

We were wrong. FAQ

QUESTION: What sparked the idea for the apology and the ad?

ANSWER: My single biggest regret of the past 18 years is how I led this church for the first 16 years. I meant well, but nothing can change the fact that I just did it wrong. They say that if God wants to get your attention, He will toss a little pebble into your life. If that doesn't work, He will throw a rock. As a last resort, He will heave a brick! Well, Africa was my brick. In October 2006, I went for the first time to Africa and saw for myself the devastation caused by extreme poverty and the AIDS pandemic. It truly made me wonder how anyone could be as willfully blind as I was. One day, while running at White Rock Lake, I sensed God say to me, "I want you to apologize to the community." So many people are turned off to the church today largely because it fails to live out its creed. We contributed to that problem. We don't want to be a part of the problem anymore. But the path toward restoring credibility begins with a sincere apology.

QUESTION: What was the reaction of your members when you announced that you were issuing this apology and doing so through a full-page ad?

ANSWER: In a couple of the services, there was spontaneous applause. There is something about this that feels very right to us. And truthfully, most of our people are that way, very genuine, very willing to admit it when they blow it. I can't say that everybody feels exactly as I do (that this is the right thing to do), but as a broken person myself, I would much rather be aligned with a church that can admit it when it's wrong than the kind that never does.

QUESTION: What do you hope this open apology will do for those who read it or hear about it through word-of-mouth?

ANSWER: The one thing I hope for more than anything else is for those who have lost faith in the church, who intrinsically know what church should be about, that they would dare to believe that a church could be known for its love and compassion more than its rhetoric and judgments. I know we won't be perfect, no church ever is, but I hope that we live in such a way that those outside the church would see more of Jesus' ways in us.

QUESTION: Do you expect an increase in attendance at your church as a result of this very open and public apology?

ANSWER: I really don't know what to expect; it may be just the opposite. It may lead to a decrease in attendance. I just know it's the right thing to do and that's why we're doing it.

QUESTION: In your opinion, do you think there are churches that were right, that have been truly following Jesus and doing correctly the things that you are now apologizing for?

ANSWER: Oh, yes, there are many churches that have been doing it right. Our apology is for Springcreek Church. I'm not heaping all churches together like everyone has done it wrong. I thank God for waking me up from the stupor I was in. I will never again lead as I have led.

QUESTION: What type of reaction have you had or do you expect to receive from other pastors outside of your church?

ANSWER: It is rare to hear the Church apologize for anything it has ever done. But as a God-ordained, human-led organization, it regularly stands in need of forgiveness itself. As a pastor, I need to regularly model for others the values I long to see them live. If I preach reconciliation and forgiveness but they never see me seek reconciliation and forgiveness, then they have reason to doubt just how much I really believe in the practice. At the same time, I expect that there will be those who condemn what we've done. That's okay. They are entitled to their beliefs, and maybe we need to hear the things they are saying as well.

QUESTION: Aren't there other ways to spend the money you spent for this ad, maybe help the poor, the hungry?

ANSWER: Every dollar given to the church is important. As a church we spend less than 1% of our annual budget on advertising every year. To put it in perspective, we've already sent more than 30 times the total amount we spend on advertising to Africa. The poor, both at home and abroad, are a much higher priority to us than advertising. And rather than diminish resource dollars being leveraged for the poor, it is our hope to maximize them. If more churches embraced compassion ministries, then the dream of eradicating extreme poverty might actually be realized.

QUESTION: Your ad says "We followed trends when we should have followed Jesus." Why is it that it took you 18 years to realize you were not following Jesus?

ANSWER: Willful blindness is all I can say: in the same way we pass the guy on the street corner holding a sign that says, "Will work for food", or when I watch the television and see starving children in Africa or hurricane-ravaged parts of the coast. For many of us, we think this is an important need and someone needs to do something about it. We just all too casually dismiss that the "someone" is us. And honestly, you and I can do that for the rest of our lives. I spent too many years of my life not seeing what really matters. I won't spend the balance of my life in that way. And truthfully, that's the only way I can ever prove to you and anybody else that my apology is sincere. Watch how I live. Do I lead and do I live like the poor really matter to God? If I don't, then you have reason to doubt my sincerity. If I do, then join with me and let's change the world.

For detailed information:

<http://www.springcreekchurch.org/WeWereWrong.html>