

Dear Heartland:

Twenty years ago I left the marketplace in response to one crystallizing question, *“When I wake up in the morning, what do I want to do?”*

Isn't it fascinating how such weighty and life-altering callings can get whittled down into such a simple form?

For the last two decades my answer to that question has unequivocally and wholeheartedly always been with you, Heartland — serving, dreaming, leading, and joining you as a faith-filled people on mission to love others far from God.

And there has simply been no greater joy.

During my time away, however, this question returned and intensified. It wasn't what my four months away was *for* but it is certainly what emerged: a new answer to that same question. So it deeply pains me to say... *I am leaving Heartland on February 1<sup>st</sup> to pursue new entrepreneurial opportunities in the marketplace.*

Now, I recognize that over the course of the past four months I've been saying things like, *“I'm not leaving”* and *“I'll be back”* and *“It's great to be back.”* Please know that each time I meant it and believed it. It wasn't until my re-entry last week, however, that I fully realized God was bringing this wonderful season of my life to an end and that it is time for me to leave this church I love.

To be clear, I'm not leaving because of any moral failure or indiscretion. I still really love Jesus, I will always serve His greater church in some capacity, and I still hate country music.

*But here's why:* over the past five years entrepreneurial dreams began to rise up in me, take hold, ferment and are now taking shape as real opportunities to pursue. Looking back, it's all pretty obvious: I listen to mostly business podcasts, I read marketplace books, I've been discipling business leaders, and the entrepreneurial space is where I now spend much of my free time.

In short, it's what I wake up in the morning most wanting to do.

But coming to a place where I could admit this reality was an altogether different thing. I didn't know what to do because of the “four loves” that I carry so deeply in my heart:

1. **My love for Heartland:** it is where I first experienced a sense of home when I moved to Kansas City in August of 1998. It is where I met my wife, birthed and adopted our three daughters, dedicated each of them, and it is where we let our puppies run the halls of 8301. This is where I experienced my calling, was further trained in ministry, and

partnered with each of you in taking some beautiful hills together. You have no idea what you mean to me, dear Church.

2. **My love for the elders, staff and management team:** I have walked with many of you for 19 years and never fathomed a day that we wouldn't be dreaming new dreams and locking arms together. We have our battle scars, for sure, but there's been so much life, joy, and God's glory along the way.
3. **My love for my Family:** for their provision, spiritual well being, and their life-giving relationships. My family loves Heartland. Elise has called HCC home for 23 years, my girls love MOVE middle school, and they love that I'm a pastor. So just the idea of a transition and its impact on my family's heart has been almost unbearable. I'm still not sure where we can find a spiritual home so nurturing, equipping, and that will care so deeply for their well being.
4. **My love for the marketplace:** there is such a mission field in the marketplace and so much opportunity for a different kind of impact. And, as you know, I love to start stuff and chase an idea as far as it will go.

Friends, I have felt the great weight of these competing loves and the responsibility to faithfully care and tend to each of them. At times, it has been anguishing.

Over the last month or so, I had been working with the Management Team to create a hybrid role that would allow me to serve Heartland in a reduced capacity while also giving me greater freedom to pursue these new dreams. But the Lord's grace just didn't seem to be in it. Personally, it became clear that I was trying to manage these "four loves," make everything okay for everyone, and— perhaps— take the safest route.

Letting go of all those things became the final surrender in my heart.

Getting to this place of clarity has not been easy on anyone. It has been confusing, stressful, and hard. I know that you've felt its impact and you've been so faithful through it. This is especially true for our Management Team. My relationship with each person is unique and different, of course, but over the past five years we on the whole began to grow along different trajectories. None better or worse, right or wrong. Just different. But that gap leaves us now in a tender place. We've each contributed to this tension and we each carry our own pain by having walked through it together. But, most importantly, these are my friends. We are brothers and sisters. We're family and we are committed to seeking relational repair where needed— for our sakes, for your sake, and for the Lord's.

And, as you might suspect, Heartland is generously helping us through this transition. We are so very grateful. It makes this free-fall moment a little less scary because there are so many unknowns ahead— one, in particular, is where my family and I can find spiritual community like what we've experienced with you. It breaks our heart that— for the foreseeable future— we

will no longer be at Heartland. Personally, we need space to breathe and your new leadership will need space to run after the God-sized dreams in their hearts.

Speaking of new leadership, the Management Team and elders have begun a process that will address questions of succession and a leadership structure that best supports Heartland's great future and I'm sure you'll hear more about that in due time.

*But here's what I want you to know...*

I'll share more about this on Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, (so please come!), but I resigned on the very day that we finalized our new strategic plan together. Please understand, I did not resign in protest of the plan but with enthusiastic blessing *for it*. This strategic work has been a 16 month journey and I've been a part of it every step of the way. This new vision for the future is absolutely right for who Heartland is, what God has been doing in us, and what our city most needs. It is stunning in its clarity and actionable for every person, every day.

And yet for me personally, it was the oddest thing: I just couldn't see myself in the plan— as if the Lord had put spiritual blinders over my eyes. That's when I finally knew. The Lord had answered my question. He is waking me up to new dreams just like He's doing the same for Heartland. Both dreams are a part of God's big kingdom and mission, but just distinctly different from each other now.

Heartland needs and deserves to have its leaders dreaming those dreams *for* Heartland, with fire in their bellies and hair on fire. And that's what you have in Tom Brawner, Craig Cheney, Jay Cull, Seth Davidson, Steve Fisher, and Michelle Pemberton— four of whom have prior lead pastor experience and all represent over a century of cumulative leadership at Heartland. That's what you also have in our many staff members who are chomping at the bit to take the new hill.

And that's what I pray will be true of you. Thank you for saying yes to Heartland's life-changing mission and thank you for continuing to say yes. Our city and world needs you.

With so much love and gratitude,  
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