

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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## **Editorial Introduction**

by Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. Welcome to JAC136 - the 136th edition of Journal of Aggressive Christianity.

This is the Evangelist Pitch Issue. We received short evangelistic briefs from Salvationists around the world, plus an exhortation. We're not naive. We don't expect that heaps of people who don't follow Jesus also read the pages of JAC faithfully.

That's where you come in. Because the contributors come from different places in life and in geography, there are different evangelistic approaches represented. Read them all. Pray over them. And then participate!

Share them with your friends with whom each of them might most effectively connect. Share them strategically. And share them widely. And let's see how God wants to use 400 words from each contributor for His eternal glory, shall we?

Captain Kim Haworth, Tasmania, kicks things off with a bit of spiritual math, 21>31.

Captain Nana Fatouma Togo, Mali, explains how Jesus, The Good Shepherd, wants to bring you home.

Major Charles Roberts, New York State, revels in the In-Between Times.

Captain Manikya Mera, Victoria Australia, tells My Story.

Abisola Onatoye, a soldier in Toronto, wants to introduce you to A Friend You Have.

Captain Kevin Elsasser, on Vancouver Island, tells us how we can be Experiencing Salvation.

Kathy Allan, a soldier in southwestern Ontario, suggests Just One Look - For The Unconvinced.

Lieutenant Tabitha Swires, in upstate New York, offers Salvation For You Today.

Your friendly editor is Recruiting.

And we'll end with the exhortation, from Major Andrew Bale, The Most Important Thing In My Life, as a bit of reminder and correction for Christian readers.

Thanks to the contributors. But the supernatural success of JAC136 is 'on' Holy Spirit and us. Let's be partnering with Holy Spirit to share each evangelistic pitch with the people who might respond most favourably to it. And send each article along with prayer, aiming to see many people begin friendship with Jesus through it.

Godspeed.

## 21 > 31

Captain Kim Haworth

If you were to ask me what the difference is between the first 31 years of my life and the last 21 years, I'd tell you, unreservedly, everything! Everything is different. Not that the first 31 years, were bad – they weren't. I've been really blessed in my life. I'm grateful as I've always known the love and safety of a good family, plenty of food in my belly and wonderful experiences. But I never knew what I was missing, until I met Jesus.

At 31 that changed. I experienced the living God in an encounter that changed everything and opened my eyes to what being truly alive really feels like. From that experience, I made a decision to trust in Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit!

It's a decision I renew and live by every day. Until that point, I didn't know that wholeness and true freedom were found in relationship with God, but once I knew, it changed everything for me. The years since have been a wild ride – years of living by faith and being fully alive in Jesus. Following Jesus has taken me to places and given me experiences I never expected. These have fulfilled me ways I never knew was possible. There's still been hard times for sure, but navigating those times with God has made all the difference.

I've tried life with God, and I've tried life without God. There is really no comparison. Life with God is so much better - it has changed the reason why I get out of bed in the morning, how I live and what I do. Life with God has changed how I love, who I love and how I see everything and everyone around me!

The truth is, we were created to live in relationship with God. Jesus makes that possible! God says, "If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). The more I seek God, the more I see Him. The more I press into God, the more truly alive I feel and the more whole I become. It begins with a decision to put your trust in the Lord Jesus – one step of faith, that will change everything! Do it! And really commit to seeking and knowing God.

You'll never regret it. You'll discover the relationship you were created to have and the life you were meant to live. A life and relationship that defines all others - one that lasts for eternity!

Bless you heaps!

## **Jesus, The Good Shepherd**

Captain Nana Fatouma Togo

There's a shepherd with a hundred sheep.

One of them wanders away from the flock. The shepherd leaves the others, searches for the lost one until he finds it, and carries it back to the fold on his shoulders, calling his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him over the return of the lost sheep (this parable is from Luke 15:1-7).

Someone may wonder why the sheep got lost, but the text does not tell us anything about it.

There are at least two ways of understanding the loss of this sheep:

1. The first is that the group abandoned the sheep and went on their way without realizing that they were leaving a sheep behind; perhaps the sheep is a bit stubborn. Perhaps the shepherd was preoccupied with worries and did not see that the sheep was gradually moving away from the group.

2. The second way of understanding is that it would be a voluntary act on sheep's part. Perhaps she considers that life will be better further away, that grass will be greener elsewhere. We don't know, but one thing was sure, she was no longer under care of the shepherd, not being conscious of the exposure to dangers (like a child playing on the railway).

