

When we started Awaken, my friend Liz told us that people would be drawn to Awaken
Because authenticity is such a high value for me and for us and for our church...
In that spirit, this is my "Here I am" to you Awaken...
Today serves as the day where I share with you my intentions
To transition over the next year
Out of my role as one of the Pastors at Awaken

Now...I understand that this is very shocking to many of you in the room
And that's fair - so let's take a couple of deep breathes together and get our frontal lobes back
And - Let me slow down and take a few minutes to share with you how I got here.

Fair warning, this is Micah the human who's talking
And I'm going to risk being vulnerable and trust you with my heart and my humanity.

Almost a year ago to the day, after 15 years at Awaken,
I wrote in my journal "God I think I might be done"
And so - over the past year I've sat with that question.
Laura and I have weighed the reality of that possibility.
I have shared with close friends in ministry and my therapist & spiritual director
All to try to discern and hear the Spirit's voice in my life.

And so I went into my sabbatical this past summer
Holding the possibility that my work at Awaken was done.
I did that in order to listen and to watch what happened in my soul
In that way, my sabbatical was what I needed it to be
And a few things came into focus for me and for us as a couple:

First - The last seven years have been brutal.

In 2017 I was suspended for praying at a same sex wedding.
That was the beginning of a six-year struggle with the Covenant
That struggle finally ended with Awaken's removal in 2023.

But during those years
I sat through at least 6 meetings with the Board of Ordered ministry
Surrounded by 30 people, asked to explain and sometimes defend myself.
Along the way, friendships dissolved, mentoring relationships ended,
And the trust I once had in the denomination died.
If I'm honest, some things in me were broken
And may never fully recover from that experience.

In March of 2020, all of our worlds changed with COVID.
Like many Pastors, I did not get into this work
Because I liked virtual meetings and speaking at a camera in an empty room

And I know that this was not a unique thing that I experienced alone,
But the experience of trying to be a Pastor through COVID fried a lot of Pastors
And it almost did me in.

The elections of 2016, 2020 and now 2024 as you know, have been deeply divisive.
For me, they've strained family relationships that were once close
And often left me feeling isolated.
I've shared in the past
But one of the costs of this journey of deconstruction and reconstruction
Is that sometimes there will be people
Who are not able to make that journey with you
And there is just a deep grief for me in that.

Now - Much of this journey I chose or we chose
And much of it, we did together
So this is not "I'm a victim of circumstances out of my control and/or I did this all alone."
The point is this...
As I stepped away and slowed down
What came into focus is the aggregate of all these things
And the toll that it's taken on me
The reality is that I'm just really really tired and I feel pretty beat up by the last 7 years.

I think it's important to pause and say

To our queer siblings, and to the parents raising queer kids at Awaken:
My advocacy and our church's advocacy for your place at the table has been worth it.
I have no regrets. You are worth it. Your kids are worth it. My kids are worth it.
While nobody comes home from battle without scars, I would do it all again tomorrow.

**Secondly, I have become more aware than ever
of the cost and sacrifice of wearing the mantle of Pastor.**

I remember sitting in my first class for ordination called vocational excellence.
How wise and seasoned veterans of ministry told us that there is a difference
Between the person who is called Pastor and those that are not.

I also remember thinking, not me. I'll do it differently.
In so many ways Awaken has been different from other places and for that I am grateful.
And...I am not special and Awaken is not immune.
Amidst all of the beautiful things you get to experience when you wear this mantle -
Being a Pastor can and often is a very lonely occupation.
"Heavy is the head that wears the crown," they say—
And when the crown involves shepherding spiritual lives
In a community that welcomes questions and doubts
My experience is that the weight only grows.

Finally - wise is the person who knows what time it is.

Our lives are made up of seasons and as we know
The seasons are always changing.
Laura and I recently watched the Downton Abbey Grand Finale
Mrs. Patmore said about her big transition out of service to married life,
"Our lives are made of chapters and it's ok for one chapter to end for another to begin."

And I would say the same is true for churches.
Different seasons call for different kinds of leaders.

In the beginning, entrepreneurs, visionaries, catalysts were needed.
That's who I am.

