.

But sometimes close encounters with God can be like that.

Not quite what we expected, not quite what we thought. From my perspective, the christian message that we send people, at least some of the time in our culture today, is more like this encounter with God is like curling up on the sofa with a good book and a cup of hot chocolate. Oh, Jesus and me, we just. It's all good. We've got it.

Jesus here to make all my problems go away. And I'm gonna be happy, happy, happy, because Jesus is in my life. I feel so good. I came out of this worship service this morning. I felt so good.

Oh.

Now, the problem with this, besides the fact that it's not biblical, that's significant. The problem is that when we sell people that bill of goods and they accept Jesus under those terms, then what happens with all their problems don't go away. And very quickly, this curling up on the sofa with a cup of hot chocolate with God, that doesn't seem to be there anymore.

And then there is this deconstruction of faith because, wait a minute now, you told me that following God means that he's going to take care of things. But look around. Don't you see all of the pain in the world, let alone the pain that I've experienced in my life? And so then maybe God isn't there, and I deconstruct my faith in all of this.

Well, what we see in scripture is that version of God is not the real version, but God is very real indeed. You see, God doesn't fit in our nice, neat little box of elixir Christianity, as though we can just take a potion of God, and that's going to solve all of our problems. Now, I want to be clear, though, that this doesn't mean also that God is this horrid rash being bent on human extermination either. But don't we see this walk in the garden with God, God having favor with Noah. Don't we see that there's this judgment there?

Well, even if we struggle with judgment, as it's spelled out in Genesis six, and I encourage us, let's be honest about faith, doubt, struggle. Say, wait a minute, God. I may not understand all this happening here. Let's not forget that God's actions in Genesis chapter six are a result of human violence. They're a result of corruption and wickedness, every evil intention of the heart.

Now, we can argue with God about methodology, and God can take it. He's a big God. We see in the psalms, the laments and people arguing with God and crying out to him. But let's never forget that God is never the passive parent who turns a blind eye to his errant children.

Don't we want a God who upholds justice? Don't we want a God who one day is going to reverse the curse and is going to turn things to the right once again? Now, what this does reveal to us then, is that our close encounters with God aren't always filled with warm fuzzies. Sometimes those close encounters are confrontations with our world and even with our lives. And they can even be a call to action.

In fact, they often are a call to action. But wait a minute. I just want to go to church. I just want to feel good. No, it's a call to action.

It's a call to be engaged in this world. And that's exactly what we see with Noah. God calls Noah to act, to do something, and it was hard. We go on to the text. Genesis, chapter six, verses 14 and 15.

Here's what we read. God says, make yourself an ark of gopher and wood. Gopher Wood make rooms in the ark, cover it with pitch inside and outside. This is how you're to make it. The ark will be 450ft long, 75ft wide and 45ft high.

And if you want to see it, you can drive south of Cincinnati and you can. Right there. There you go. Look at that. Just kidding.

So after God calls Noah to action, he gives him a word. This is so interesting that then is repeated eight different times in Genesis chapter nine. What's the word? Well, we see it. Genesis 6:18.

Here's the word. I will establish my. Here's the word. Covenant. But I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark with your sons, your wife and your sons wives.

Covenant. Now, what is a covenant? We don't use that word a whole lot in our English language these days. It's an agreement between two parties that's forged through relationship. It's more than just a contract.

Well, we talk about the marriage covenant. It's not just a license, not just a piece of paper. It's an agreement through relationship. So Noah's close encounter leads to a forged relationship. So we go on to the story.

We see that God, yes, he brings judgment. The flood comes, Genesis seven and eight. And then the water recedes. And then God says this. Now we're in Genesis chapter eight, verse 21, we read this.

God says, I will never again curse the ground because of human beings. Let me pause time out real quick. Do you remember Lamech's, Noah's dad's prophecy back in Genesis chapter five when Noah was born? That somehow through Noah, he's going to bring relief to the curse that God had given because of the sin of Adam and Eve. God says, I will never again curse because of human beings, even though the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward.

And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done. And then God honors his covenant. Genesis, chapter nine. Remember I said that word covenant is used eight different times in Genesis nine. Let me just go through this list.

I'm just going to go through it quickly here, but just to make this point. Genesis nine. Nine, I'm establishing my covenant with you. Verse eleven, I established my covenant with you. Verse twelve, this is a sign of the covenant.

