

FAQ's About God's Calling Me to Calvary Community Church – *Shawn Thornton*

1. Why?

- God called me out of the boat of my comfort zone – at first I expected Him to tell me to get back in the boat and that He was testing my willingness to go anywhere, but instead, He called me to another place in His Kingdom
- I began to realize what God used in my leadership approach to take Bible Center from 750 people to 2,000 people and to relocate the church ministries probably would not be the type of leadership now needed to lead Bible Center forward for Christ
- I believe God is preparing the heart of the next Senior Pastor here and He will bring him to Bible Center and continue to bless this place for His glory

2. What about your intention to stay? Did you deceive us?

- Up until recent weeks, I never intended to leave Bible Center. I always believed I would retire here. Most of the time when I made statements about my intention to stay, I would say things like “Lord willing” or “God would really have to show me otherwise.” One person who emailed me recently said: “I always appreciated your willingness to put those kinds of phrases somewhere near your intentions to stay, because none of us can lock God in.” They went on to say “my wife rarely noticed those statements, but I always pointed them out to her.” Be sure and know that I never used those statements as my potential escape hatch or some technical loophole; I simply believed God would keep me here, I intended to stay, but I did not want to presume upon God.
- As I shared with you my intention to stay here for many more years, I meant it, I believed it, and I never planned to leave. While serving as your Senior Pastor, I have never put my resume out. I have never met with a pulpit committee or allowed anyone to consider me a candidate for any other position until about three weeks ago when I believed God was redirecting my life and then Calvary Community Church asked me to prayerfully consider being a pastoral candidate.
- I have had to process this myself. If I deceived you, I deceived myself. I don't believe that to be the case. At the open house for my tenth anniversary as pastor, someone asked me to promise to stay another 10 years. While I thought I would easily stay that much longer, I simply responded “I cannot promise, because God is God, and I am His to direct, but you have heard me say that I intend to stay a long time and have no desire to go anywhere else.”

3. So what's the real story of your departure?

- **Are you upset with something or someone?** NO
- **Are you leaving mad?** NO
- **Do you feel like you have been mistreated, overworked, or undercompensated?** NO
- **Are you butting heads with the boards or staff?** NO
- **Are you burned out and just need a break?** NO, the Elders have been gracious about this and have been gauging this well
- **Are you hiding moral failure and thus you are leaving to cover it up?** NO - while I am not a perfect man, I have been faithful to my wife whom I love more today than the day I married her and I have tried to live an honest and upright life
- **Are you going to bigger and better?** I am not sure – it's a bit of apples to oranges – cost of living, the church there has been hurting, facilities are different, culture is different, programs are different, etc.
- **When did you officially become a candidate there?** Three weeks ago
- **When did you make your final decision and whom did you tell?** We made the final decision before the Lord this past Monday (August 11th). We told Jon, Katie and Megan. We told the chairmen of both churches' elder boards (Wayne Pugh here) and I played phone tag with the chairman of the deacon board here at Bible Center (Stan Backus) until the next day. We told close family members.
- **How long have you had a relationship with Calvary Community Church and what has that relationship been?** I had a prior relationship with this church (through a friend in leadership there). I had given input to them through my friend on some philosophical statements they were writing (just as an outside friend – not sure anyone else in leadership ever knew who I was or if any of my comments made any difference) and last fall had pointed them toward men in our region that might be open to be their pastor (at that time they off-handedly inquired as to my interest – to which I replied “no”). They asked me to speak this summer, but when they first suggested this my friend in leadership there simply said “you know we are not considering you, we have offered a call to someone.” I appreciated their desire to keep things clear. Then, as God worked on me in terms of showing me that He might be concluding my ministry at Bible Center, some of their leaders began listening to podcasts from Bible Center. Their first serious inquiries occurred around the time I spoke in California on July 20th. Based on what I believed God was doing in redirecting my life, I indicated Lesli and I would pray about being a candidate for Senior Pastor there. By the next weekend I told them I would be a candidate. I also communicated that to the Chairman of the

Elders here. Because of the past connection between Calvary Community and me, we knew a great deal about each other already, so each simply needed to do some basic due diligence in seeking God's will. Calvary Community Church extended a call and Monday (August 11th) we accepted that call.

