

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Getting back to normal?

*By Lloyd Sweatt
Correspondent*



Sweatt

As I write these thoughts, it has been 55 weeks since our world and our churches have been affected and infected by the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. One question I have been asked over and over is: “When are we getting back to **normal**?”

Since March 2020, we have learned new terminology that has become part of our everyday **normal** vocabulary – words such as pandemic, quarantine, shelter-in-place, social distancing, mask mandates, virtual classrooms, and zoom meeting.

Prior to March 2020, church services and doing ministry was pretty much **normal**. Each week those services carried a bit of being **normal** (with an occasional week a little above **normal**). Those **normal** weeks could be described as comfortable and routine.

Following March 2020, everything was anything but **normal**. For the past year, we’ve faced:

- Pandemic problems.
- Political problems.
- People problems.

– Personal problems.

Being the pastor of a medium-to-large congregation, I, along with pastors across our state and nation, have wrestled with the struggle of how to keep things going in the midst of these changing problems.

I realize there are many creative servants of our Lord who keep it going by having weekly drive-in church services, livestream services, and Facebook Live services. These vehicles of communication have allowed the Gospel message to go way beyond the local congregation.

Back to the question: “When are we getting back to **normal**?” I find myself constantly trying to understand the last 55 weeks. Allow me to share some of my conclusions that I have come to realize about **normal**.

Our Lord always changes our **normal**, our routines, our being comfortable. Jesus changed the **normal** of Mary and Joseph when He was conceived and born. Jesus changed the **normal** of all 12 disciples and those who followed Him as He called them to “Follow Me.”

The New Testament church was anything but **normal** in its day. In fact, the Lord allowed persecution to move those early believers from a comfortable **normal** to the “uttermost parts of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20).

My conclusion is that our **normal** has changed! I believe there is a more concentrated effort to not take for granted the times to assemble ourselves together, that we not forsake those opportunities and that we see more clearly the day of Jesus approaching (Hebrews 10:25). Those who now attend in-house worship services have a deeper desire to assemble together in church and in fellowship with others.

I also believe the **normal** always needs to be fresh, not stagnant, nor comfortable. Back in the prophet Isaiah’s day

there was a sense of everything being **normal** when Uzziah was king. Then, as Isaiah 6:1 reads, King Uzziah died and Isaiah quickly “saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne!”

The Bible reminds me that our **normal** is constantly changing and the Lord is still sitting upon His throne! The challenge, in whatever our new **normal** may be, is to keep in mind Hebrews 12:1-2: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

– May we focus our eyes on Jesus, as our **normal** continues to change. No matter how our **normal** may change, Jesus never changes! As the Bible reminds us in Hebrews 13:8, *Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.*

– May we follow Jesus to and through the new **normal** today and every tomorrow that we face. I pray we never have another pandemic, but we will probably still face political problems, people problems, and personal problems.

– May we follow Jesus as we “...run with patience the race that is set before us...” through every problem (Hebrews 12:1).

– May we as leaders and members of local churches refuse to stay comfortable and complacent but be more committed to follow Jesus. We the ones who Luke describes in Acts chapter 17 that the cause of Christ has *turned the world upside down* through evangelism and ministry.

– May that be our new **normal**!

Sweatt is pastor of Meadowview Church, Amory. He may be contacted at lloydmbc@gmail.com.