



## Lessons Learned

### Part 2 – Change is Imminent, So be Adaptable

Travis Brawner

So, it is a new year. Any new year's resolutions? None that you want to admit? Well, you're only three days in; hopefully, you're staying strong. I don't do New Year's resolutions, but I am a planner. Any planners out there? Any of you still do the paper calendar at the first of the year and you're excited because you got your new 2021 calendar? And then some of you are just more fly by the seat of your pants, free spirited, we're going to see what happens. And some of you from that group like to mess with some of us that are planners, don't you? You like to see our plans and you like to change things a little bit just to mess with us because you think it's pretty funny. You like to do that, don't you? Stop it. It's not funny. We work hard on our plans.

I'm a planner. I'm the five-year plan guy. Anybody else a five-year plan guy? In 2020, we had to throw that out the window, didn't we? It's like maybe five weeks and even sometimes five days were planning in 2020. And 2020 taught us that. Planners, listen to me, no, listen to the Lord from Proverbs 16: 9. It says, ***the heart of the man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.*** We can plan as well as we can, think we have everything laid out just like it should be, but we know that the Lord is the one that is going to establish our steps. I think about the only predictable thing that happened in 2020 was the return of the McRib sandwich. You can always count on it.

Who doesn't like change? It's kind of the same group as the planners, maybe, but that can be a little bit different. I like to plan, but I don't mind change. I think sometimes change is good. I like to plan, and I don't mind change, as long as I get to plan the change that's going to happen, right? The thing is like change or not, change is imminent, which means it's bound to happen; it's going to happen at any time.

Sometimes it's small change, sometimes it's big change, sometimes a little bit at a time, and then sometimes all at once. If you think about it, five years ago, ten years ago, excluding the pandemic of course, what your life looked like then and what it looks like now and the change that can slowly happen. You may have even lived somewhere different, your job looked different even if you're in the same job.

You could have kids. Your kids are at a different age so their life and therefore your life looks different. Your marriage looks different. Things happen over time and it may be slow change. Or it may be like 2020, throwing a lot of change at everybody all at once. Sometimes, for you, individually, there was some big change that was separate from the pandemic. And maybe there was some big change that happened all at once. The fact is change is imminent.

If you have your Bible, open up to Ecclesiastes 3. We're going to read from King Solomon. In these *Lessons Learned*, we're turning to Solomon a lot because he was one of the wisest men to ever live. So, we have a lot of lessons to learn from Solomon.

In Chapter 3, it says, ***3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.***

Very repetitive, right? So, what we're seeing from Solomon here is this literary technique that's really driving a point home. He listed a lot of things. He could have listed a lot more things, but in the number of things he listed, what he is saying, basically, is every human activity under the sun is going to change. Change is imminent. There is a time for everything, even a McRib sandwich, but for a limited time only. Change is imminent.

As we look at *Lessons Learned*, the lesson that we're looking at today is this: **Change is imminent, so be adaptable.** We must be adaptable. Change is imminent, so be adaptable.

In 2020, a lot of us had to make a lot of adaptations, didn't we? Our school looked different. We had to adapt in the way that we do school. Some private schools even closed. Some schools met full time, but still had to distance and wear masks and things like that. Some met part time. Some moved to homeschooling. We home schooled for about nine years and this shows me how backwards 2020 was because now, in 2021, the homeschoolers and the infectious disease doctors are the cool kids. Everybody is looking to them for what to do.

We had to make adaptations at church. The way that we gathered looked very different and it looked different along the way. We talk like this is in the past, but a lot of these things are still going on, right? Like I said, we didn't change the calendar and change the world. The way we do business with Zoom meetings and remotely and everything else, entertainment, for those of you that deliver it and those of us that consume it, it's very different. A lot of streaming and virtual sports has looked very different. We can now participate in activities face to face this close to one another for two hours, but then we can't shake hands afterwards.

Meals look different, right? Restaurants look different. The way that we eat out, we've had to adapt. And holidays and traditions... Speaking of people that don't like change, how was your Christmas? Lot's of traditions that we had to adapt because of the changes of 2020. As we think about adapting, we know that it's important because adaptability makes for sustainability. Another word you could use here is survival.