The lost sheep portrays the image of a sinner, a lost soul saved by grace.

For many reasons someone may decide to wander far away from God. Sometimes it appears like self-driven life is more enjoyable. But outside of God there is no hope; just darkness, deception, and death.

### **Jesus, The Good Shepherd.**

Whatever the reason for the loss of the sheep, the text underlines the responsibility of the shepherd to go and look for the sheep until it is found. There is not only an obligation of means; there is a vocation of result. And, to do this, one must not hesitate to leave the 99 others to search for the lost sheep.

Shepherds take care of their sheep. The sheep recognize their shepherd's voice and follow him. A shepherd does not lead his flock from the back. He walks ahead to show them where to go. He leads them to green pastures where there is good grass to eat. He makes them drink. In the evening, he brings them back to the sheepfold, which is a walled or fenced area or cave where the sheep are protected from wild animals and thieves. Why? Because each sheep is of high value.

In the same way God's love for sinners is so great, He searches diligently for the lost. In John 3:16, the Bible says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus paid the price by giving His life as a ransom. This is the reason He is depicted as the good shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

There is often a great temptation to think that we can get out of trouble on our own, without God's help. The truth is that in order to get out of a bad situation, to get out of a depression, to regain a taste for life, to find meaning in life... only Christ it can happen. It is Him alone who can get you out of your solitude, out of your confinement. There is no salvation in any other name than the name of Jesus. To stop getting lost and come back to God, you need Him. If you rely on Him, you will no longer wander but will be under His eternal protection.

### **The Joy Of Finding The Lost.**

When the sheep has been found, the shepherd himself carries it joyfully on his shoulders to the house, where it will be cared for.

Who could think that he came to the Lord by himself? On the contrary, it is the good shepherd who has come to meet us, to seek us out, to find us, to bring us to himself, and finally to bring us into the father's house: at the cost of His own life in supreme love for those whom He calls His friends. Thus, He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through HIM.

The joy of the shepherd who has found his sheep is shared with friends and neighbors at home. The joy here is that of the redeemer, shared later with all the redeemed.

Are you feeling far away from God? Don't lose hope. Today the Good Shepherd, Jesus Himself, has found you (after all, you are reading this!), and wants to bring you home. Will you allow the Saviour Jesus to bring you back?

## In-Between Times

Major Charles Roberts

I love these "in-between" times, times between seasons: the weather is unpredictable; yet in your very being you sense that a change is coming. For example, you may want to cling to the vestiges of summer by wearing shorts as often as possible, and resisting the hanging-up of sweaters in your closets... ..yet, at some point, you will succumb.



"He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end." Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 3:11

There's something happening here / What it is not exactly clear - Change is the only constant, and yet we cling to sameness. We know with each season, there is the potential for a corresponding spiritual sea change, and really - it can be ecstatic! And filled with fears, too, I bet. In these times in-between seasons, there is a liminality, a fine line between growth and shrinking back, a unique unction to become more vulnerable, more alive. These are the times we can grow closer in community, or grow deeper in solitude.

Fall brings a new PTA, kids' sports, new teachers to meet, new professors to have coffee with! It is a time one can expand one's horizons - or one can prep for winter and hunker down in bulky sweaters, and drink some concoction of pumpkin spice something or other, and get close to some old friends in print. Whether you thrust yourself into Fall, or prep for the Winter quiet time, God is working. He is always working for your highest and best good. Looking at the coming leaf changes, I see a burst of orange amidst the great greenery, and although the leaves fall off and die, they flame out in glory before they become food for the next crop of young oaks or spruces.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past, See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” Isaiah 41:18-19

While there is not much obvious "springing up" coming into Autumn, there is a great work going on. In your own life, do you not perceive it? God is preparing your heart for the season to come. Whether that season brings great joys or heartbreaks, God is there, preparing the Way.

Whether you an active person, preparing for hikes and bicycle excursions, or if you are getting your book-pile ready by the fireplace, God is speaking to you. Do you not perceive it? There are also seasons of the soul. We are born into Spring, when life is new. During our childhood and adolescent years, we thrive in the joys of Summer. When we learn to negotiate the worlds of work, higher education, career and family, we shed the follies of childhood, just as the Fall leaves flutter earthworm. Winter is the longest human season, when we deal with frailty and the frustrations of middle to old age. Just like walking through a blizzard, we traverse the treacherous landscapes of illness and loss.

