

# love where you live



HOW *to* LIVE SENT *in*  
*the* PLACE YOU CALL HOME

shauna pilgreen

  
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*To those with whom I share the sidewalks:  
this book is for you.*

*To the ones I get to hold hands with every day,  
Ben, Elijah, Sam, Kavita, and Asher:  
this book is because of you.*

## **The Dweller's Prayer**

*Awaken me, Lord,  
to engage with the people around me today.  
I choose to make You known  
so that Your love may be in them as it is in me.  
Come, Jesus. You are welcome here.*

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# Foreword

The web of relationships that once dominated the fabric of communities has all but disappeared. Yet each time we hear about it, something within us resonates with it. We have a longing to know our neighbors and have a greater sense of community—even family—with those we live among.

Volumes have been written on what prevents deep community from developing. It's been noted that the loss of the front porch has contributed to the decline of neighbors gathering. Many have developed a “garage door syndrome”: the garage door goes up, the car goes in, the garage door goes down. Intruders, also known as the people next door, are kept at a distance.

Another contributing factor is the potential for individuals and families to acquire new jobs, uproot, and start over in a new town that is miles, states, and even continents away. Arguably, people could do this at any point in history. The difference is the ease in which we can now do this and the frequency at which it happens. If you don't like your town or your circumstances, our cultural narrative says, “Move. Change them. Start fresh and live your dream.”

As followers of Jesus, we have to ask if that's the narrative we see in Scripture or the narrative we see lived out in Jesus. It doesn't

take long to capture a different angle. We are indeed a *sent* people. Our sending, however, is always with a purpose. Abraham and the people of Israel were sent to a promised and specific place. In the covenant community, there were a myriad of laws given on how to take care of one another and welcome the outsider.

When the covenant community was *sent* into exile, as Jeremiah records, God was still sending them with purpose. They were not to decrease or sit idly by. No, the directive from the Lord was to build houses, settle down, plant gardens, eat their produce, marry, have sons and daughters, and give those sons and daughters in marriage so that they can also have sons and daughters (Jeremiah 29:4–6). The higher directive was to “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you” (v. 7). Yes, there is activity to be done, but it’s driven toward a kingdom purpose.

If anyone has ever been sent with a purpose, Jesus is the perfect embodiment of it. Jesus lived deeply into community. We don’t often spend much time thinking about it, as the Gospels do not record those years, but the life of Jesus is a profound example of loving a place. Jesus spent thirty years in a community that was barely a dot on the map of the backwaters of the Roman empire. How many parties did He attend? How many funerals? How much life? How many every-day-in-the-mundane experiences shaped those final three years of ministry? He knew the Jewish law, the customs, the festivals, the rhythms, the people.

He studied. He learned. He, as Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*, “became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14).



The people of Israel and the life of Jesus teach us a fundamental value as the people of God in the world: to live intentionally where you have been sent. Know the people and the place. Invest your life deeply, because we are at work bringing pictures of the future kingdom to the here and now.



If this is the better narrative, the narrative the people of God are given to live, the question we need to ask now is, Who is living this narrative, and how do we begin to demonstrate this in our own context? Through her life and the life of her family, Shauna Pilgreen will answer the first question and help you answer the second.

In a deeply inviting and vulnerable way, Shauna invites you into her story, introducing you to the people that make up her immediate and extended family, from a small Southern town to her current urban lifestyle. She gives you the joyous and celebratory experiences and the deeply painful parts as well, because the journey is real and it's not all smooth sailing.

In the pages to come, you'll not only read a compelling story of one family who has chosen to create community rather than run from it but you'll also get some practical, field-level advice for discovering and loving your own neighborhood. You'll get principles to put into practice and tools that will help you see your community, and more of it, in new ways. And you can trust your guide because she's gone before you, lived with purpose, and has the scars and stories to prove it.

It's time to recapture our identity as the *sent* people of God. For some, that identity might involve *going* to a new town, a big city, or even a new country. For all of us, that identity of being sent means "to be sent with a purpose," and to deeply love where we live. May the kingdom break in as we do so.

Randy Frazee, pastor and author of *The Connecting Church*  
and *Real Simplicity: Making Room for Life*

# Introduction

## *Why Live Sent?*

Hi there. Come on over. Thanks for meeting me here, on the corner of Third and Market. Let's start on the sunny side because I didn't wear enough layers. I see that you left your shades at home. I get it. The day started off quite foggy and cool. Ready to walk? I know you're up for it, or at least are curious, because you picked up this book.

