



One of the questions that is at the front of everyone's mind these days is, "When will things go back to normal?" We are experiencing a second wave of COVID-19 and many parts of Canada are returning to restrictions previously lifted. The longer the pandemic persists the more *COVID cracks* are beginning to show. There are rising levels of insecurity, stress, and tension. Many of us are needing additional time away, and it would not surprise me to see some early retirements as we move into 2021. Most experts suggest that a return to normal is still a long way off and that it will not ever be exactly like it was pre-COVID.

The idea of a return to normal has really piqued my interest, especially as I think about our Alliance churches in Canada. The danger is that our craving for a return to normal is really a desire to go back to business as usual—a return to the *way it was*. However, I can't help but wonder if the way it was may not have been the way God intended, and if instead of a return to normal, we need to embrace the challenge of aspiring toward "Kingdom normal."

Acts 13 shows a church shifting its focus to the *ends of the earth*. Acts 1:8 states, "But you will receive power when the

Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The church is enveloped in Spirit-anointed worship and fasting when the Holy Spirit declares, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). In this passage, we see three Kingdom normal realities that I believe God wants us to experience.

The first Kingdom normal is *integrated diversity* in leadership. The core leadership of the church in Antioch was incredibly diverse. Barnabas was a strong Jewish teacher/evangelist sent from the Jerusalem church to care for local churches. Simeon was from Niger (country adjacent to African Niger River) and probably Black. Lucius of Cyrene was from North Africa, west of Egypt. Manaen was the foster brother of Herod the Tetrarch who beheaded John the Baptist, and Saul was a Jewish Rabbi, church persecutor turned church planter. It is worth noting the strange irony that Saul was responsible for the planting of the church at Antioch. Not only do we have Jews and Gentiles in this core leadership team, but they are from different cultures, classes, and linguistic backgrounds, all ministering together. It is Kingdom normal for Christ-centred communities to foster and promote an inclusive

atmosphere where everyone can fully participate and serve in all spheres of leadership regardless of their economic, cultural, and social political background.

The second Kingdom normal is *inspiring dependence* on the Holy Spirit. It was in a Spirit-anointed worship gathering that the missionary call was heard. The Holy Spirit will always exalt Jesus and when Jesus is exalted you cannot help but be captivated by His heart for the nations. It is in the place of radical dependence on the Holy Spirit that we are given a fresh revelation of the majesty and mission of Jesus. Kingdom normal starts with surrender, not solutions. The temptation in a crisis is to multiply strategies and minimize surrender, but the exact opposite is needed. It is in the context of submission to the Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks, directs, and empowers.

The third Kingdom normal is *impassioned devotion* to reach the nations of the world. The Holy Spirit breaks into their worship and announces, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). It is Kingdom normal for the church to join Jesus on His mission to reach the world.

In Revelation 7:9-10, we get a glimpse of God’s vision for the future. John writes; “...I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Wow! Let that vision sink in! Our life is not about us and our comfort or even the comfort of our family. Greater things are happening, and we are invited into God’s Kingdom expansion. It is time for us to give God glory and proclaim the Gospel with passion! This is our normal!

COVID-19 has hit our Cuban families very hard. Food is scarce and prices for basic items have increased exorbitantly. One Cuban church leader writes, “We are living to the extreme, with electrical blackouts of up to 16 hours, consecutive water cuts, making queues of up to a thousand people, sleeping outdoors to get in a line to wait up to 30 hours for a single item.” Yet amid extreme hardship, the church is advancing. Demonstrating inspiring dependence on the Holy Spirit, they have adopted the motto, “Adapt and Advance!” Congregations that are unable to meet in buildings are hosting small group meetings at their homes, openly singing and praising God and sharing stories of hope. This courageous expression of “Kingdom normal”, bringing the Gospel directly to their communities, is resulting in many neighbours and friends spontaneously showing up to hear the praises and listen to the messages of hope.

One Cuban Alliance congregation had 54 people come to faith in Jesus during the first four months of the pandemic. Among them were two families, both fully devoted to idol worship. These families collected a total of 14 garbage bags of idols and burned them. YES! Now, this is a powerful picture of the church on mission living Kingdom normal!

As we enter a new year longing for things to go *back to normal*, perhaps you are hearing the Holy Spirit whispering an invitation to a new normal – a Kingdom normal that transcends and leverages your current reality to see the Kingdom of God advance. This is a normal worth longing for!

Global Advance Fund Update

The Global Advance Fund (GAF) covers the costs of sending and supporting international workers. Through the GAF, our workers take the Gospel to places where few or none have heard the name of Jesus.

Year to date (as of December 24, 2020)

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| Total 2020 Faith Goal | \$16,067,161 |
| YTD Income | \$13,050,966* |
| Excess/Shortfall | (3,016,195) |

*81.23% of total 2020 Faith Goal