The Teacher, Solomon, reminds us: "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." But life under heaven is not all there is. There is access to another life, eternal life, life without limits, life with God. And God will guide you through every season. Jesus says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Faith in Jesus is the portal to this new life, a life that shines in every season, not dependent on anything under heaven, because Jesus is the Way to heaven. Go get that life, it's a prayer away. Everybody ought to follow Jesus.

## My Story

Captain Manikya Mera

Growing up in a Christian home is wonderful, but your views are shaped by the world around you. My family, school, and friends were all a big part of my upbringing, but it wasn't until I was in adolescence that I started to think about 'Life.' For instance, why should one live? What is the purpose of life? What makes the world different from the one described in the gospels? What is the point of my existence?

In my search for solutions, these questions remained, and my attempts to find a solution continued. Many things were taught to me through my life experiences, but when I studied the Bible and discovered that humans are created in God's image and have a mission that defines them and empowers those around them in an imperfect world filled with so much pain and injustice. Then I realised that everything is possible when you work with the creator. But is it ever feasible to connect with a creator who cannot be seen? Then I discovered some intriguing verses in the bible such as "I have formed you," "Seek me and you shall find," "Here I am knocking," and so on. When I realised that God's presence is all around me and that I don't have to travel anywhere to find Him. My heart pushed me to pray, asking for forgiveness of my misdeeds and seeking his mercy for my life.

Then the adventure started, during which God partnered with me in many incredible ways that I could never have imagined. The story of God's incarnation in Jesus showed me how to live a good life. He demonstrated it by living it and teaching it. Healing and wholeness, as well as knowledge of God's presence and power in our lives right now, are key to good life. His is a world free of suffering and evil, where justice, peace, joy, and community reign supreme. There are still moments when I feel powerless and unable to make a difference, especially when things don't go my way, but God's continual presence awakens my thoughts and brings me back to His way of life. I don't know where you are in your path, but all I ask is that you remember that there is a way to find "The Truth" that will set you free. 'The New Life' will change the way you view at the world.

My hope is that you, like me, will be able to find Jesus. My prayer is that you will be able to listen to Jesus and accept your flaws, which can be overcome by trust in him. Let me share a prayer with you:

Lord Jesus, I confess my sins and ask for your forgiveness. Please come into my heart as my Lord and Saviour. Take complete control of my life and help me to walk in Your footsteps daily by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Lord, for saving me and for answering my prayer.

## **A Friend You Have**

Abisola Onatoye

Walking into the grocery store a while back, I felt it in my spirit to look back and talk to a young man sitting on the floor outside. We conversed and I found out he believes that God doesn't exist because He took away his grandma. I was so sad to hear about his loss, especially after he explained how close they were and how she was a Christian and he prayed to God to let her live.

If there is one thing I know for sure, it is that God knows this young man by name, knows his story and He loves him deeply: "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Look friend, God has our best interest at heart! "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). I also believe that Jesus came to earth and saw all the hardships existing and he is interceding for us, because He knows how we feel as humans: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize and understand our weaknesses and temptations, but one who has been tempted, yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

I was able to share with the young man about my journey of faith and some of the difficulties I have experienced. I have heard stories of miracle babies and well as God waking up dead people, we have that in the Bible and also real-life stories of such in this present day, so I know it's not impossible for God to do. It's okay to look up to Him to do this for us, but God is more than miracles! He is way more than that: He is a very loving father and friend, ever present help in times of need (see Psalm 46:1).

I know that as Christian and non-Christian, we all go through our own fair share of life and struggles. But here is the difference, as a child of God, your camp is filled with so much love. The kind of support you need daily to get through life, knowing there is an ever-present friend with you who has your back. This friend is full of so much wisdom to help you navigate life, full of so much peace and joy to keep away depression and he is there through the dark and good times.

Would you rather do life alone? Or have a friend who has loved you before you were born, one who knows your weaknesses but loves you regardless? A friend whose friendship doesn't end at death, but has life eternal?

Just as God prompted me to speak with the young man at the grocery store because God sees him and cares about him, He cares for YOU also and I would like you to welcome Him into your life.

Love from your friends, Abisola & Jesus

## Experiencing Salvation

Captain Kevin Elsasser

Bible tells us that humanity is important to God because we were made in His image and for relationship with our Creator. This is Genesis 1:26 (CEV): God said, “Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures.”