### **A Welcoming Walk**

So, welcome to my city. It probably looks different from yours. Maybe your city is a bit bigger or your town much smaller. I and my fellow citizens of San Francisco are all squeezed into forty-nine square miles. We're known by what neighborhood we live in—the Mission, Portola, Glen Park, Inner Sunset, Outer Sunset, and so on. When I give my address to local friends, I have to give the cross street too. We value good food and celebrate everything. Well, almost everything.

I want you to meet my neighbors. We'll see many while we're out and about. Some will stop by, and others will need us to come to them. Ruth can tell us what it's like to live on these streets we're

walking on. Janet has raised her kids here and is now enjoying her grandkids in the very same neighborhood. Rachael and Justin started their family in San Francisco and want to show you how they've jumped in feet-first, learning to love this place. Jordyn is going to join us. Her white cane guides her, but she sees this place better than I do. We're going to peek inside where Darrin works, and you won't be able to miss her big grin from the front desk. Later on we'll stop by for a cup of chai that Israel will gladly serve us. Let me know when you get hungry. I know a great Chinese restaurant near the art museum. The chef, Kathy, will probably stop by our table to tell us what we must eat. And we will order exactly that.

### **The Sending God at the Intersection**

You need to know that, before I moved, I shoved my theology and upbringing into my already overstuffed suitcase, certain they were necessary for my survival. They would be useful for defense and justification and in sharing the gospel if I were asked. I wasn't moving sent. I was moving superior. Yet within hours of arrival into my new home, I quickly noticed that people weren't like me and what I had packed wasn't going to be needed here. Conveniently, a big dumpster was already positioned outside our apartment. Once I tossed my ideals and superiority, I was awakened to see these people and this place with such wide-eyed wonder.

I felt like God tapped me on the shoulder and invited me on a life-altering walk to see the diversity, the brokenness, and the beauty. I looked up and was standing at the crossroads. I could choose to stick to the parts of the Bible that I liked and to keep nearby my files of "what I like to do, how I will spend my time, what works best for me, and the gospel according to my previous culture" or I could pay attention to the God who had sent me here for reasons and a purpose beyond what I could comprehend.

As I looked around, I saw what I had packed was not necessarily what the people needed. I realized I had needs too, and the

people pointed me to my greatest need. My life inside the walls of the church was flipped inside out as I became more at home with people who had yet to step inside those walls. I began to see God in the train stations, SROs (Single Room Occupancies, one-room units for residents with minimal income), high-rise apartments, and tech companies. I began to see Him daily in San Francisco, and it was all messy and hard and utterly beautiful. I could see that God didn't fit in a box with rules and regulations. Oh no! I can tell you that He is with Salem on the street and Kay at the abortion clinic and Diane who thinks Someone is up there somewhere. God is moving obstacles that have kept people from walking closer to Him and removing blinders so others might see Him. And I'm getting to be a part of it all. He's rocking my theology of "me" and "them." He's revealing the ugliness in my heart and my daily, hourly, momentary need of the Savior. My heart is still growing in love with the people of my city, because I am choosing to encounter the God of the city—not the god of my theology and ideas.

For where we live is our playground. It is our campus. Our physical location is where we play, imagine, create, explore, unwind, celebrate, dig, and hang upside down. It also contains a people we study, understand, enjoy, consider, ponder, serve, and converse with. And wherever we live, we have a chance to impact and engage with these lives.

Jane Jacobs, a twentieth-century author and activist, was also a housewife and mom with a love for her city of Manhattan that I want to mirror. She thought places were about people. Not buildings. In her words, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."<sup>1</sup> The people I tell you about are important because where we live is not made just of concrete and steel, farmland or factory. It's the people whose heartbeats power our cities and towns.

Yet the reality is that people are constantly moving in and out and around the places we live. Reasons for these moves include family dynamics, housing situations, and career opportunities. Did you

know the average American will move eleven times in his or her life? It's common to fixate on the reason for the move rather than God's big picture behind the move. It's time for believers in Jesus Christ to awaken to our reality of being sent, not simply making a move.

