

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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***Infinitum Primer***

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## **Editorial Introduction**

By Major Stephen Court, editor

Coming up on a decade ago (2015) a handful of salvos created a rule of life called Infinitum (we won't riff on it here, as it has received due attention in JAC pages in the following years and you can search the archives to your heart's content).

Infinitum is a way of life centered on following Jesus by loving God and loving others through an emphasis on the habits and disciplines of surrender, generosity, and mission (see Infinitum app or InfinitumLife.com for more). We aim to see the Bible and also the world through these Jesus-colored lenses.

Half a decade ago we produced a reading plan called INFINITUM PRIMER PLAN for YouVersion Bible App (this has been accompanied by lots of other Infinitum reading plans on the popular app). We're giving you a taste of the amended plan here in JAC154 and hoping that you will migrate over to YouVersion Bible App and try out all of the other Infinitum reading plans with your friends. And so far, hundreds of thousands of people have subscribed to Infinitum reading plans on that app.

This one, JAC154, is a five-day series, a primer on each Infinitum component.

If you get through it all before February 1, feel free to search the archives of 153 previous JACs and the 'Infinitum' series of reading plans on YouVersion Bible App. May God use it all to accelerate the advance of the great commission.

Courage and Godspeed.

## Day 1: Follow Jesus

Reading: Matthew 19: 16-22 (The Voice)

*16 Then a young man came up to Jesus.*

*Young Man: Teacher, what good deed can I do to assure myself eternal life?*

*Jesus: 17 Strange that you should ask Me what is good. There is only One who is good. If you want to participate in His divine life, obey the Commandments.*

*Young Man: 18 Which Commandments in particular?*

*Jesus: Well, to begin with, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony,*

*19 honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.*

*Young Man: 20 I've kept those Commandments faithfully. What else do I need to do?*

*Jesus: 21 If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give all your money to the poor; then you will have treasure in heaven. And then come, follow Me.*

*22 The young man went away sad because he was very wealthy indeed.*

Jesus, in response to the teenager's query, instructs him to get rid of all of his earthly entanglements and, in His own words, 'follow Me'. To follow Jesus is the fundamental responsibility and purpose and opportunity of every single person who ever lived. It isn't to go to meetings on a Sunday morning, to join a church, to undergo certain traditional rituals, to abide a list of 'do's and don'ts', or to hold particular political views. It is to follow Jesus.

And to follow Jesus has significant implications. First, we don't get to go wherever we want. Jesus sets the agenda. He heads to the destination of His choice. We don't seem to have any 'say' in it. We follow Him. The upside on this one is that when we follow Jesus, we end up in the same destination as Jesus.

Second, the movement of following Jesus implies that we leave some things behind. What we broadly labelled 'earthly entanglements' for the rich teenager meant all of his possessions. For you those 'earthly entanglements' might mean worldviews or postures or sinful habits or some combination of these and his obstacles.

Third, it implies relationship. We're not following a set of rules or a philosophy – something inanimate. We are invited by Jesus to follow Him. Yes, He was crucified on the Cross for our sins (yours and mine). But on the third day He conquered sin and death, defeating the devil, rising again, ascending to heaven, where He now lives, and more than lives, reigns in anticipation of His triumphant return. He's alive. And while you may have heard a Christian phrase about 'asking Jesus into my life', Jesus is inviting this rich teen into HIS life. And He makes the same invitation to us.

Play that one out for a moment. We follow Him, part of His life, engaging with Him in the most adventurous, abundant experience in the universe!

You'd think that'd be the easiest 'sell' on the planet. You'd think that people would automatically buy in to that deal. But, of course, not everyone can imagine how amazing that experience will be. And some are infatuated with the 'earthly entanglements' we alluded to above. And, like the rich teenager, they choose the status quo.

If you're at that juncture in your life, looking to decide, like the rich teenager, whether to go all in with Jesus or to continue with the status quo, we urge you to accept Jesus' invitation into His life. Yes, it will cost you everything. But what a bargain that will be!

For those who are just starting out in following Jesus, we've found the simple way of life we introduced at the beginning of Day 1 – Infinitum (Latin for 'boundless', alluding to the boundless love of Jesus) – is an excellent scaffolding around this 'new creation' that God is crafting in us. You might want to try it out.

## Day 2: Loving God, Loving Others

Reading: Matthew 22:34-40 (The Voice)

*34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, a group of Pharisees met to consider new questions that might trip up Jesus.*

*35 A legal expert thought of one that would certainly stump Him.*

*Pharisees: 36 Teacher, of all the laws, which commandment is the greatest?*

*Jesus (quoting Scripture): 37 “Love the Eternal One your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.”*

*38 This is the first and greatest commandment.*

*39 And the second is nearly as important, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

*40 The rest of the law, and all the teachings of the prophets, are but variations on these themes.*

The virtues of Infinitum are to love God and love others. Together, this is known as ‘the great commandment’ as it encompasses all the meaning of the Old Testament. We want love to characterize our lives. And these loves are vertical – God – and horizontal – people. And the order is not coincidental.

First we love God. And then we love people. If we try it the other way around, it doesn’t work. If we look to love people, we get tired. Trying to love people in our own strength, stereotypical humanitarian, well-intentioned approach to caring for people, is unsustainable over the long-term. Plus, God commands us, “You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3 NIV).” Anything we put ‘before’ God is in the wrong order.

