

Back to the New Future Study Series

This series is made in response to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. When restrictions on normal life lift around our country (this will vary depending on where you live and, of course, restrictions may come back at times), people will begin to return their lives to 'normal' or to the 'new normal' as it is often being referred to. But what is normal and what should the new normal look like? Was the way that we were doing life before COVID *normal*? What about the stuff that we loved about being in isolation, like the slower pace of life and the sour dough bread? Can we keep that good stuff too? What can this new future look like?

The challenge is that simply going back to the way things were may not be the best thing for our future. It may not be healthy. It may not be Godly. This series will challenge us to reframe what our lives will look like in the future, to develop a 'new normal' that holds at the centre God's norms for humans, for church, and for our society.

The series has four sessions:

1. Back to the new future
2. Back to the new future for me
3. Back to the new future for church
4. Back to the new future for society

Study 1: Back to the new future

How do we define normal?

- How do we determine as individuals, as a church, and as a society what is 'normal'?
- Is there a difference between what is common and what is normal?
- Do we even believe that there are norms that should guide our lives? If so, who determines them?

Read Psalm 119:129-136 together.

The best way to do this week's study is to have a printed copy of the bible passage for each person and then work through and mark it up as follows:

- Underline all the terms used for God's word in this passage. Hint: there's one in each verse!
 - What does each term mean? Are they basically synonyms for the same thing?
 - Why is it significant that they are all preceded by 'your'?
- Circle the ways that God's word is described and what it does
 - What do these terms mean?
 - Which one excites you the most?
 - What else are we taught about God in this passage? Circle these too
- Put a box around the ways that we are supposed to respond to God's word
 - Are you conscious of trying to do these things? Give an example of how you do this
 - Which do you find most challenging / don't do?

Going Deeper

- How does God's Word help set the norms for our lives, our church, our society?
- What are some areas where the coronavirus restrictions have challenged you about how you, our church, our society might be out of kilter with God's norms?
- How might we make changes measured against God's norms as we enter a new future:
 - What have we **STOPPED** during the pandemic that we don't want to back to?
 - What have we **CHANGED** that we wish to continue?
 - What has we **STARTED** that we wish to adopt?
 - What have we started out of **NECESSITY** that we would prefer not to continue?

Prayer

Pray together asking God to help you to shape a new future based on the norm of his word.

Study 2- Back to the New Future for Me

Discuss these questions (you might like to break people into smaller groups of 2-3 people if your meeting format allows that):

- What has been the best thing about the restriction period for you as an individual?
- What has been the hardest thing about the restriction period for you as an individual?
- (If people answer generally and not personally see if you can gently push them towards answering about their own specific circumstances.)

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-15 together.

Read it a second time in an alternative translation. Discuss major differences.

Now get the group to retell the passage using their own words in a more conversational style. This is not simply rewording the sentences. If you were telling someone who wasn't there what you had heard, how would you describe it? Is there any information you would fill in for them?

Now have a conversation about the passage and focus on these two big questions:

- What does this say about God?
- What does this say about us?

As people share their thoughts always feel free to ask: Where do you see that in these verses?

At a convenient point in the conversation, read Exodus 20:8-11. Notice that these verses are very similar to Deut 5:12-15 but there are some key differences. Discuss the differences and how they might prompt you to think about the sabbath commandment differently.

Other questions for discussion:

- What does this teach us about what God desires as normal for humanity?
 - For the church.
 - For society.
 - For individuals.
- Where are humans generally out of kilter with God's normal in this passage?
- Where are people in our community out of kilter with God's normal (as seen in this passage)?

In light of today's biblical discussion, let's think about the future:

- What have we **STOPPED** during the pandemic that we don't want to back to?
- What have we **CHANGED** that we wish to continue?
- What have we **STARTED** that we wish to adopt?
- What have we started out of **NECESSITY** that we would prefer not to continue?
- What lessons are there still to be learned from this time of forced restriction?

Prayer

Pray together that this would be more than a discussion of ideas but that God would work with us to change our future for good.

Study 3- Back to the new future for church

What does normal look like for church?

- Brainstorm a list of things that are non-negotiable must-have aspects of church. These are things that mean that church wouldn't be church if we didn't have them, the real core.
- What other aspects of church are not core things but still things you really love or value?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10 together.

- What does it mean for Jesus to be the Living Stone and precious cornerstone?
 - Why do some people reject him and stumble over him?
 - What is the right response to him?
- What do each of the following descriptions teach us about the church:
 - Living stones being built into a spiritual house
 - Holy Priesthood / Royal Priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices
 - A Chosen People
 - A Holy nation
 - God's special possession
 - The people of God
- Which of these do you most resonate with and get inspired by?
- Which of these do you find most challenging and difficult?
- Most of this passage is about who we are as the church. How does who we are shape what we do?

Going Deeper

- In light of who we are as the church how might we answer the following 4 questions:
 - What have we **STOPPED** during the pandemic that we shouldn't back to?
 - What have we **CHANGED** that we should continue?
 - What has we **STARTED** that we want to adopt?
 - What have we started out of **NECESSITY** that we shouldn't continue?

Prayer

Pray for us as a church, using some of these descriptions, as we seek to be church in a new future.

Study 4- Back to the new future for society

Intro question: For group discussion or in pairs.

- What societal trends are you noticing in this 'new normal' we're experiencing at the moment? (Cultural, economic, geographic, institutional, philosophical, medical, familial, educational and others.)
- What missional opportunities might these changes present? What could we do ready yourself for them?

Read (passage) together. [Matthew 4:12-17](#)

Read it a second time in an alternative translation. Discuss major differences.

Now get the group to retell the passage using their own words in a more conversational style. This is not simply rewording the sentences. If you were telling someone who wasn't there what you had heard, how would you describe it? Is there any information you would fill in for them?

(Extension reading- Revelation 21:1-7)

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