Adaptability makes for survival. I think of some different groups or organizations where people had to adapt throughout this past year to survive. One in particular is Kanakuk Kamp, Our friends Joe White and Doug Goodwin, and the whole team over at Kamp, they were facing the possibility of not being able to open for the summer. For them, if they can't open for the summer it may mean they close their gates forever. So, adaptability makes for sustainability. So, they got with the health officials and the governor and the Taney and Stone county officials and asked, "What can we do? We want to adapt." Their plans were blessed by them, so they moved forward and therefore, they sustained. Was it the best year ever? Probably not in several aspects, but you know what? They sustained. They'll be here next year. Kamp will be around in 2021.

Many shows and attractions coming into the pandemic and hearing that we have to limit our admissions and we have to put people so far apart, we have to wear masks, and all these limitations and the question arose, "Is it even worth doing?" The answer to that question was yes because adaptability makes for sustainability. Again, maybe not the best financial year for a lot of people, but those people that adapted, sustained and will be around for this next season that's upon us. And as things get better, their still here.

Our church, Woodland Hills Family Church, had to adapt in order to sustain. Now, we know that the global church, the collective body of believers in Christ, nothing can destroy that, nothing. But your local church, your church family here, Woodland Hills Family Church, the facility and the way that we meet, had to adapt in order to be sustainable. If Ted and the rest of the staff weren't adaptable in the way that we do things, then the doors could possibly be closed. Adaptability makes for sustainability. We had some restaurants that put in drive thru, some that took on some delivery options and different things.

We know some things about the panda bear: 1) It is a bear, for those of you that have been in the debate about whether it's a raccoon or a bear. Most of you probably didn't know that was a debate. But the panda is a bear, based on molecular studies. So, we know a few things about the panda bear. 2) An individual bear eats 20 to 50 pounds of bamboo a day; 99% of it's diet is bamboo. If it can't get its bamboo, it will die. It can't sustain on the 1% of the rest of its diet. 3) They are endangered. We've known all of our lifetime that panda bears have been endangered because they can only sustain on bamboo.

Contrast that to the grizzly bear. The grizzly bear is not endangered. It's protected, but it's not endangered. As a matter of fact, in some parts of the world, there are hunting seasons to control the population of the grizzly bear. What will the grizzly eat? Grass, roots, berries, fish, small wildlife, roadkill, human garbage, and of course, the occasionally tourist, so be careful out there.

So, contrast that, the panda bear that says, "If I can't have my bamboo, I'm going to lay down and die." Or the grizzly bear that says, "What's that? Dead possum? I'll eat it." The attitude between the two. The point here is for the sake of your organization, of your business, of your school, of your child's education, of your family, of your ministry, of you church... For the sake of all of these things, we must all learn to eat tourists like the grizzly. We have a lot of them, right? We must all learn to be adaptable.

The important thing is that the attitude with which we adapt matters. I don't imagine a grizzly bear, when eating a dead possum, thinks, *gosh I'd really rather have some fresh Alaskan salmon*. No, it's just thankful that it has something to eat and it's going to adapt to that. It's going to eat it and survive.

In 2020, a lot of us have had some road kill thrown our way, haven't we? It's been a rough year for many different reasons. So, the question is what was your attitude, what is your attitude? Again, we're still in the midst of some things. What is your attitude as you have roadkill presented to you as your only means to sustain? *Is it I can't do this? These adaptations that I've had to make, the way that we're doing things, I just can't do it. Or is it thank you Lord, praise the Lord, he has given me a means to adapt, to sustain. I can survive to do ministry another day, to do school another day, for my family another day, for business another day, all of these things.* The attitude to which we adapt matters.

