

Last week I had the privilege of spending some time in both Nairobi and Mombasa. I've never been in Kenya before so I had to check Maps to see exactly where these places were. So Kenya has, as neighbours, Somalia to the east, Ethiopia and South Sudan to the north, Uganda to the west and Tanzania to the south.

Nairobi is the capital and Mombasa is a coastal town close to the Tanzanian border, just above the island of Zanzibar.

Being in another country helped me realise that my 'normal' may not be 'normal' for someone else.

By normal I mean:

How the traffic works

How public transport works

Attitude towards water

Even something as simple as washing hands

Motorbikes

Security at shopping centres - did you know

That when you drive in to a shopping centre you are stopped by security that looks every passenger in the eye and then checks your boot. Then before you enter the shopping centre itself you have to go through a detector process. All the result of some terrorist activity that happened a while ago.

The weather conditions

I'm used to my normal

I like my normal

In fact I may go out of my way to ensure my normal remains normal.

But at some point I have to realise that my normal may not be THE NORMAL.

Today we are going to talk a little bit about what THE NORMAL, for a Christian, actually looks like.

### Accepting THE new NORMAL

When one steps out of the plane in Mombasa, the first thing that greets you is the hot and humid air. Like Durban on humidity steroids.

Your whole body starts sweating.

My hosts were waiting to pick us up and we drove straight to our destination. Out the car, walk to the house, **shoes off** before you enter the house.

Very practical.

We do the same thing in the UK and Germany.

I'm not sure what is wrong with SA but I like it.

It adds emphasis to your daily routine of making sure that you keep your feet washed and your socks don't have holes.

And I'm sweating.

Ice cold bottled water becomes my new best friend.

Not tap water - that's a no-no. You know how I had to train myself not to do the tap thing when I was brushing my teeth. That is one deeply ingrained habit.  
I actually don't like drinking water.  
Suddenly I liked it a lot because the thought of tea or coffee was unbearable.  
The good ship Marc was changing course to a new normal.

When I started studying the Bible in 1993, the biggest shock to my system came when I realised that the way I was living my life, was not right.  
All the Scriptures that I was starting to 'see' for the first time were pointing to a way of life that was very different to the one I was living.  
A new NORMAL was being presented to me and I had to make a decision whether I was willing to let go of the old one.  
Completely.  
Put the whole thing in the bin and start again from the foundations up.  
It was a big decision.  
And we made it.

Today, we are going to re-look at Act 2v42-47 because I believe we need to see it more clearly.  
It's a familiar one but familiar does not mean we get it.

Why this Scripture?

Last year we started an initiative called Fuller house - Expanding the Garden from your home. This initiative encourages us to be hospitable. Invite new people into your homes as a means to possibly help people get to know God better.  
What a great plan.  
Except, this new 'normal' has been slow in being accepted.  
Even in my own heart, I had to answer some difficult questions as my comfortable 'normal' was being challenged.

The background of this Scripture goes something like this.  
Jesus had told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem.  
He told them that they would be His witnesses locally and to the ends of the earth.  
Another apostle was chosen to replace Judas.  
Then comes the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit appears as tongues of fire and rests on them.  
They start speaking new languages.  
Then Peter stands up, reminds the people that these happenings had been prophesied about in Joel.  
That David had spoken about Jesus.  
That this Jesus, whom they had crucified was both Lord and Messiah.  
That the answer was to repent and be baptized.  
And then the Bible says an important thing.

Act 2v41

*Those who **accepted** his message were baptized,  
and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Three thousand accepted the message and were baptised.  
When you accept something, you make it your own, you own it, you change your normal and willingly accept a new NORMAL.  
When you become a Christian however, accepting God's message is the new NORMAL.  
And then you work at making the new normal work for you.  
How do you do that?

### **THE NORMAL**

In Kenya, everyone and I mean everyone washes their hands before a meal.  
If you are sitting outside, there will be a portable water supply and before you get your plate, you are ushered to the hand washing station.  
In the dining room there is a small handbasin ... in the dining room.  
It's hot and sweaty there and makes complete sense.  
It's their normal and their expectation was that it would be my normal too.

From Acts 2v42 onward we get a small glimpse into the lives of those who had accepted the message in the previous verse.

### **Act 2v42-47**

*They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching ...*

That what God's NORMAL looks like.

What does devoted mean?

This is not just a daily reading of the Bible.

This is not just an increase in knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

This is not reading a devotional book.

It's not a tick box exercise to make God happy.

As a verb it means,

**"to give all or most of one's time or resources to a person or activity".**

"All or most" of your, "time or resources" to what?

The teaching of the Apostles.

Other versions say:

"And they were continuing steadfastly" (YLT, KJV)

"They were committed" (MSG)

"They were persevering in the doctrine" (DR 1899)

They were studying what the Apostles said, for all they were worth.

As if their lives depended on it, their spiritual lives.

Because they had "accepted" God's NORMAL.

Just like we did when we were baptised and said, "Jesus is Lord."