Tentmaker Paul talked about God to the leaders in Athens, Greece, when he said,

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. (Acts 17:24–27 NIV)

God loves us a whole lot and breathes not only breath in us but a purpose and calling that is as unique as we are. And with that purpose comes a place to dwell. For to dwell is to live, abide, pitch your tent. That dwelling place is strategic.

We downplay God's activity when we see a move simply as a move, or a decision to stay as a commitment to the status quo. Moving is our human explanation for a transition or change in life. Living *sent* is recognizing God's intimate involvement in our lives, whether we are in a new zip code or have been in the same one for years. Living sent aligns our uniqueness to His activity for the purpose of making Him visible to our community. To many He is an unknown God, but to believers He is the sending God.

He sent Abraham. He sent Jonah. He sent out the Twelve. He sent Philip. God has been sending out His people since the beginning. God sent Jesus, right? Of course, Jesus lived sent before He told us to do it. He spent His earthly years living this way. He went into the temple and the synagogues, but he was even more in the fields and the homes and the cities, with the outcasts and

those who were attracted to His lifestyle. He said to those closest to Him, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

Like all Christ followers, we are sent places to show Jesus. Sure, His words are a mission trip verse, but so much more encompassing. They are also a lifestyle that includes how we parent, love, lead, shop, dine, explore, and serve. If we don’t show Jesus as we do these things, we will fail the people of our cities and towns and abandon our sending God.

For me, I made a decision on the streets of San Francisco to take His command seriously. To serve and not be served. To consider myself sent and to not consume only but to contribute to the welfare of the city. This wasn’t a Wonder Woman moment. It was very much an internal surrender to doing life God’s way one day at a time, choosing to be present and awake to the needs and culture around me. I didn’t know how it would look. I didn’t rally the few local Christians I knew and draw up a battle plan. I took a deep breath, believing I was in San Francisco for a reason beyond myself. And honestly? I could have done all this in the town we lived in before. It wasn’t about the move. It was about waking up to God’s vision for where I lived.

• • • • •

So whether you’re about to go or you find yourself in an unfamiliar place, or you’re wondering what you’re still doing *here*—this is your moment, the intersection of life as usual or life as sent. To set this book down and forfeit the adventure or to move forward with God into your city, town, suburb, or neighborhood that needs Him. You might not need a physical relocation but a spiritual relocation of where your heart’s affection and mind’s attention should be. Let’s touch and hear and see and smell and speak His beauty, His Name, and His story.

God has a purpose for our lives where we live. Our career move has greater purpose than just clocking in, leading a team,

or winning the case. The business or idea we're intending to start is not to end with going public on Wall Street. The lease of the one-bedroom apartment, the commute, or the countless people at the superstore are not just random pieces of living.

God is calling professionals, families, students, and empty nesters who love Him to specific dwelling places. What each of us has to offer is unique and critical to how God has set up His mission on earth. In the workplace and the neighborhoods, around the conference room and the lunch table, God equips His people with influence and a voice that can speak into the seekers and the lost of cities and towns, suburbs and up-and-coming communities. He expects greatness from His followers. Not a Christian version of life borrowed from the secular market but the finest, most excellent life we can live.

It's dwellers of faith who have the opportunity right now in history to be among the influencers and dreamers. Not as Christians who have moved onto the scene (like I once thought) but as accountants, developers, entrepreneurs, teachers, scientists, lawyers, and volunteers who are Christians. We must have a vision for being where we live. We have to be strategic, creative, and intentional.

Choosing to live sent is moving toward something, not away from something, and leads to an attachment to your community.

Living sent is the strategy of loving people well in your town whom you are sent to love and watching God connect the dots.

Living sent is for those who are called to stay in their childhood places and for those who must cross oceans.

Living sent is for those who want to move and those who have to move. For those who want to stay and those who have to stay.

To live sent is to be tied, first and foremost, to the trinity of the God-created heart, mind, and soul.

Living sent is an awakening to God's activity as we learn a culture and graciously give the truth of Christ.

## A Dose of Creativity

Living sent takes His command to go and infuses it with our creativity. It starts with thinking outside the box. Some of you are already there. Others, like me, are Type A, introverted people pleasers who choose neat and tidy over risky and messy any day of the week. Yet this is what blows my mind—thinking outside the box is still within God’s creation! Our thinking can never go beyond His thinking, but when we begin to think like He does and see what He sees and respond with His heart, God can take our dreams, ideas, and prayers to unparalleled places. Places where heaven and earth collide and His glory is on display—and an “only God” moment sparks, exploding on earth as it did in heaven.

