

Dear Bible Center Family:

August 17, 2008

What a joy it has been for me to have the honor and privilege of serving as your Senior Pastor for more than a decade! God has done so many marvelous and mighty things in my life and the life of this church family. To Him be the glory!

On Wednesday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, I met with the Elders, Deacons, and Pastors of Bible Center and shared with them how God has been redirecting Lesli and me in recent days. We believed it important to communicate this to you at the next Sunday service. The Lord has called me to be the Senior Pastor of Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, CA. Like Bible Center, Calvary Community Church passionately seeks to see people come to, grow in, live for, and talk about Jesus.

While always intending to retire right here and never thinking God would ever call me to any other ministry, during the month of May God began to work on my heart in terms of where and how He wanted to use me in His kingdom. After many hours of prayer and introspection, He began to confirm in my heart that He had used me to accomplish what He had called me to do here at Bible Center. I also realized my leadership wiring was different from what He would use in this setting to move the church forward for Jesus. At that time, I believed God was moving me in terms of my ministry location, but had absolutely no indication of where He might be leading. Most of you know me well enough to know this was an agonizing process filled with hours of tears and prayers. I wrestled with the Lord over what He was doing in me and began to push back on His nudging.

In early June, God stepped all over my toes while I prepared and preached the message about "Getting Out of the Boat." God kept whispering in my heart: "So, you are going to challenge others to get out of their comfort zones and follow me wherever I want them to be, but what about you, Shawn?" He used that sermon in many lives. My life was one dramatically affected due to what He had already begun in me.

When you are treated well, are compensated well, have a wonderful team with which to work, have a great flock to shepherd and most important, you are witnessing God at work in individual lives and in the church, it is hard to imagine God asking you to step out of the boat. There is nothing I have done or the leadership of Bible Center has done to prompt this. On the contrary, the leadership and congregation of this church have been nothing but supportive, encouraging, and a blessing! God has simply taken me through a personal process of redirection. I deeply love this ministry, the pastoral team, the leadership, the congregation, and you.

Soon after God used the "Getting Out of the Boat" sermon, God directed Calvary Community Church to contact me. After several weeks of prayerful dialogue, careful exploration, and seeking God's will, Lesli and I were led to accept the call for me to become Calvary's Senior Pastor. We know God will only bless us, Bible Center Church, and Calvary Community Church if we each remain in the center of His will.

The hardest part of this process for both Lesli and me has been that while He has now called us to another church ministry, the Lord has not removed or required us to diminish our deep, personal love for the flock here. While never expecting this transition for the Thornton family or for Bible Center, I know that long before I arrived, while I have been here, and long after I am gone, Bible Center has been, is, and will be a God-thing here in the Kanawha Valley. I look forward to seeing how God uses this church body, upcoming campus development phases, and you to produce maturing followers of Jesus for the honor and glory of God!

My prayer is that this church body remain Bible-Centered – because when you do, you remain Jesus-Focused! I will also be praying for the leadership and congregation that God will bring the right man to help lead Bible Center forward for Christ. Bible Center's best days are ahead!

Thank you for your love, encouragement, friendship, and prayers over the years!

Please pray for Lesli, Jon, Katie, Megan and me - as we continue "outside the boat" of our comfort zone.

With love,



Shawn Thornton