

## **Dearest Destiny,**

You are some of my closest friends. This morning, I must tell you that the District has been walking alongside Deanna and me as we navigated a very tough season. And I am not referring to COVID, the political climate, or racial tensions. I am referencing struggles in our marriage.

In late January 2021, Deanna approached me, seeking a divorce. She cited many reasons, but at the crux of it, she felt like her life was moving in a different direction, and she wanted to be able to move on. Before I say much more, I think it is essential to say that there has been no infidelity, secret sin, or falling away from the faith. I played a recorded video from Deanna to our Council and staff that stated the same.

After Deanna told me, with her blessing, I reached out to Paul Kuzma, Foursquare's top-level certified counselor in Christiansburg, VA. I told Paul what had happened. I felt myself reeling very fast into a depressive state I had never experienced before, and I needed help. He recommended care and got me set up with medical and mental help immediately. We had conference calls weekly for a season. Then every other week, and so forth, until I felt like I had crawled out of a very dark place. I was in a severe grief stage for close to two months.

We started to involve the Gateway District immediately through Paul's promptings. Our District Supervisor at the time, Sam Rockwell, moved quickly to offer support and care. The District paid our way to receive a 4-day, critical-stage marital counseling session through a 1-on-1 intensive in Denver. Sam has been a constant support to me, having been a pastor whose wife had left him, with a very similar story arch as ours. Even up to this week, he has offered wise counsel and support.

Another person I confided in almost immediately was Derick Brown. He has been a dear friend and confidant. Additionally, I feel one of the wisest decisions I made after returning to Destiny was to ask to start meeting with Bill Boylan. We have been meeting every Friday for over a couple of years. And I felt like I needed to include him in my journey. He has provided wisdom, counsel, and friendship when I have needed it the most. I don't know if I could have succeeded without those two.

Last Fall, I also stepped into a monthly Pastoral Triage Care Group led by a Foursquare-sanctioned initiative. It is a small group of Foursquare pastors that meets to share and hold each other's burdens under the care of Brian James McMahan. He is also a licensed Foursquare pastor and professional grief counselor. I have cried with this group many times as they helped me shoulder my pain.

I have openly shared the news of our struggles with my Direct Area Pastor, Vaughn Fahrenbruck. He virtually attended the meeting on Thursday evening when I first addressed the Council. I also shared with our Regional Pastor, Loren Houltberg, standing beside me today, and our new Central District Supervisor, Antonio Simms. I have been up-front, honest, and accountable to our District in this matter.

Earlier this week, I also had a long conversation with our founding pastors, Brent and Tani Parker. Their support and encouragement were overwhelming. When the Council met Thursday night, I shared a letter of support they had written for that purpose. And I also have a statement they have prepared for me to read today. I will get to that in a moment.

This weekend, Deanna approached me, feeling like we had done all we could to work through relational issues with no resolution. I had been fighting this for a long time, and she felt exhausted to keep going. We shed tears. She said she had started filing for divorce and asked me to sign the initial paperwork. I did not contest. I also feel like I have done all that I can do.

It is essential to say that this is not what I want, but it is where Deanna has landed. The next steps are to work together to love and care for our kids.

Both of us desire to keep our friendship intact. We want to absolutely not speak ill of one another and to work to love and serve our kids in the best way we can think possible. I especially want to challenge us -- the church -- to hold Deanna in respect. I am asking for your help with that.

The scripture says that God hates divorce. To that matter, Bill Boylan shared with the Council on Thursday night that he believes this is included in scripture to convey that God knows how much it hurts. He was cheated on, betrayed, and divorced by the people of Israel. Divorce rips apart that which was meant to stay together, and people are left hurt in its wake. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, He told them it was only allowed because of "the hardness of [our] hearts." And we admit that we are fallen and broken.

Deanna will be stepping down as a lead pastor at Destiny. But in doing so, she shares her love, concern, and care in parting. Our church will suffer loss to that end. She is dearly loved and adored and has ministered profoundly to many. She needs some time. But please do not hesitate to reach out to her in love and care.

I have shared my desire to stay and serve as your lead pastor should the District and Council decide I am fit and deserving. I left that on the floor with the Council on Thursday evening. Pastor Loren will speak more about that in a moment.

Through this process, I have felt nothing but love, compassion, and care from the District. Their support has been above and beyond in many ways.

I asked the District if I could have someone here with me as I shared this morning. And I am so grateful that Loren is standing next to me today. I want to tell you that he has bent over backward to be here today. He canceled previous plans and commitments, rerouted, and drove 1,400+ miles in the last couple of days to sit next to me, as I shared with the staff last night. That is the kind of care and attention that the District has given. Loren and the others on the District team have shown overwhelming care — especially this week. And it means the world to me.

Our District Supervisor, Antonio Simms, messaged me Thursday afternoon, just before the Council meeting, saying, "[We are] definitely praying. We are here for you and your church. We will get through this together. Your pain is ours, too."

I am sure that there will be many questions and concerns. But can I ask this: if you hear someone asking questions in the coming days, please refer them directly to Deanna or me. I ask for your trust in that—the less chatter and gossip, the better for my family and our children.

Lastly, I want to say that I regret your not knowing of this sooner. But I also want to say that I did not expect this day to come.

**With all my love and respect,  
Shawn**