This lifestyle will lead us to question the voice, influence, and resources God has given us. Know that these were specifically created and given to be used here on earth. They don’t travel into eternity. Doing what you were created to do, in your current season of life, in the place you live—this is living sent. To live like you’re supposed to be there, not like you’re just passing through.

*If I can, you can.* This is Jesus’s model He demonstrated here on earth. He sends us. He makes us all unique. (Not one disciple was like another!) What we bring to the table, paired with what He’s already up to, is how He is drawing people to Himself. If we lift Him up, our communities will notice. God wants to take every part of you and use it to tell of Him. Blend it together, and we get to live in this place both confident in Him who sent us and creatively with the gifts and influence He gives. He wants to meet us in our zip code, on our street. He is ready to show us how to live sent in the place we call home.

Dream of the *what ifs* with me.

What if dwellers who love Jesus become awakened to their purpose in the cities and towns and start living sent?



What if we don't dodge eye contact but offer a smile and an introduction?

What if you were the one who got something started among a few colleagues or neighbors for the simple reason of getting to know one another beyond titles and house numbers?

What if you led the PTA to make a stellar breakfast for the teachers and student body once a week?

What if you hosted the neighborhood Christmas party?

What if you say a private prayer at mealtime that encourages another believer to do the same?

What if you took on the projects no one wanted at an under-resourced school?

What if you invited the interns at your office over for dinner and shared your faith story?

What if you prayed over an area of town and then saw God plant a church there?

What if you were the empty nester looking toward retirement and became the president of the Rotary Club?

What if I tell you that all of these *what ifs* are happening in my corner of the world?!

And here's what will happen as we live sent with creativity:

And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. (Jer. 33:9)

## Let Me Be Your Guide

You may be nodding your head, excited to hop on board, but wondering how. It's expected that a guide is a bit of a nerd when it comes to what they love. I'm okay with that. Come with me.

In the pages of this book, I want to show you how and by what means you can reach the people around you every day. I think stories are powerful and will share my experience of moving to and living in San Francisco, as well as stories of friends who are living sent around the world. All of these earthly stories are “to be continued,” as we are all a work in progress created to do good works. We’ll also explore lives and places in Scripture that radiate this concept. I’ve got a list of supplies for you to keep on hand and tips for engaging people in conversation. I’m going to show you ways to use your home that include your entire family. Once this becomes a lifestyle, it is addictive. You actually personify a love for the place, and that’s attractive to others. This love is genuine because of the work of Christ in you. This will infuse hope for every dweller of faith around you and lead seekers to find Him.

I write to you as a dweller. I show you no statistics but countless stories of His faithfulness. And if God is doing this in San Francisco, He is also doing this in the suburbs of Dallas, in the mountain towns of North Carolina, within the city limits of Detroit, and in your corner of the world. We of all people should laugh the loudest, serve the most, work the best, think the brightest, give the most abundantly, shower His grace the widest, and pray the hardest!<sup>2</sup>

This book is best read in the place you call home. I and the baristas in your town highly recommend their coffee shop. Your librarians would be overjoyed to have you at their table. I dare you to read this in your company lounge. Take each chapter and make it the family dinner discussion. It wouldn’t surprise me at all if you have a certain place in town that is your thinking spot or respite. Mine is a bench at Walter Haas Park in Diamond Heights that overlooks my city.



Thus far you’ve only needed to read, but I’m about to make a bold move. Throughout the book, you will be given room to doodle and dream, to sketch what you see.

Right here, draw a map of where you live, or tape one inside the cover of this book. If you're going to live sent, you've got to start making marks, and the first ones might as well be in this book. Make sure you label your house and street and anything else that is of importance to you. I will reference this map in other chapters and have you add to it.