But Awaken is not a young church anymore
And to grow as a trusted presence in this neighborhood,
New gifts may be required—steadiness, patience, attention to detail...*all of which I have in spades...*

I've seen too many leaders miss the chance
To pass the baton when it was their time and in doing so ended up making a mess.
And after watching it happen to others...I guess I vowed to never be that leader.

I remember one day one of our former worship leaders told me
That his chapter at Awaken was over.
He said something I haven't forgotten
“when I dream I don't dream about church music for awaken anymore”.
While I was away I really paid attention to this question...
“Micah, what captures your heart and dreams and imagination?”
Awaken will always be special to me and will have a special place in my heart.
AND she deserves someone sitting in my chair
Whose imagination & dreams are captured by her future.

As I listened to my heart in my time away
I noticed that my dreams for the future have and are changing.
Coming back from my first sabbatical in 2018
I was energized and ready for whatever mountain was in front of us
Suffice it to say that this is not how I have returned from this one
Some of you have probably even sensed that in my response...because I can't lie.

For Laura and I,
Me in full time ministry is all we've known as a couple in marriage for 26 years
Next year at this time, it's very possible
That we could be dropping off our youngest at college

A few weeks ago I spoke about thresholds
And Moses leaving Midian to become the leader of the Exodus
And how often - things change and even good things come to an end
In order for us to step into what's next.
And as a couple, we sense that we're at a threshold moment
And there's some healing and reconnecting for us to do
That just isn't possible while still in the role of Pastor and Pastor's wife

Now - A few details & maybe some clarification:

The question you're probably all thinking and asking is how long?
When does this happen?
I have committed to the Advisory team a minimum of a year to work together
In order to make this transition as smooth as possible,
We've already been hard at work
And more information will be coming in the weeks and months to come.

What that means is that we have at least a year together
To put up our sails and point this ship in the direction that the Spirit is blowing
I want very badly to help settle Awaken into her new home here in this location
And we've still got work to do friends...and I'm up for it.
I suppose that's why I've been so compelled the last 8 weeks since I've been back
I still believe in this church and the work that we are called to do
I just also know that I need a break

And so, I'm committed to finishing well
So that as Paul says
You all will "shine like stars in the universe as you hold on to the Word of life.
Then I will be able to boast that I did not run and labor in vain...
Rather I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race."

For me, I do not know what's next.
I have no plans and no job lined up
I may be done being a pastor...I don't know
But, similar to what happened before I said yes to planting awaken
I sense the need to step away from it at least for a time
So that if and when...I can choose it again.
In a lot of ways I feel like I am back at the beginning when we started
And all I have is a sense of God's invitation and a lot of trust and faith
That if I jump God will be there to be faithful.

I think it's important for you to hear this...

Awaken is Awaken if I'm here or not
YOU ALL are Awaken
And our values, our DNA and our culture LIVE IN YOU
God has been SOOOOOO faithful over 16 years of our life together
And there is no reason to start believing
That God won't be faithful to get us through this transition.

It's also important for you to hear -

Nothing is wrong
I didn't do anything wrong
There's no moral or ethical scandal
There's no story here
And - Awaken has been nothing but supportive, kind and generous
To me and my family through it all

Sabbaticals are for rest **and** discernment
This is always a possibility when someone is free to discern
And listen to where the Spirit is leading
This is normal and this is natural - even if it's hard or sad.

The other day I had a conversation with two of my friends who are Pastors and he said,
"Micah - you did it! You did the thing that we all dreamt about in church plant training. Only 10% of churches make it past 10 years and hardly any founders get to leave on their own terms! Usually the

church closes or it implodes or they get fired for something...but you did it. I know this is hard and it will be hard but you just have to hear that - you did the dream!"

And I would say to you all - WE did the dream.

Outside of my family and my wife

There is nothing in my life that I am more proud of than Awaken

And who we have become together

It has been the single greatest honor of my vocational life to be called your Pastor,

And I know that there are so many things that I will miss

And so many memories that I cherish and will take to my grave...

AND it's ok that chapters end and new ones begin

As a person who has received the gift of your trust over the years.

I wanted to be the one to tell you that this chapter is coming to a close.