When I landed in Kenya I had to accept the Kenyan normal.  
Kenya normal traffic is very different to South Africa normal traffic.  
In Mombasa there were no traffic lights.  
No road markings  
Bad roads and No rules.  
Whenever two roads met, the boldest driver entered the main stream.  
When I was in the midst of the "chaos" I had to force myself to sit still.  
Rest my hands on my lap.  
I had to tell myself that all this around me was normal.  
Because my driver was certainly not stressed.  
Cars would be continuously pushing in front of you.  
Motorbikes, mostly motorbike taxis called Boda boda, were buzzing around you all the time.  
Mostly no helmets with up to four passengers at a time.  
Matatus, the three wheeled taxis, are all over the place.  
And you know what impressed me the most, other than that it seemed to work?  
No one got a bad attitude.  
5 sec in that traffic would have had the average SA driver out of his car ready to rumble with the first vehicle that pushed in front of him.  
Not in Kenya.  
I must have been driven by about 10 different drivers and not one of them had the slightest negative thing to say about the traffic.  
They just ebbed and flowed with it.

When you enter someone else's space you enter their way of doing things.  
When we enter God's space we accept God's way of doing things.

God's space is filled with His devoted followers,  
Who give all or most of their time to what the Apostles were teaching.

We have agreed to do this because we have so much to unlearn  
from our characters  
and our cultures  
that only a devoted attitude and the help of others in Healthy Discipling Relationships is  
going to make any kind of headway.

So what is our call?

### **NORMAL results**

So what are they teaching?  
What did their lives look like?

Act 2v42-47

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching  
and to fellowship,  
to the breaking of bread*

and to prayer.

<sup>43</sup>Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

We've heard this before.

Interestingly it sounds very much like Fuller House with some Red Bull added.

There was fellowship

Breaking of bread

Prayer

The believers were together

They shared their stuff

They met daily

The ate together in their homes, with glad and sincere hearts

Praising God

Enjoying the favour of the people - what does that mean?

The people approved, they liked, they supported what was happening.

The people wanted what was now NORMAL for the disciples.

When I first met the church, I wanted to join even before I had even gone through many of the studies, because the people were real and different to what I was used to.

I wanted some of that.

And the result is that God added people to their group.

**Life as a disciple,  
is about a devotion to God's Word  
which then provides everything we need  
to live a life that attracts people into our homes**

And

if we don't think we need to invite people

Or we are not used to inviting people

Or we are scared to invite people

Or we feel insecure about inviting people

What do we do?

We go back to V42 and we devote even more time to the God's Word and we beg God for a change of heart because the alternative

Doing nothing and carrying on living in my normal as if God's Word did not teach any of these things.

That option does not exist in the Christian world.

Paul thought his normal was God's normal too, until God had a Healthy Discipling Chat to him on the road to Damascus where He said:

## Act 26v15-18

*"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. <sup>16</sup>"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup>I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup>to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."***

He introduces Himself.

Then tells Paul that his normal is wrong.

And then proceeds to tell him what the new NORMAL is.

We are being sent to help people get to know God better.

Expanding the Garden is NORMAL

So, if we need help in getting our hearts behind Expanding the Garden

Then we have to devote ourselves to God's Word.

Because there is no other option.

What does that look like?

Proverbs 2 has some answers.

Proverbs 2v1-11 is divided into three sections:

## Pro 2v1-11

My son, **if you accept** my words  
and **store up** my commands within you,  
<sup>2</sup>**turning your ear** to wisdom  
and **applying your heart** to understanding--  
<sup>3</sup>indeed, **if you call out** for insight  
and **cry aloud** for understanding,  
and **if you look for it** as for silver  
and **search for it** as for hidden treasure,

The first one starts with acceptance and a humble response.

<sup>5</sup>then

you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.  
<sup>6</sup>**For the LORD gives wisdom;**  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
<sup>7</sup>He holds success in store for the upright,  
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,  
<sup>8</sup>for he guards the course of the just  
and protects the way of his faithful ones.

The second one leads from the first and explains why it is necessary to follow this path of listening to God.

<sup>9</sup>**Then**  
you will understand what is right and just  
and fair--every good path.  
<sup>10</sup>For wisdom will enter your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.  
<sup>11</sup>Discretion will protect you,  
and understanding will guard you.

The third one explains the deeper spiritual processes that happen, outside of our control, God's grace that helps us get on board with God's NORMAL. Which then reflects into the way we live our lives.

Let us stop living our Christian lives based upon our own understanding. Let us get back to devoting ourselves to God's Word.

### Summary

In Kenya I had to chose the Kenyan normal.  
I could have chosen my normal and drank the water from the tap  
And not washed my hands  
And not accepted the way the traffic flowed  
And ignored the security at the shopping malls  
And turned a blind eye to the hot and humid weather conditions  
But Kenyans would call that stupid.

In much the same way I could ignore my new Christian NORMAL  
And keep doing Christianity according to my normal  
I think God would call that foolish.

So let's store up  
and turn our ears  
And apply our hearts  
and call out for insight  
And cry aloud for understanding  
Let's search for it as for hidden treasure

**Then** we will understand the fear of the Lord  
And God will give us wisdom that will enter our hearts  
And give us pleasant knowledge for the soul.

And with our new found conviction on what disciples do NORMALLY  
Let's get on with what God has called us to do - EXPAND HIS GARDEN.

Amen