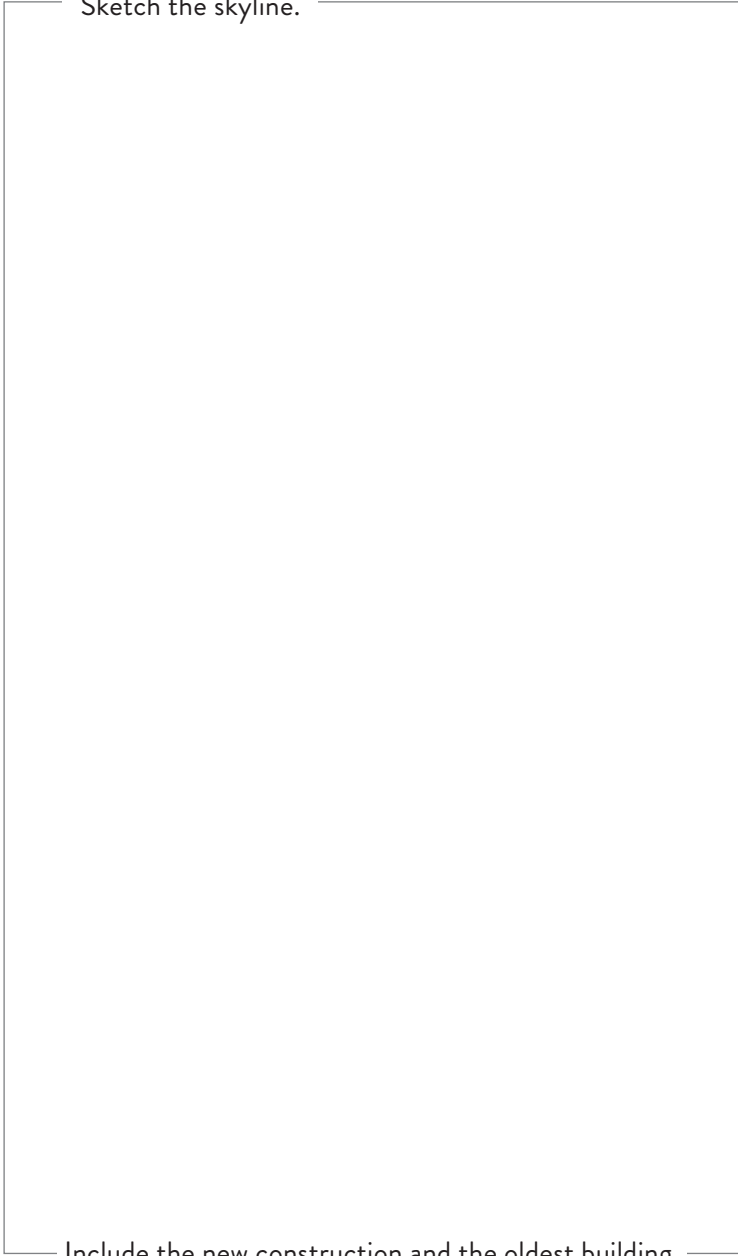
Tell me who's leading your community. Take me to the restaurant that is so divine you will return again. I'll be your excuse.

Now, on the next page, dream of what your town can become. Pondering these questions sets your heart toward living sent.

I've written my stories with much prayer for you to dream as you read and take notes as you find yourself in the story God is writing. I'm just one dweller of faith, a red-pinned dot on the map. And so are you. That makes two. And I'm counting on the work of the Spirit to stir your heart toward this lifestyle that will awaken you and those in your home, network, and relationships to live sent. Just as Jesus Christ gave us His stories and showed us how to live in our time here in the places we call home, He left us with this incredible word: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). This is why we live sent. We've got great works to do in the places we are learning to love.

Hannah Whitall Smith wrote in her classic work, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, that this life of obedience and faith is "so glorious, and human words seem so powerless!" And then she prayed, "May God grant me so to tell it, that every believer to whom this book shall come, may have his eyes opened to see the truth as it is in Jesus, and may be enabled to enter into possession of this glorious life for himself!"<sup>3</sup> I echo this prayer for you, the creatives and dwellers of the places you will call home.

Sketch the skyline.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw a skyline. The box is oriented vertically and occupies most of the page's width and height.

Include the new construction and the oldest building.

What do you love about your town?

What bothers you?

What would you change?

What seems just right?

