

## **LESSONS LEARNED IN 2021 // Deuteronomy 8**

*Message from Pastor Neal Thornton*

From this chapter of Deuteronomy, we learn three things:

1. We are to not forget the Lord
2. We are to keep his commandments
3. We are to seek and to stay humble

God is asking us a question: did you learn anything in 2020? Not did you do anything or want anything, but did we learn anything? We may want to move ahead to 2021, but first we need to look at what God has taught us in 2020.

### 12 LESSONS FROM 2020

#### **I. What we learned about ministry**

##### **1. Online ministry is real ministry (1 Corinthians 9:22-23)**

The pandemic has prompted churches to have a whatever-it-takes mentality. Online ministry is not an equal and adequate substitute for in-person ministry, but we are reaching people we would not reach otherwise and had not reached before.

##### **2. Spirit-led leaders are mission critical (Zechariah 4:6)**

God has raised up leaders for such a time as this. He has filled gaps with men and women who are not seeking their own interests, but the interests of the Lord. God has charged the local church to make disciples and to be lights in the darkness, and it needs to do so by an otherworldly means. This requires listening to the Lord. It is not something manufactured by men. Only God can do it.

##### **3. Change isn't as scary as we think (Acts 16:7)**

2020 involved a change of plans for all of us personally, as well as how the church operates, from new service times to off-campus group meetings to limited nursery availability. We've learned that the change is not that scary and that God is on the other side of that change. We can cross the bridge together. Change might be difficult, but we can do it.

#### **II. What we learned about people**

##### **1. People will do what people will do (Psalm 139: 14)**

You cannot control people, but you can lead them and teach them. We need to strike the right balance with people. In a local church setting, there are polar opposites in feelings about the pandemic—we need to make each as comfortable as possible. Don't be reckless; be kind; chart a faithful path forward.

##### **2. People need positivity and encouragement (Ephesians 4:29)**

Attitudes are contagious, and people are hurting more than we know. We need people to point us to the positive when we feel negative. Christians should be first in line to bring that encouragement. Our words matter to people.

##### **3. People are still perishing apart from Christ (Hebrews 9:27)**

We can develop tunnel vision and forget that people perish apart from Christ; whether from a pandemic or otherwise, people are dying. We need to get out of the barracks and onto the battlefield, taking the gospel where it's needed most. The gospel needs preaching

### **III. What we learned about ourselves**

#### **1. We need incarnational life-giving relationships (1 Samuel 18:1-3)**

One of the greatest tragedies of the pandemic is the perhaps unrecoverable blow it has dealt to many relationships. We have drifted away. We need to pay attention to being intentional before God to nurture life-giving relationships. People should know you and you know them.

#### **2. Stress will hurt you if you let it (Philippians 4:8)**

We are more stressed than we realize. It may feel like too many computer windows open, too many plates spinning, or a game of whack-a-mole. We need to know ourselves, and have people that know us objectively and can notice behavior patterns that signal a problem. For our health, we may need to turn down the volume and be careful of the news and media we are consuming.

#### **3. Desperation produces dependence (2 Corinthians 12:9)**

To attempt the Christian life on your own is dangerous and foolish. Because God loves us, he will remove the crutches of life so we will return to a rightful dependence on him. In our independence, we don't know ourselves rightly, and we don't know Christ rightly. We don't pursue holiness, don't pursue Christ, because what we want is to be strong enough not to need Jesus. In reality, we always need Jesus. If dependence is the goal, weakness is the greatest advantage.

### **IV. What we learned about God**

#### **1. God loves to be trusted more than he loves to be served (Proverbs 3:5-8)**

Do you think God needs something from you? He doesn't. He is not a taker; he is a giver. God does not need us to serve him. He is a gracious generous giving God. He is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him. God wants us to trust him. True spiritual service flows out of a heart that is learning to trust him, not the other way around.

#### **2. God wants to do more in us than through us. (Romans 8:29)**

God is committed to developing us before he is committed to developing our ministry. God doesn't look at us as robots, concerned primarily with our efficiency. God's chief aim is to work in us to be more holy, Christlike, and satisfied in who God is. We can thank God for 2020 because of what he did in our hearts. Otherwise, we might make an idol out of what he is doing through us—we may worship ministry.

#### **3. Christ builds and protects his church (Matthew 6:18)**

Motivated men and women don't build the church: Christ builds the church. He uses spirit-empowered leadership, but it is his church. Christ is the shepherd. We are in a position of surrender, and the church will survive as long as Jesus is at the helm and we don't try to usurp his authority. He has the power and the prerogative.

In 2021, Lord, help us learn the lessons of 2020.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What lessons has God taught you and your family in 2020?
2. Which area of your life needs the most intentional prayer—stress, life-giving relationships, an encouraging attitude?
3. Do we primarily focus on serving God or trusting him? How would prioritizing trusting God affect how we serve him?