And then he goes on, it is a covenant for all future generations. Verse 13, I'll be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Verse 15, I'll remember my covenant between me and you. Verse 16 is the permanent covenant between God and the living creatures on earth. And then verse 17, this is a sign of the covenant that I've established between me and every creature on earth eight different times.

It sure seems to me that God takes his covenant very seriously.

He repeats it a whole lot.

So let's rewind the tape again just a little bit. Going back to Genesis, chapter five, Noah's father, Lamech, said he named him Noah, saying, this one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed. Separation, consequence because of sin, the curse that came now, Noah, somehow God was using him to bring a reversal of the curse. Sure enough, through Noah, the relief came. There was judgment going through that.

That led to a recreation, a rebirth where the old was gone, the new has come. Now, it sure sounds like we're starting to use some language that we see in the New Testament. New life only comes when old life is gone. It's not new by definition, if it's still part of the old. New life comes when the old is gone.

It's painful, it's hard, and at times, we don't understand it.

But these encounters, close encounters with God, are often like that. They aren't what we think, but they lead to something greater. So Noah's close encounter, it led to judgment, led to pain, it led to death, but it also brought relief and then recreation. So now let's think about your life and mine. So what does this really have to do?

Is this just a nice little talk about something that happened in the old Testament, and then there's something that's taking place in the New Testament? Well, let me just ask you the question. Do you really want a close encounter with God?

Well, let me answer the question for myself. I mean, if we're talking about there's possible pain, there's possible judgment, hardship, difficulty, I don't know that I really want that type of close encounter.

When Laura and I were driving down here yesterday, we were coming northeast side of Indianapolis, down 465 south to 70 west, coming around the city of Indianapolis, and we hit traffic. Surprise, surprise. And, I mean, it was bad traffic. We were sitting there for 1520 minutes. Just.

It's like a parking lot for whatever was going on, construction or something. So we're sitting there. So I'm thinking to myself, oh, there's got to be an alternative alternate route. There's got to be another way. So every year I'm looking, but, you know, there was nothing that was going to work.

And it hit me. I didn't even share this with Laura yesterday. It hit me in that moment. This is the picture of life, that in following God, it doesn't mean we're not going to hit the traffic. And what do we do in humanity?

Oh, there's got to be another way. And so we want to try this, we're going to try that. There's going to be some way we can bypass this and get around this traffic and so forth. But what

we discover is there's no other way. And sometimes we just have to go through it, the valley of the shadow of death, to get to the other side.

But praise God that we have a savior who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. And he doesn't just drop us off and leave us to fend for ourselves.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes these words, second Corinthians, chapter five. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come.

So in Christ's death, the old is gone, the old you, your old ways, sin, rebellion. And when we've encountered and experienced that curse, there's the reverse of the curse that comes. Noah was foreshadowing. Noah was projecting to the ultimate reversal of the curse that's found in Jesus Christ. It's in Christ's resurrection that the new has come, the new you with new ways, not problem and pain free.

But where are you? And I can now, like Noah, we can find favor with God. We can walk with God in this life and in the life to come.

So you remember the storyline, close encounters of the third kind. The main character, Roy Neary Muncie, Indiana, everyday blue collar worker. His life has changed after close encounter. And that's what happens when we have close encounters. Our lives are changed.

And even more so, it's true that our life changes not just now, but for all of eternity, when we have a close encounter with God. That's what I pray for. For each one here in this room, each one joining online, that you will have a close encounter with Jesus and that through him your life will be changed. You know, it may not be the picture, maybe that you've been told before, some time past, you come to Jesus, all your problems go away.

But it is true that when we have a close encounter with God through Jesus Christ, he leads us through that valley, the shadow of death. He doesn't just drop us off, and he's with us on the other side. Let's pray together. Father Lord, we don't understand in our human finite, limited knowledge and why you do or allow things to be as they are.

But what we are so grateful for is that when we have a close encounter with you, just like with Noah, you lead us through those hard times to the other side. I pray that for every person in this room right now, that there will be faith, hope and trust from that close encounter with Jesus Christ. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel? Visit [YouTube.com sherwoodoaks](https://www.youtube.com/sherwoodoaks) to watch messages, series and complete worship services.