In my residency training for ear, nose, and throat, in Oklahoma City, occasionally we would have organizations or companies that would bring in free lunch for the department. I had a friend, Cope Norcross, that would always get exasperated by people that would complain about the quality of their free food that they were eating. He would say, "The only thing you should ever say about the quality of food you didn't pay for is, 'Wow, this food tastes so free.'" That's it, right? We should be grateful for the things that are provided to us. And we don't pout because we can't have our bamboo, but we are grateful because we're given a means to sustain. Praise the Lord; he has provided.

I think of the Israelites. In the old covenant, God's people were in captivity in Egypt and they were slaves to the Egyptians. God delivered them from their slavery, and they were in the desert 40 years, wandering. Eventually, he delivered them to their promised land. Their promised land was a place where they would have everything that they need and everything they want.

Now, after they were freed from slavery in their desert wandering, it was less than two months when they ran out of food. The people started to complain to Moses and Aaron that were leading them at the time. They said, "Why did you bring us out here? We would rather have died at the hand of the Egyptians rather than starve to death." The words they used in scripture were actually, "We would rather be back by the pot of meat rather than out here starving to death, even if we would have died at the hands of the Egyptians."

We read in Exodus 16: 4 and 35, **4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.** He gave them specific rules about how they were to gather the bread that he was to give them.

And then in Verse 35, we read **35 The people of Israel ate the manna forty years...** Makes 2020 not seem so long. **...till they came to a habitable land.** Where they had everything they need and everything they want. **They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.**

Followers of Jesus, we are God's people of the new covenant. Our time on earth is our desert wandering. And we have a promised land. That promised land is in heaven. While we're here on earth in our desert wandering, amidst change and struggles and trials, God is providing manna with which we

can adapt. He's providing for us. One day, we'll be in our promised land in heaven where we'll have everything we want and everything we need. But for now, this is our desert wandering, and he is giving us means to sustain.

And we have to be careful about the attitude with which we adapt. Because as the Lord is providing us manna, we may look around at others because the manna isn't going to be the same for everybody. We're not promised anything this side of heaven, so you may look at your neighbor and other businesses in town, other shows, other attractions, other schools, other students, other whatever is going on and you may say, "I wish the Lord provided the manna for me that he's providing for them." We don't complain because we can't have the bamboo; we're thankful for that in which the Lord provides. Don't dwell on the manna of others.

Have you ever been in a groove before? You know what I mean? Everything is going well, and it hardly even requires effort. I'm talking about everything, in your marriage, in your job, in your parenting, at work, at school, at church, anything you're doing. You feel like things are in a groove. I get an idea of this picture. This is kind of a road where the wheels have worn these grooves in the road. It's almost like an amusement part ride that you don't even have to really steer. You just push the gas and go. And there's not much effort required. You feel like you're in a groove.

Have you ever felt in a groove and then suddenly you had to adapt? Like things were going really well. We were in a groove here at Woodland Hills. The church was growing, we were doing ministry and influence was expanding. And then the pandemic hit, and things had to change, and we had to adapt. I would say because of the adaptation, because of the faithfulness of the staff, we are still in a groove. It's a different kind of a groove, but we were knocked out of the groove we were in. Maybe in your job, you work, you were in a groove and things were going well. There was upward trajectory. and you were getting raises, and you were growing with the company. Things were happening and then you got knocked off for some reason, either the pandemic or otherwise.

Some of you are retired. We think of the retirement years generally as a time when things settle down and not much changes and things run smoothly. Some of you retirees would tell us that is not the case. When I say the word retirement, generally what age do you think in your head? There's an age that most of us think when we think about retirement. We think of 65, right? That's just kind of the number that comes to mind.

The most common causes of death and disability in the United States are heart disease and cancer. So, look at this. The average age of a first heart attack in males (keep in mind the retirement age)... The average age of a first heart attack in males is 65 and in females is 70. The average age of diagnosis of cancer, males and females together, is 65 to 74. Retirement is not necessarily smooth sailing. Some of you have had tsunamis of change come your way in your retirement: A spouse that passed away, a spouse that got a diagnosis. You got a diagnosis. A child that got a diagnosis. Things that have happened that have really thrown you out of your groove.