— Dream of what your town can become. —



# starting point



*“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”*

*John 20:21*

# 1

## The Town of Six Traffic Lights

I'm a rural girl. I was raised among cotton fields and pecan trees, though my father didn't farm. He was and has always been a preacher. When I explain to someone where I grew up, I start with the southeastern portion of the United States. Then I give specifics like Georgia, a coastal state, between South Carolina and Florida. Some people interrupt my progression and infer Atlanta. I give them a look like *Uh, no*. Four hours south of Atlanta, one hour north of Tallahassee, Florida. In a small farming community where the smell of peanuts blows through and where chicken feathers flutter around as the trucks drive from coops to gallows. Where football and hunting are the things in the fall and sweet tea is more popular than water.

But I lost them at Atlanta.

### **My First Lessons in Living Sent**

I didn't learn how to live sent in the city. The concept was first put into practice, again and again, in our town of six traffic lights. Two of the lights were on the Georgia highway that ran through.

The other four were around the city square. It was a small town and a good place to grow up.

My family of five—father, mother, two younger sisters, and myself—were the outsiders in this family-rooted town. We stood out because we didn't farm. We stood out because our grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, cousins, and second cousins didn't all live within a twenty-mile radius of the town.

But this didn't keep our community from inviting us into their family gatherings. To gather at their table and let us share their grandparents. And the farmers gave generously of their corn, pecans, peas, beans, cantaloupes, and watermelons. My dad gave of himself as he officiated weddings, visited those in the hospital, and spoke at funerals. This town of six traffic lights wanted a pastor, and we wanted an extended family.

Being new to a place and not having ties afforded us a pair of fresh eyes. And we could see differently with this set of eyes and no family around to keep our calendar full of dinners and celebrations. We could plead the fifth as newcomers within a certain time period (which is determined by the culture in which one lives). And we were considered new for a number of years. I mean, who knew as a fourth-grader wearing her first cheerleading outfit to Football Friday that a pair of bloomers was required? And who knew that a certain boy was your friend's cousin when you kind of mentioned to her that you thought he was cute? Okay, I pleaded the fifth a lot.

"They'll see our out-of-county tags on the car and figure it out." My mother used this excuse more times than I could count. She lived with the mentality that we could always be the new ones around, and that could always be our excuse for doing things a bit differently from all the rest.

My mother was my first teacher in living sent. I thought I was just living my childhood. Once, in grade school, the girls in their ballet outfits asked me where I was going. I didn't dare tell them the nursing home. I played it cool with my bag of Funyuns and Crystal Pepsi in my hands at the Stop-n-Shop.



“I don’t know—something fun—not sure though—see ya.”

But I knew it was the nursing home we were going to. My sisters and I did “normal kid activities” like basketball and piano lessons too. But we also routinely walked up the steps and into the sterile and sweet community of elderly people who beamed to have us there. We would practice our piano before this audience and get rave reviews.

Living sent also took us to the other side of the train tracks. Several girls helped with childcare at our church and they would sometimes need a ride home. They didn’t live like we lived and we didn’t live like they lived. They raised pigs in their backyard and would graduate at the very top of their classes. Brilliant girls. Brilliant. We attempted to breed English bulldogs in our backyard and strived to have the smarts these girls did. We tried. We really tried.

Living sent looked like sitting around our dining room table with missionaries and pastors who were in town for revival services. Miss Margaret would teach us the songs she would sing to the children of Liberia about lifting Jesus higher and stomping Satan lower. With hand and foot motions, of course. Other missionaries would share what seemed like the stuff movies are made of about how they were persecuted and robbed and cursed. Then their faces would shine like the sun as they told story after story of going into the dark places and sharing Jesus with the witch doctors and witnessing healing and life transformation. Stories of starting churches and growing food and learning from the locals. I could see it in their eyes. My soul was drawn to what they were experiencing in Africa. They weren’t relaxing in the status quo. Even as a child, I had seen enough to make a decision about my future. America wasn’t their home anymore. They were living sent in other parts of the world, and I wanted to as well.

It was in the sports arena where my pastor-dad lived sent; he became chaplain for a couple of athletic teams. In the town of six traffic lights, race was a difference maker. Skin color made a

difference in where one lived and went to school, church, and work, but it didn't matter as much on the sports field. Dad exchanged the pulpit and his preacher voice for locker rooms and pep talks—all to build relationships across racial lines that weren't happening in many other places in town on Friday nights.

