

Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale Enters A New Era

This past spring, when founding pastor Bob Coy stepped down from Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale because of a moral failure, the congregation was stunned. He had been loved and respected, so the announcement was a shock to say the least. But because of a strong leadership team, a committed congregation and much prayer, the church is emerging stronger than ever.

After an period of transition, staff teacher Doug Sauder was recently named lead pastor of the 20,000-member church. Serving in various pastoral roles over the past 15 years at Calvary, Doug has assumed the leadership of the pastoral team which will rotate teachers for the weekend and mid-week services for ten campuses throughout Florida.

Recently, writer and media consultant Phil Cooke had the opportunity to interview Calvary Chapel's new pastor about the transition and the future of the church. Here's what happened:

Phil Cooke: How would you describe your recent roles and responsibilities?

Doug Sauder: I have had the unique opportunity to serve within the local church as a pastor at Calvary Chapel as well as part of a statewide foster care ministry, 4KIDS of South Florida. Here at Calvary Chapel, I have overseen regional campuses, Family Ministry, and our Next Gen Discipleship Ministry. As president of 4KIDS, I've been able to work with a network of churches, organizations and government agencies both locally and around the state as we build a culture of orphan care in an effort to impact our community, our state and our country.

Phil Cooke: You've been named lead pastor of Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale after a difficult few months since your

predecessor, founding pastor Bob Coy stepped down. Because he was so well-loved, the announcement was a real blow to the church. How do you lead a congregation through such a difficult transition?

Doug Sauder: The only way to lead a church body through a transition like this is by being led. Of course, those who serve in ministry know that they're supposed to be led by God's Spirit in *all* that they do. But it's when things reach a critical climate that you tend to focus and depend more fully on the Lord. It's then that you fully embrace the reality that apart from Him you can do nothing.

I imagine it being similar to what Joshua must have experienced when Moses died. Those were some big shoes to fill. God's simple instructions to Joshua have been a source of great strength for me: "Be strong and courageous. Be careful to obey everything in the Book of the Law. I will give you success." So for me and for our team, we are trusting the Lord as we follow His lead into His promises for our church.

Phil Cooke: Did the fact that the church had a strong teaching team make a difference in the transition?

Doug Sauder: One of the wonderful truths about the Lord is that He's always faithful to provide for His people. In advance of the transition, He had been building a team of teachers whom He had gifted and filled with a passion to share the greatest story ever told. When the need for them was at its greatest, God's provision was in place.

Phil Cooke: How important is it for a church to build a community, rather than focus on a single leader?

Doug Sauder: It's absolutely essential because the New Testament reveals to us that the Church is to be a living and thriving community of faith. One of the most important questions that we continually ask is, "How can we preserve a genuine dynamic of community within the context of a growing

ministry where organization is increasingly needed?" How do we allow for the continued growth of God's family without sacrificing being a true *spiritual* family? At the end of the day, the simple answer is the same as it's always been—relationship.

Phil Cooke: What difference does a strong group of elders (or board members) make during a church crisis?

Doug Sauder: In times of crisis, the value of those who've experienced the storms of life are incalculable. I can say with great gratitude that God has surrounded our church with many men who fit that exact description. They're men whose roots run deep into the soil of God's character. They know Him well, and it has a calming and stabilizing effect on others. Many of our elders and board members have put their normal lives on hold for a season to help guide our church through these waters.

Phil Cooke: Out of curiosity, what scriptures have you been focusing on in your teaching to help the congregation move forward?

Doug Sauder: When our current church property was being constructed, a deliberate decision was made. As the concrete for our stage was being poured, a plastic-wrapped Bible was embedded in the very spot that the pulpit would eventually stand. The symbolism was that our church's teaching ministry would always be founded on one thing and one thing only, the Word of God.

In that spirit, our teaching team has decided to continue in the area of scripture that we were in prior to our transition. So we've continued our chapter-by-chapter teaching from the Book of Luke. And I might add that it's no coincidence that the first weekend after the crisis, we were in Luke 10—watching Jesus send out 70 disciples. Christ's commitment to make disciples was His mission then and it's our mission

now. God's Word will never change and neither will our church's mission to make disciples.

Phil Cooke: Do you feel the church is "out of the woods" or are there still ongoing challenges?

Doug Sauder: Challenges will always be a reality in our earthly existence. Particularly in ministry because God knows they keep us close to Him and they prevent us from being independent of Him. So in that respect, I not only expect but I appreciate the ongoing challenges that our ministry will face. The last thing I would want is to succumb to the notion that our church needs the Lord any less than it has over the past several weeks.

Having said that, things are changing, dust is settling, water is leveling and wisdom is accruing. As one season gives way to another I'm hopeful that our church family is starting to reach a level of equilibrium that the Lord desires for us.

Phil Cooke: What are the things you're most excited about today at Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale?

Doug Sauder: There are many things I'm excited about, but if I could narrow it down to one it would be this: nothing excites me more than to see how God is going to reveal more of Who He is through this. When you read through the Bible, you cannot escape it; it's in those times when God's people lean on Him most fully that they see Him most clearly. The Red Sea, the lion's den, the walls of Jericho, these were all places where it simply *had* to be God!

Phil Cooke: What does the future hold for Doug Sauder and the congregation at Calvary?

Doug Sauder: I'm indescribably thankful that my personal future and our church's corporate future are actually being held in God's hands. My life is His life, this is His church—and I for one am filled with awe and gratitude to watch

Him lead His people one challenge and one step at a time. None of us knows exactly what the future looks like, but we do know Who's leading us there, and we know that His utmost concern for us is our utmost good.

Phil Cooke: If there was one encouraging thought you'd share for leaders going through a church crisis of any kind—what would it be?

Doug Sauder: Crisis is a gift that nobody registers for, for obvious reasons. But here's something that can't be denied: Crisis reveals true character. You never know the true nature of something until it is under duress or put to some sort of test. You'll never know if your roof is solid without a thunderstorm. And you'll never know the true character of someone apart from the context of crisis, and I would encourage all church leaders to embrace that reality. Here's why:

Crisis will reveal the true character in those around you, and you really need to know where people are in regard to you. Who is for you and who is against you? Nothing clarifies that like a crisis.

Also, crisis reveals the true character in you. Let's be honest, none of us are perfect and we all need to surrender and submit areas of our heart to the Lord's transformational touch. But we need to recognize what those areas are before we can yield to Him changing them in us. Nothing reveals those blind-spots like a crisis, because it's then and there that the "true you" is seen.

Lastly, crisis reveals the true character of the Lord. God's character is constant and never changes. But there are times when we're more dialed-in than others to His voice and His actions on our behalf. Crisis is the time when our hearts tend to be most attuned to His, and He has a perfect track record of faithfulness towards those who trust in Him.

Phil Cooke is a media consultant focused mainly on the Christian market, as well as a vocal critic of contemporary American and American-influenced Christian culture. [Click here to visit his website.](#)