We have to remember this this too. The pandemic is not the only thing that happened in 2020. People faced all kinds of change even with house or car problems, with a rough patch in a marriage, other

relationships, a friend that betrayed you, infertility; the list goes on of things that can throw you out of a groove that you feel like you're in and you can become frustrated in that. You may even become frustrated with God, saying, "Lord, you blessed this. This groove that I was in, I know you brought me here. Why did you knock me out of this groove?" You can become frustrated.

I want to turn to an account in scripture that if you've been in church long, you've heard or you've read it. It tells us something similar. In Luke 8, **22 One day he (Jesus) got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, 23 and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. 24 And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.** Let's talk about this for a minute. The situation. The Lord told them to get in the boat and go. He called them to this. Picture the scene as the storm comes up.

You may have seen a movie with a similar scene on a boat that's about to sink because of a storm, but also think of a movie scene... It's the feeling that I get when I'm reading the situation where someone is in some type of an encasement that's filling up with water and there's a hatch that they can't quite get open. And the water is getting higher and higher. As you're watching, you're feeling yourself short of breath because of the situation. And then the hatch opens and you take a deep breath with them. The situation is better, the situation is calm. The person is calm, you're calm. That's the type of scenario that I picture in this scripture. And when we read that Jesus rebuked the wind and the raging waves and there was calm, there were two things that were calm, I believe. One was the weather, and the other was the disciples. They calmed down as the storm calmed down.

But look at what happens next. **25 He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"** Look at that question that Jesus asked. "Where is your faith?" He is implying they didn't have faith when the storm was whipping up. You see, they were adapting, no doubt. Remember there were a few fishermen on this boat that were used to waters and used to storms most likely and they probably adapted. I doubt they woke Jesus right away. They changed their sails, and they changed their course. They probably started bailing water out with bucket as it started filling up the boat. They were adapting but they didn't have faith. Their calm only came when the Lord settled the storm.

So, what do we know from this? The key to adapting to your circumstances is to first trust the Lord. See, I should first trust the Lord before, during, and after a storm. I should trust the Lord before, during, and after change. I should trust the Lord before, during, and after I'm making adaptations. That's because the calm shouldn't come because the storm gets settled; the calm in me should come because I'm in the boat with the one who commands the winds and the water, not because of my circumstances. The key to adapting to your circumstances is to first trust the Lord.

Proverbs 3 says, **5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.** What does "he will make straight your paths" mean. First of all, Proverbs are generalizations, they're not promises. But he will make straight your paths. What does that look like? Often times we come upon a path that splits three

ways. We're faced with change. Maybe this road had ruts in it and suddenly we have to choose, and we're faced with some change. What does a straight path look like? Well, we can come to this and we can say, "Okay, I've got three options here. The one straight in front of me makes the most logical sense. It stands to give me the best outcome that I want, that's the path I'm going to take." That's one option. But that's not what the Lord desires for our approach.

We read in James 4, **13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."** There is our other approach as we stand at a split in the road. We seek the Lord's will. And that can be hard, can't it? Trying to seek the Lord's will, trying to understand what the will of the Lord is in the decisions that we're making as we're faced with changes and we need to adapt.

If you are like me, you wish you'd get an email: "Dear Travis, this is what I want you to do. Sincerely, the Lord." That would be nice, but that's not the case. So, how do we go about seeking the Lord's will? First of all, as we stand at the road facing change, we filter it through scripture. There are a lot of scenarios through scripture that the Bible directly addresses and says you should do this and you shouldn't do that. So, we seek wisdom through scripture.

We take it to the Lord in prayer. We seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. We pray, "Lord, move in me through your Holy Spirit to prompt me what the right thing to do is." By the way, if you feel like the Holy Spirit is prompting you to do something that goes against scripture, then it's not the Holy Spirit. The order of things that we filter through is important.