We didn't have traditions in this new place. We would create them. My family wasn't tied down to everyone else's schedules. We didn't know the backstory. We didn't know the gossip (yet). We hadn't figured out who was related to whom. We hadn't learned that the beach was *the* vacation spot and that the size of Christmas depended upon how good the crops were that year. We just didn't know. We were new to the town of six traffic lights.

Abraham was new to the town of Canaan. In Hebrews 11:8–10 we read,

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (NIV)

God told him to leave his country, his people, and his family and go “to the land that I will show you.” How's that for vagueness? That makes the town of six traffic lights sound absolutely specific.

### **It Takes Faith to Move**

When God calls, faith should be our response. This is true even when the call from God is a new way of looking at the world right where we are. For Abraham, he had only known life with his extended family in the same geographic region. If Abraham had stayed in the place that was familiar, he wouldn't have exercised the same amount of faith it took to move. Whenever we are called

to leave the familiar for the unknown and uncertain, our faith is tested. And faith is not what you can see but what you can't see. Faith is the heart response. Obedience is the physical response. Faith says, "Yes, God." Obedience is one foot, then another. We follow not because of where He's leading or who else will be there or what we can expect but because it's God and He alone is worth following.

By faith we move. My family has had to believe God for what we couldn't see and make steps into uncharted waters. And the tricky part about faith is that because it's invisible, it's hard to paint the picture of what we've been asked to do for those around us. That is why we have to be certain of the calling.

### **The Calling Has to Be Present**

Some days all we have is our calling. The new place will be hard. Our outlook will get foggy. Our hearts will grow heavy. People will let us down. Circumstances will change. Knowing God has called us to this place will make all the difference in those moments. To clarify the calling, let's ask the right questions. They flow from God, not from this fleeting, always-changing world.

- Is God first?
- Do I love Him more than work, culture, success, and location?
- Is our move about more than what we can get out of it?
- Is it possible He's got a plan for us here?
- If He is my hope, will I share Him?

If we cannot answer yes to these questions, then when the physical location stops doing it for us, we will bail.

Not long after we moved, I remember asking my mom the wrong question: "Does a bus come to the town of six traffic lights?" I wanted to get on the bus back to where we used to live. We never did—partly because a bus didn't come by in the town of six traffic

lights. But mostly because I knew we were supposed to be there. The calling was present. It was visible in my parents, and I couldn't deny the peace in my heart.

Abraham was the first one officially called in the Scriptures. His call from God didn't include his future destination but the move from where Abraham was presently.

I'd like to think if God had told me everything on one of those days I sat on the front porch waiting for a bus to come by, He would have said something like this: "Shauna, for now you live in the town of six traffic lights. When you leave, you will not return here but will take with you what you've learned. I am sending you to the city of San Francisco. The people will point out your Southern dialect and marvel at the number of children you have. You'll find yourself surprised most days that this will be your home. Your life will intersect with the masses on a daily basis. Be My mouthpiece. Be My hands. Show compassion. I will go before you and still have many things to teach you, show you, and shape in you. It won't be easy, but I who call you am faithful."

Our calling God is a sending God, from Abraham forward. God sent the Israelites as exiles into Babylon. They didn't haphazardly end up there. We don't feel sorry for Abraham but rather learn from his calling. We don't have to take pity on the exiles either. Most people don't feel sorry for us when they learn we live in San Francisco. For when we see ourselves as sent, when we are called, it's a joy. An absolute joy!

### **Sink Roots Down**

In Abraham's day it wasn't common for people to leave their homeland. It wasn't common in my day either, in the town of six traffic lights. By faith, Abraham made his home in a very different place, which means he didn't see it as temporary. We are to make our home in the places God calls us. If we see our move as a "stop along the way," we will be waiting for the bus to come by, and on hard

days we will hop on it. Be sure of it. Rather, put things up on the walls. Break down those cardboard boxes for someone else to use. Embrace the reality that you are a citizen of this physical place.

Keep in mind we will be “strangers in a foreign land” this side of heaven because we are ultimately citizens of God’s kingdom. Opportunities will arise, and we’ll want to run away from the craziness of this place, but instead let’s run toward the calling of living here. The nation was different because Abraham said yes to the calling and made Canaan his home. Our places can be different because we say yes to the call God has for us to live sent here.

