

Hindsight 2020

2020 year of the Pandemic. 19 million Americans infected, 337,000 dead, civil unrest, political protests, and deadly riots; wildfires out west, a contentious election that divided friends and family, a bitter impeachment battle, the largest single day decline in the stock market ever, millions of jobs lost, stores closed, much of life cancelled or virtualized, and murder hornets arrive on our continent.

That's just our country. Around the globe you had Australia devastated by wildfires, locust swarms in Africa, a massive explosion leveled much of Beirut, and a passenger plane shot down in the Ukraine. For a while, there were rumors of a new war until it was swallowed up by other bad news.

How many times last year did we hear someone say something like "I can't wait for 2020 to end." Something bad would happen, and you would roll your eyes and say, "2020 right."

Social media is filled with memes declaring what a bad year 2020 was. Time magazine featured a cover with a red X drawn over the number 2020, the headline blaring, "The Worst Year Ever." Other publication ran similar "woe is me" clickbait headlines.

Was 2020 the worst year ever?— a group of 28 historians from some of the most illustrious universities in the world was convened to rank 2020 in the annals of history. According to these scholars, 2020 is not even close to the worst year ever.

They point to 1348 at the height of the Black Death where some 200 million people died in a single year, there is 1944 when the holocaust in Nazi Germany reached its deadly zenith, or 1816 when a volcano eruption in Indonesia blocked out the sun for months, creating the year without summer, and eventually starving millions.

Even in U.S. history, they only ranked 2020 as 8th worst behind events such as the 1918 flu pandemic, the 1929 stock market crash marking the beginning of the Great Depression, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, or the worst year ever in U.S. history— 1862 the grimmest year of the Civil War.

For many of us though, maybe it's been the most challenging year of our lives. There has certainly been a slow grind in the building stress of last year. There is no doubt 2020 has been indelibly etched on our psyches forever.

So, here we are in 2021. We came in with high hopes. This year will surely be better than the last. Right now, I have my doubts. But it's mid-January. We still have some optimism left in the tank, I think it would be appropriate to take a look back on this most unusual of years and consider the lessons we have learned. You should never go through a year like 2020 and not learn something about yourself, about life, and about faith.

I want to do this in two parts. This week I will focus on lessons learned from the pandemic and

everything surrounding that. Next week will focus on some of the other lessons learned in 2020.

There are maybe the obvious lessons; the easy lessons we can learn. Like you can never have too much toilet paper. If you go back in time, buy stock in Germ-X and Purell. As my daughter would say, "Wash your dang hands!" If the grocery store has it this week, but you don't need it until next week, buy it anyway, because it won't be there next week.

So, in no particular order, let me give you a few.

I. It's Okay to Slow Down

Number one, it's okay to slow down. Our schedules aren't nearly as important as we thought. Life in 2019 was busy, busy, busy. Calendars crammed. Schedules stressed to the limit. Well, one of the great lessons learned in 2020 is that is that our workaholic culture overrated.

Last year we learned to slow down, read a book, do a puzzle, or play a game.

Scripture extols the value of hard work. Proverbs 12:11 says, "*Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.*" Sometimes, though, we use work as a cover for serving the idols of greed, materialism, and accomplishment. Success can become the enemy of spirituality.

To combat this tendency, God built into creation the gift of rest. Genesis 2:2-3 says,

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

God didn't rest on the seventh day because he tired. He was modelling for us a pattern of life—a cycle of work and rest, of labor and refreshing. He built in rhythms of renewal. There are seasons when trees bud, flowers blossom and grass grows. There are seasons when the leaves fall, and plants go dormant.

We work harder and smarter when we get enough sleep. When you get enough sleep your productivity skyrockets and your memory sharpens. You make better decisions. And better than all that— you're happier, more pleasant to be around and work with.

Think about Jesus. No one had a job more important than his, and yet he never seemed hurried or harried. He was inundated by people with urgent needs. He was surrounded by crowds, events tumbled one into another with barely time to catch his breath.

Still, Jesus modeled rest. After John the Baptist's death, Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 6:31, "*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest.*"

There was the time in Matthew 8 where Jesus and the disciples are sailing across the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful place, but it is notorious for raging storms that

seemingly whip up out of nowhere. This is what happened this time. The waves start sweeping up over the side of the boat, and the disciples, many of whom are experienced fishermen and sailors are terrified. They're in a panic. Where's Jesus? Maybe he can do something. You know where they find Jesus? He's sound asleep in the back of boat. He's taking a nap. It's okay to slow down and rest.