Then we seek counsel from those around us that we know to be wise. Proverbs 15: 22 says, **Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed.** And in that, we seek the Lord's will, we're seeking God's will. Sometimes we stand at that split in the road and we hesitate because we don't want to make the wrong decision. But when we seek the Lord's will, he will make straight our path. So, whatever path you choose, if you're seeking the Lord's will, it's the right path. Now the outcome may not be desirable. There may be a storm right on the other side of that decision. You may get into a run in that path and immediately get knocked off of it. That doesn't mean that you were not in the Lord's will. You seek the Lord's will, you trust in him before, during, and after a storm, before, during, and after a decision is made seeking his will. That can be hard, and we have to trust in him.

Sometimes we can even get a little bit paralyzed trying to make a decision. "How should I adapt to the situation? What is the right answer for what I'm dealing with?" We seek the Lord's will and still we have a hard time making a decision.

In surgery, there is always an operative plan. When we do an operation, there is an objective, the main thing we're trying to accomplish, steps to take, anatomy to understand, and there are potential problems that we need to adapt to. In every operation, small or big, that's the plan.

When a resident is being trained in surgical procedures, you're given a little more leeway to do operations if you've shown competency in other operations. With your attending physician practically hands on yours to begin with and then slowly allowing you to do the procedure as you've clearly become competent at it. Remember, part of the surgical plan is adapting to changes that take place.

I can distinctly remember in my residency with Dr. Berryhill, who was one of the ear surgeons that I trained under. We were sitting there together under the microscope operating in the ear and something changed, an adaptation had to be made. There is anxiety in that as a young surgeon. I could always feel the anxiety and I know Dr. Berryhill could too when the situation came up. He would always gently say, "Dr. Brawner, you're doing fine. Don't worry, I won't let you mess anything up that I can't fix." That's soothing for the surgeon, not the patient, okay? But he said, "I won't let you mess anything up that I can't fix."

That's us; standing at the crossroads, making a decision, seeking the Lord's will, but I don't want to decide the wrong thing. But if you're in the Lord's will, follower of Jesus, you won't mess anything up that he can't fix. His fix may be different than your idea of fix, so you have to be careful because his fix may not be comfort for you, it may not be steak and potatoes, it may be roadkill. His fix may be very different from yours, but you're not going mess anything up that he can't fix. Seek the Lord's will and make the decision.

Now, as we're talking about adapting, I want to say briefly, but very importantly, that, follower of Jesus, you should adapt to your circumstances as you remain rigid in your essential beliefs. When you think of rigid, you think of a spine. The essential beliefs are the backbone of our Christian faith. And as the world around us is wanting us to adapt to their way of thinking, their way of speaking, their way of acting, we remain rigid in our essential beliefs. Don't be so flexible that you lose your spine, follower of Jesus.

To close, I want to walk through, practically speaking, what this looks like as we say change is imminent, so be adaptable. We make our plans as unto the Lord, seeking his will. As change is presented and we get knocked out of a groove, we first trust the Lord before, during, and after. Then we consider the options. We say, "Which is the right path for me to take in this decision that I have to make?" We seek the Lord's will through scripture, through prayer, asking guidance from the Holy Spirit, and seeking the counsel of others, we decide. Having faith and having calm because we're in the boat with the one who commands the winds and the waves. The storm may not settle but we can remain calm knowing that we have sought his will.

And then on the other side of it, if it turns out well, great, praise the Lord. If it doesn't turn out that great, then you lay down and pout and want your bamboo... No. praise the Lord because he's given you something to sustain you. He has provided a means to sustain you.

The last thing is heads up because the next change is right around the corner. I pray that 2021 is better for all of us, but we have no certainty in that. We have faith, we trust in the Lord before, during, and after everything that we do.



Father, we love you. We're grateful for the year 2020. We're grateful that it's over and we pray for 2021 most of all, not for prosperity or for good times or for comfort, but mostly, Lord, we pray for the calm and the comfort that you bring to us through first placing faith in you. We know that you are the one that commands the winds and the waves and that you can do that for us, Father.

We pray for those who have not placed faith in you, Lord, that they would see the truth from your scripture and your word and your people. And that they understand and make a decision to follow you and confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that you raised him from the dead.

We pray for our church family and for the year ahead. We thank you and praise you and bless you in Jesus name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.