Here we see that we have been created in God’s image with the purpose of caring for creation. God instructs the first humans regarding the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’: “You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die” (Genesis 2:17 CEV). On the day they disregarded God’s instructions, their perfect relationship with God was broken.

Since God is holy, He made a way to bring humanity back into fellowship – Jesus! Look at the extremes to which Jesus went – His love drove Him all the way to the cross (where He died for our sins). The cross is the bridge between the holy God and sinful people. You? Me? Sinful? How about one or more of these: Have you ever been, “jealous, angry, and selfish” (Galatians 5:20 CEV).

Romans 5:8 (CEV) reads, “But God showed how much He loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful.” Jesus’ death on the cross makes it possible for us to enter into relationship with God. How does this happen? It comes through repentance and faith. Paul said, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

As Jesus summed it up, “Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). We can surrender to His will for our whole life. Here is a prayer that many have used to begin a relationship with Jesus (from ‘The Navigators’):

*Dear Jesus,*

*I know that I am a sinner and that I need You to forgive me. I know that You died a painful death so that my sins could be washed clean. Thank you. I want to make You the Lord of my life, and I will trust and follow You. Everything I have is Yours now.*

*In Your name, Lord.*

*Amen.*

## **Just One Look - For The Unconvinced**

Kathy Allan

I could tell you that God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit are real, and have always been with you. I know that in this age of "No thanks, I'm good", I run the willing risk that you will stop reading now, but I have hope that you may boldly go.

I could mention that names are mere place holders, and that The Light of the World could just as easily be called Revealer of Truth, Giver of Grace, or Hope of the Hopeless. I'm optimistic you identify with Higher Power because you've seen a sunset or two, or heard bird song, or felt cool grass, and opened up to awe even just a bit.

I could hazard a guess that somewhere along the line in your very own life you've encountered even a bit of love, acceptance, a feeling of being safely held, looked at with kind eyes. If you have, you already know Him/Her/They/God.

I could quote the Bible. It might be helpful and may land in a good place in your heart, as it has for me. All the Bible does is show our need for two things: help, and a Helper, aka Jesus, his given human name. We all know that sooner or later we need it.

I could sing you a song about the Trinity I adore, for there are three somehow, in the Oneness of Their Mystery. Sometimes though, my voice fails when I'm overtaken by their goodness, a glorious thing.

I could tell you how I have come to trust and lean on The Big 3, another name I often call them. Yes, yes, yes, I have because life is hard. I am a hard way learner, who knows the vitality of trust in Trustworthy, and of leaning on Strength to survive the inevitable "what's going to happen next?"

I could tell you of all the too-crazy-to-be-true 'coincidences' that have led me to this very moment. One literally came in the mail today – an eye popping moment of striking spiritual serendipity. I gasped and I knew!

I could testify about the goodness, love, and power of forgiveness that have flowed all over my past shame, anger, doubts and regrets, and left me with a strangely soft peace I know isn't mine.

I could invite you, and I have, and I do; please, just one look.

## **Salvation For You Today**

Lieutenant Tabitha Swires

I'll never ever forget that moment. Face pressed to the carpet, loud blaring music in the background, a pile of used up tissues surrounding my head. I felt I couldn't move, physically, mentally, emotionally... mostly physically I was pressed. I never knew the presence of God could manifest in a physical way. Especially not for someone like me. Yet there I was pressed to an old church carpet... knowing that something was happening to me inside and I would never be the same.

Just days before I was pressed to a different carpet. The carpet of my bedroom floor after another keg party. I was in a lot of pain. I wrote my prayers out to God. I wasn't even sure if I was allowed to talk to Him while under the influence, but I was just that low and desperate. There was this grace we call prevenient grace. This grace precedes any sort of relationship you may or may not have and want or may not want. The grace of God exists in every space and place for you and for me no matter your stance on faith. This grace was there for me as I was pressed to the church carpet by the power of God the night I finally surrendered. From that place I could begin the process of working it all out.

After almost an entire decade of drugs, alcohol, running, and living the double masked life of a pastor's kid on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings. I was underserving, deeply ashamed, and definitely convicted. By His grace alone He saw me. By His grace alone He helped me understand I was justified. By His grace alone He was calling me for me. He didn't need me. He wanted me. That's the Gospel. God knew what I needed before I ever wanted it and poured out His grace through the cross. He knew life with Him pressed to a church carpet would be better than all the places and spaces I'd been pressed before. I knew it too. I said yes again. That night was like a Holy Ghost shake down. Lies, mistakes, sin, darkness, regret, pain, anger... all being shaken out of me as His love just washed me wave after wave changing my heart and thoughts towards me and Him.