II. Be Flexible

Number two. Be flexible. Oh, man haven't we had to learn how to make adjustments on the fly. We had to change our change of change of plans.

This one comes from our own Milan Rodriguez. She shares,

Flexibility is key! I've bounced more than a ping pong ball during tournament play! 2020 taught me to be better at adjusting to constant and sudden changes in my schedule, expectations, and plans!

Back in March and April, the elders would meet to make plans for the next week, and they would have to change three times before the next Sunday. Events were developing that fast. All of us have had to cancel, change or postpone important plans. Vacations shelved. Graduations moved. Events canceled. We would never have predicted that a third to half of us would be meeting in the parking lot. Back in May, it felt so weird and awkward. Now it feels normal. That's just the kind of year it's been.

God's timing is different from our own. Heaven's calendar doesn't look like yours. We have our plans and purposes, but God knows what is best.

One of the things I've learned about being flexible is that it requires humility before God—humility to know that God knows better and his plans might be different.

And when my schedule and God's schedule look different, guess who's right and who's wrong? Here's the reality. God wasn't surprised by anything in 2020. None of what happened caught him off guard. It was all a part of the plan.

So, when God tries to rearrange your schedule, you can get mad, you can whine, you can complain, or you can be humble and look, listen, and learn what God is trying to teach you. We always need to be humble enough to be flexible and submit to God's calendar. Listen to what James 4:13-15 says,

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

III. Get to Know Your Neighbors

Number 3. Get to know your neighbors. I realized this year how little I knew my neighbors. Technology allows our relationships to be scattered all over the place. We also tend to view our houses as our personal castle. They are our refuge, a place to retreat from everyone else.

One of the remarkable phenomenon sociologists have noted in our culture over the last half century is that we have gone from building houses with front porches, where we can sit in our swings, drinking coffee, and talk to our neighbor walking their dog to building houses with privacy fenced backyards and decks that are completely secluded from our neighbors.

Last spring we are all working from home, taking online classes. Our home office had three computer workstations set up in one room. It looked like NASA mission control.

For our own mental sanity, we would take walks. We couldn't go anywhere. We couldn't do anything. Everything was closed. And it was so weird. It would a Tuesday afternoon, and everyone was outside, not in their backyard, but in their front yards, playing catch with their kids, washing their car, planting flowers, or a bunch of them just sitting in lawn chairs watching other human beings do their thing.

We talked to more neighbors and neighbors more in two months than we did in the previous four years. Part of that is our fault, for sure. But there were houses where we wondered if anyone even lived there, because you never, ever saw them. But in 2020, there they were. People were so starved for human contact and connection that they congregated in the one place they could get it.

Jesus tells us that one of the greatest commandments is "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" And the parable of the Good Samaritan shows that anyone can be my neighbor— somebody of a different race, a different faith, or different politics —just like Jews and Samaritans— anyone can be my neighbor, but I was stunned at how little I knew my actual neighbors. 2020 opened new doors to love our neighbors. One of the things we did was leave anonymous bags of toilet paper on our neighbor's porches.

IV. Appreciate Those Who Serve

Another lesson from 2020— appreciate those who serve. Think of all the people who work in what in 2019 we thought of as menial jobs, or who worked in the background unseen and unappreciated, but in 2020 we realized just how essential they really were. There's a word that took on a whole new meaning in 2020 —essential.

Last year taught us how important certain people are— servers, nurses, truck drivers, grocery store employees, workers at the toilet paper factory. And others that used to be seen as powerful and important, all the sudden became unessential.

Here's the truth of it, though. Everyone's essential. Everyone's important. Everyone has a crucial role to fill, but 2020 reminded us to not overlook those that we so often take for

granted.

There was time the highlight of your day was seeing the UPS guy stop in front of your house bearing boxes from the outside world. And we learned to thank the truck driver. Maybe we left a bigger tip for our waitress because we knew she'd been out of work for a month or more. Maybe we were a little gentle with the kid wearing a smock in the aisle at Wal-Mart because we could tell by just looking at his face he'd pulled three shifts in two days.

One of the greatest lessons Jesus taught was the importance serving. Jesus was the one who got down on his knees and washed the disciple's dirty feet. When Jesus tells us we all need to wash one another's feet, he means that we all need to be willing to serve.

But having a high view of servanthood isn't just being willing to serve. It's also in how we treat those who serve us. This is a part of Jesus' golden rule, "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" One of the greatest thermometers of your spiritual temperature is how you treat people who serve you. This is true with how you treat your server, how you treat the janitor, your teacher, your spouse, your parents, your children. Appreciate those who serve you.