- **What is the timeline of your journey in making this decision and the move?**
 - Mid May began to sense God unsettling me here in terms of His Call on my life – concluded He might be moving me – but He had opened no doors, pushed back that it was probably just normal post-relocation feelings
 - Early to Mid June God stepped all over my toes and challenged me to be willing to get out of my comfort zone – to “Get Out of the Boat” – no clear indication of where – Calvary called to have me come out and fill the pulpit, but clearly not a candidate or even in the top dozen people of interest to them
 - Late June and early July, Lesli and I began to pray daily and through many tears about what God might have in store – began to sense that what He had started and I rejected in May might truly be His plan
 - Late July began to pray about and dialogue with Calvary Community Church leadership about the position of Senior Pastor there and whether or not God was directing me to candidate there
 - End of July indicated a willingness to candidate there and did so
 - First week in August Calvary leadership extended a call for me to serve as their Senior Pastor
 - On August 11th accepted the call to Calvary and notified chairmen of the boards at Bible Center – next day reached the Deacon Chairman (after phone tag)
 - On August 13th communicated where we believed God was leading us to the Elders, Deacons, and Staff
 - On August 17th God's redirection in my ministry communicated to both congregations
 - August 24th the last day of Sunday ministry at Bible Center
 - Mid September move to California

4. What about the new building and the debt?

- We have always believed that what God was doing at Bible Center was a God-thing. As I prayed and struggled with God regarding issues such as this, God kept communicating to me that Bible Center was His Church and He would care for her. He will.
- The new facilities are great assets and tools for ministry with or without Shawn Thornton.
- While I do not know what everyone gives, I do know that our biggest and/or are most faithful givers to the general offerings and the Hearing God's Call Building Campaign are people who are deeply plugged in to leadership and service at Bible Center. They are not fringe to the church and most were here long before I arrived. They are committed to Christ and His church – not a man.
- God always moves His people to rally together in times of transition. While a difficult thought – this journey ahead – it can be a great time of growth for individuals and the church body. People will be nudged by God to be faithful or to step up to the next level. God just works that way!
- God will provide!

5. What is Calvary Community Church like?

- They are a non-denominational church
- They emphasize expository preaching with practical relevance
- They are led by a board of elders and a ministry team
- They are passionate about reaching people for Christ and seeing them grow in Him so that still others can be reached
- They are similar in terms of demographics to Bible Center

6. How are Lesli and the kids doing?

- For each of us in the Thornton family this is a grieving process as we leave Bible Center and Charleston. We have great friends. We love Bible Center. We are hurting through this.
- Lesli and I have been processing it longer than the kids (a couple of months rather than a couple of weeks). Lesli and the kids each are willing to do what needs to be done and go back and forth between anticipation of the next step and disappointment over the process of leaving
- Pray for each of the kids. Jon starts high school. Katie starts Junior High. Megan enters the 4th grade. They will not start school here. We have contacted the potential schools there, are applying, and have been told they will help us get them going on their schooling here so they can be on pace when they arrive there

- My wife is such a wonderful blessing and partner in life and ministry. Please pray for her as she mothers the kids (and me in many ways) through this process

7. How long will you be here?

- The elders felt like we all needed to say good-bye well without unduly prolonging the grieving process (which is natural). I am in complete agreement. The picnic gives us a chance to be more relaxed in our time together in terms of goodbyes. Then next Sunday morning I will preach and in the evening I believe a farewell will be planned.
- No one is rushing me out the door, nor am I running out the door. It just seemed to leadership that it would be best to give folks a concise window to hear our goodbyes and to express them to us rather than make every Sunday for several weeks another goodbye.

8. Isn't this poor timing? Probably, but there are several factors related to the timing:

- As I prayed about this, I looked back over the last decade and realized that this season at Bible Center has been like a train going 100 MPH without ever stopping and no signs it will ahead. There is no good time to leave that kind of train.
- I asked God to open a window soon and make it clear I should go through it because this fall or winter we would probably be transitioning to three services, leadership was talking about at least planning out Phase 2 and getting a schedule in place for it over the next several years, etc.
- The ages and stage of our kids and the timing of their schooling even this fall had an impact on timing.
- It seemed there was no good timing other than seeing the Lord's hand.

9. Can we keep Lesli, the kids, and the rest of your family and you take your father-in-law? NO

10. What has Bible Center meant in your life?

- Wow! Where to begin?
- I love the body of believers here. I have made deep friendships. As one of the shepherds on the staff, I have walked through some pretty deep waters and rejoiced on some great mountain tops with so many of you. I will deeply miss you, your love for God's truth, and your deep passion for His son Jesus.
- I have probably learned more from the people here than they have from me.

- This body rejoiced with us early in our ministry time here over the birth of our third child, Megan. This body surrounded us with love and support eight and a half years ago after the sudden death of my mother. We have deep bonds with you that I know are strained today, but I know will be celebrated for all eternity!
- We have a great team of pastoral servants who will continue to shine long after I move. They are some of my best friends. They will serve the Lord and the church well in the coming days.
- It is hard for me to imagine any place and any group of people I would rather serve alongside than Bible Center and the people here. I believe I will always view these days as the sweetest days of my ministry career. Thank you for making them so sweet in the Lord!
- I praise God for each of you and for this body as a whole.
- You are in my prayers.
- I love you!