Today I stand holy... sanctified...by this grace alone. What about you? Are you feeling pressed by your surroundings? Does the world seem loud and dark? Are you lonely? Lost? Anxious? This is your grace moment today.

## Recruiting

Major Stephen Court

We have all messed up in various ways; we have all fallen short of the target; we have all disobeyed God. We have all sinned.

Our sins separate us from God and from the abundant life for which He created us.

The Lord Jesus Christ - God in the flesh - came down to earth, lived a perfect life, suffered the consequences we all, by our sinning, deserve, dying on the Cross for our sins. But He came back to life again, conquering sin and death, defeating the devil, ascending to heaven, interceding for us right now, and planning to come back again.

He says to each of us, "Come, follow Me." This is both the most spectacular invitation in the history of the world and the most elementary command, coming as it does, from the Creator of the Universe. And our response to this invitation / command will determine our destiny.

Rejection in any form - choosing to continue in our own direction - will lead us to our own destination, hell. Acceptance will bring forgiveness, regeneration, hope, purpose, love, acceptance, and eternal life in heaven.

How do we obey that command? Jesus clarifies, "Repent and believe." That is, change our minds and our direction, turning from our sins, and trusting and relying on Him.

What does it look like to accept His invitation into His life? It is an amazing adventure in the supernatural as we die to ourselves and our petty little issues and, filled with His Holy Spirit, engage in His mission that runs through the agony of the world.

We are looking to win the world for Jesus.

Interested?

Here's a prayer you can pray:

*Lord, thank You for loving me, for pursuing me, for dying for me, for... (fill in things you are thankful for);*

*Sorry for ignoring You, for disobeying You, for rebelling against You... (fill in things you are sorry for and renounce them);*

*Please forgive me, please sort out my life, please accompany me through life all the way to heaven, please fill me with Your Holy Spirit... I accept Your invitation to come follow You!*

*I pray in Your holy name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

## **The Most Important Thing In My Life**

Major Andrew Bale

The commission was straightforward - write as if you're addressing unbelievers and you want to get them saved. Now I am rarely lost for words, but I really struggled with this assignment. Next year Tracey and I will celebrate 30 very happy years together. We have a deep, significant, life changing relationship with each other. You probably won't be surprised to hear that I didn't pick her up in a bar with a chat up line!

The truth is that holding a prepared conversation to achieve a predetermined outcome is not always the best way to talk to someone, unless of course you're a car salesman or using a chat-up line. Sharing our faith with our friends should never be reduced to a simple transaction. Whilst many people have affectively used proven methods to engage unbelievers in conversation, conversations which have been designed to ultimately close the deal, I'm not sure that is the best way to evangelise in 2021.

When I talk to my friends about anything, I talk to them about things that are important to me, things which I think might benefit them or interest them. For example, if somebody in a social setting started to talk about cars then I would sing the praises of the car I'm currently driving! It's a hybrid, eco-friendly, economic to run and easy to drive. If somebody mentioned that they had put on a lot of weight during lockdown then I might share my current exercise regime or talk about diet. If someone told me that they were suffering with arthritis, then as a fellow sufferer I would sympathise with them and share with them anything that I had discovered over time that might be helpful.

The most important thing in my life is my faith. The most important person in my life is Jesus and so as you would expect, he comes into the conversation an awful lot. I talk to my friends about him naturally whenever it's appropriate to do so and I have discovered that there are very few occasions when it is inappropriate. If friends share with me that they are suffering from depression, if they tell me they have problems with addictions or that they find it hard to get motivated in the morning, in fact almost any problem or concern they might share with me will inevitably end up with me talking about Jesus.

As the old chorus says, 'Christ is the answer to my every need, Christ is the answer he is my friend indeed, problems of life my spirit may assail, with Christ my Saviour I can never fail for Christ is the answer to my need.'

I have discovered that when I talk to my friends about Jesus in a natural manner, without a secret agenda, they hear in my words and see in my actions more than I could ever communicate through forced 'witnessing', they see and hear that what I'm talking about is real to me and central to my life. If you want to win the world for Jesus start by simply talking about Jesus as naturally as you talk about anything else.