I grew up quoting Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD,” in regard to happiness and health. But when we study this verse in its context, we can see God was saying to the Israelites, “Hey, I know you are in exile in Babylon, but while you are living in a city that is not your home, in a city that has very different foundational beliefs than yours, stay there, live at peace with those around you, and keep at the center that I am your God.” It’s as if God is our real estate agent, helping us settle in. God always says it well.

### **Live Forward Thinking**

Wherever we live, we do so because God has called us and believes we can make the most eternal impact there. The language we use among our church family in San Francisco is that we leverage the temporary for the sake of the eternal. God could change my calling or any of our callings. But, as best as we understand things, it seems that my family can make the most eternal impact and best influence the future and the globe by having San Francisco as our home base. The stories that flow through the pages of this book are all a result of a call, a heart response that led to a “one foot in front of the other” response.

The reason Abraham was able to move by faith, recognize his calling, and sink down roots is because he was looking ahead.

He saw the big picture. It wasn't simply about a move but about being sent and living sent. Looking forward affords us the grand view. To see the city. To see our move. To see potential. To see opportunity. To fix our eyes on heaven, on our faith being made sight once and for all.

### **The Starting Point**

We can start from anywhere and come from everywhere. The rural life. The urban life. The childhood in the pews. The childhood on the streets. It's a faulty theory that our upbringing has to be our future. A stagnant culture tends to tie our destiny to our parents' occupations and dreams. This same culture tries to dictate the boundaries in which we process life and our world. Even the church in a stagnant place can box God in and stifle the next generation's pursuit of God.

But God can speak to us at any age and in any setting. Whatever our past experiences, God has a creative way of weaving them into our present reality and our future destinations. He doesn't see our past, present, and future contained within orderly, white-bordered frames. He sees our lives collectively fitting together, working together.

He takes our wonderings, doubts, detours, mistakes, successes, failures, and everything else and uses it for His good. Let Paul remind us. Romans 8:28 says that "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

He can work despite where we've come from. He uses the weak to confound the wise. He used David, a boy from the pasture, to get the attention of the entire Philistine army. He sent royal Moses out to the wilderness then back to royalty. He called Peter. He sent Paul. I'm guessing you're expecting me to bring up Mary next. Sure. He found Mary, a teenage girl. How old was Josiah when he was crowned king? God can't be pegged down to one way of doing something.

We've got to revisit who we are and where He's brought us to better understand how He wants to use us. It's hard to fathom how I could be used in the city, considering my "average" story. But once I got specific about my life, I realized the city I live in doesn't have a high percentage of Southern stay-at-home moms who write while married to a pastor with kids in the public schools. Maybe I'm not so average. And God has a specific use for each part of your story. Get specific about who you are and what brought you here. This is the starting point.

Take the example of the recently married MIT graduate who gets a job at a popular law firm. He and his wife buy an apartment and start their careers. Then they start a family and learn to coordinate their schedules to get the kids to school and activities. He is now a father and husband who practices law and engages with the people in his condominium complex.

How about the creative free spirit drawn to downtown with a dream and just enough money to begin? She enters wide-eyed to the possibilities of honing her crafts of photography and visual arts. With flexible hours and a growing brand, she now thrives by using her God-given gifts where she once only dreamed of living.

Or what about the millennial who makes her first move away from home to take a teaching position at a new school? She steps into an environment of tenured teachers yet believes she has something to offer that is new and fresh, while displaying a teachable and respectful heart. That's the starting point.

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My family lived in the town of six traffic lights for thirteen years. The locals, with their deep family roots, loved us and invited us in. Mrs. Hazel Collins, who was related to everybody, taught me how to pray and let me climb her magnolia tree. One of the ballerinas and I spent hours studying together at the library. My sisters and I played in the city softball league with girls of color. Unfortunately, I didn't put in the practice on the keys and can't

play the piano today (my apologies to Mrs. Mary Collins. Yes, they're related). I even got married in the church in the city square.

My wedding day was my last day to call the town of six traffic lights home. With my husband, who was from a town of dozens of traffic lights, I would live in several places in our first years of marriage. Those childhood years I was storing up images and experiences of living sent subconsciously.

### DWELLER TIP

Leave the door open in the apartment complex while cooking dinner. Even if the dog leads the way, his owner will have to have a conversation!

—Keel family, dog owners