V. Be Content with what You Have

A fifth lesson is be content with what you have. Many of us learned to deal with a little less this year. Whether your income dropped, or you were concerned that it might, or what you wanted simply wasn't available. This was especially true of entertainment. You couldn't go to concerts. You couldn't go to movies. So much of what we usually do was off the table. We learned to be happy with simple things.

On the flipside, a lot of us went shopping online. We got on amazon and we ordered this that. UPS and FedEx were bringing us stuff all the time. We medicated ourselves with a big dose of retail therapy and guess what we discovered. That didn't make us happy. It didn't give us rest for our weary souls. It wasn't the answer for what was missing from our lives in 2020.

The apostle Paul tells us one of the important attributes of someone who follows Jesus is learning to be content. Philippians 4:11-13 says,

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want (whether living in 2019 or living in 2020). 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

VI. Love My Family

Another side benefit of 2020 is how it brought families together. We were forced to spend more time with each other. Sure, we lost our patience. We had words, but families also learned to enjoy each other in ways they haven't in a while. Different generations doing things

together— home improvement projects, playing games, watching shows, and learning new skills together.

Seventy-five percent of parents report witnessing key moments in their child's life they otherwise would have missed.¹ We helped with homework. We had more conversations. 66 percent of respondents in one survey said the pandemic made the closer with their family. 77 percent agreed they enjoyed spending more time with their family.

Nearly half said they really didn't understand what their spouse did at their job until they started working from home. So, maybe 2020 helped us love our families more. As followers of Jesus, the call to love one another begins at home, how we love our spouse, how we love our children, and how we love our parents.

It's easy to talk about love in general, but with family, it gets very specific very quick.

Like a lot of families, there was one family on lockdown that decided to take on some home improvement projects. Mom was doing some landscaping in the backyard, and dad decided to patch a bad spot in the driveway with new concrete.

The kids were outside playing, chasing each other around the house. At one point the little boy comes around the corner and steps right into the fresh cement. Dad's been working hard on this all day, and he loses it. He begins yelling at the boy about not listening and not paying attention. The boy is standing there in wet cement and then runs off crying.

Mom, of course, hears the commotion and comes from the backyard. She sees what's happened and she tells her husband, "Remember, honey, you love your son."

He says, "Right now, I love him in the abstract, but not in the concrete."

Family requires we take love out of the abstract and love in the concrete.

VII. Be Prepared.

Last but not least— be prepared. Modern society has allowed us to live month to month, week to week, even day to day without being prepared. We run to the grocery store multiple times a week, because it's so easy, quick, and convenient. We don't have to plan two weeks of meals. We don't have to keep all the staples on hand. If we run out of something, we just go get it. If we need something, we order it, and in two days it's on our front porch.

2020 has shown us just how fragile everything we take for granted is. Some of these things can almost go away overnight. Who would have dreamed toilet paper would be impossible to get. I remember going to the grocery store week after week and there was no flour. Have you stopped to think about what happen if the pandemic was something really bad?

Not to downplay Covid. For families that have lost a loved one, the Coronavirus is plenty bad. But what if this was like an Ebola strain or another 1918 flu pandemic. 2020 would be on a

whole other level.

The Bible talks about having enough wisdom to plan ahead and be prepared. In Luke 14:28 Jesus talks about how a wise builder first counts the cost before building a tower. Prov. 6:6-8.

*6 Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!
7 It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
8 yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.*

Basic wisdom suggests we should be prepared for minor emergencies. Basic things like having a 30 day supply of food. Keeping basic necessities on hand. Having an emergency fund so that a car repair or home repair doesn't send the family finances into a tailspin. If most Americans followed this basic wise counsel, the pandemic would not have had near the impact that it did.

Conclusion

As we come to a close, I want to revisit our first lesson learned about It's okay to slow down.

I mentioned that Jesus was a model of rest. I mean taking a nap in a wooden boat on a stormy sea. That's super chill.

But more than physical rest, Jesus modelled spiritual rest for us. Jesus frequently took times of spiritual refreshing and renewal to be alone with God. Luke 5:16 says, "*But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*"

2020 maybe put you in some lonely places that weren't so restful, but Jesus offers rest where we need it most— rest for our souls. And isn't that the part of us that's most weary from this last year? More than physically tiring or emotionally draining, 2020 has exhausted our souls. It's drained us down deep, where no medical scan can measure or therapist can shrink. Jesus gives you rest at your deepest level. He refreshes and renews the true you.

Jesus promises in Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" Is your soul tired? Come to Jesus.

ⁱ [New study suggests COVID-19 brought American families closer together | Fox News](#)