And, if we truly love God, then we WILL love others. But you see the elaboration by Jesus. This is loving, ‘God with every passion of your heart, with all the energy of your being, and with every thought that is within you.’ This is so much more than the best human facsimiles. You can put the most healthy, pure expression of love you’ve seen on steroids to capture an idea of what this is all about. The Biblical word, ‘agape’ has these definitions (from biblehub.com) = love, goodwill; affection, goodwill, love, benevolence, esteem; moral preference.

So, let’s see how that looks.

We are commanded show goodwill, to exercise benevolence, to esteem, to morally prefer God.

And then we are to show goodwill to others, to exercise benevolence toward others, to esteem others, to morally prefer others. Impossible in and of ourselves.

But God is good. And so, what God commands, God enables.

## Day 3: Surrender

Readings: Proverbs 22:4; Romans 12:1,2

Proverbs 22:4 (The Voice)

4 A humble person who fears the Eternal can expect to receive wealth, honor, and life.

There are three habitual emphases in Infinitum: surrender, generosity, and mission. Surrender? It means ‘cease resistance to an enemy or opponent and submit to their authority.’ The recognition is that in our natural state we are opposed to God, living in adversarial hostility to our Creator. And we have to surrender. Total capitulation. And that includes submission to God’s authority. And when do we do that? Life.

And while there is a moment of total surrender, it doesn’t end there. The Passion Translation uses the phrase ‘continually surrender’ a couple of times (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34) to describe our posture toward God. We are to continually surrender to Jesus, live in continual surrender, in submission to His authority.

This, of course, is in stark contrast with the normative stance all of us hold.

How does it look?

Romans 12:1-2 (TPT) explains it this way:

*1 Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God’s marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be His sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights His heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship.*

*2 Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in His eyes.*

On the positive side:

We are to live in holiness.

We are to experience all that delights His heart.

On the negative side:

‘Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture.’

Allow Holy Spirit to totally reform how we think.

And we will be empowered to discern God’s will.

The exercise is for us to walk in surrender; to live a holy life, we experience all that delights His heart. Every day we choose to refuse to imitate the culture's ideals and opinions. Every day we choose to allow Holy Spirit to reform our thinking. And every day we are empowered to discern God's will.



## Day 4: Generosity

Reading: Matthew 6:3; 2 Corinthians 8:7 (The Voice)

*3 When you give to the needy, do it in secret—even your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing.*

*7 Just as you are rich in everything—in faith and speech, in knowledge and all sincerity, and in the love we have shown among you[a]—now I ask you to invest richly in this gracious work too.*

The Passion Translation counts 19 occurrences of the word ‘generosity’ in the New Testament (and a bunch more ‘generous’, ‘generously’, etc.).

We read a study out of University of Michigan that found that over long periods of time, married couples grow to look increasingly like each other. And the happier they are as a couple, the more likely they will increase physical similarity (<https://www.livescience.com/8384-couples-start.html>). So, as we follow Jesus, it is only (super)natural that we grow more and more like Him. It’s kind of the point!

And we’ve learned as we read the Bible that God is a generous God. There are scores of verses scattered throughout Scripture that underline this divine characteristic (google for yourself) but here’s one – Matthew 7:11 (TPT): *“If you, imperfect as you are, know how to lovingly take care of your children and give them what’s best, how much more ready is your heavenly Father to give wonderful gifts to those who ask.”*

One of the dangers with religion is that we, with good intentions, try to generate side-effects and major on secondary results. Generosity is important. And so sometimes we buckle down and intentionally look for ways to be generous. And that’s not a bad thing. But if you add generosity to a shopping list of Christian characteristics (veteran Christians will riff on things like ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’), it gets lost, we lose focus, then energy, and then motivation (that’s one of the big problems of religion, but that’s for another time).

Remember the study above – couples that spend a long time together and are happy grow more alike. So, as you and Jesus are companions over a long period of time, and if you are happy together (implies that your priorities are aligned with His), then you grow more and more like Him. In Christian circles we call that being ‘Christ-like’.

And one of the outflows of being Christ-like is that you are generous as Jesus is generous. The focus isn’t so much on being generous as it is on being close to Jesus. And then generosity will emerge as a character-trait.

Does that make sense? Then let’s stay close to Jesus.

## Day 5: Mission

Readings: Matthew 28:18-20 (The Voice)

*18 Jesus came forward and addressed His beloved disciples.*

*Jesus: I am here speaking with all the authority of God, who has commanded Me to give you this commission:*

*19 Go out and make disciples in all the nations. Ceremonially wash them through baptism in the name of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

*20 Then disciple them. Form them in the practices and postures that I have taught you, and show them how to follow the commands I have laid down for you. And I will be with you, day after day, to the end of the age.*

The third vow of Infinitum is mission. And the most famous expression of our mission in Scripture is known as the Great Commission that we've quoted here. Jesus is sending His disciples out with a mission. Those of us who are His disciples today receive the same commission: make disciples of all nations.

That's overwhelming for most of us. I mean, 'all nations'! Come on.

So, let's simplify. We'll drop the last half of that statement for a few moments...

Make disciples.

Does that sound more feasible? Sure. Do you know what's even more manageable?

Make disciple.

Singular. Start with one. If you are a parent, you might want to start with your child. See – that's not unrealistic! If you're not, ask the Lord, and look around for someone who isn't quite as far advanced in following Jesus, and consider that person.

Two things:

First, you want to be a disciple yourself. It comes from a Greek word that means 'learner' and in practice in the Biblical world it connoted a committed follower. Today you might think of an apprentice, who is vocationally devoted to learning from an expert to become like the expert. We apprentice with Jesus to become like Him. And there is also an assimilation process happening, as we assimilate Jesus (we take Him in and fully understand Him) and we are assimilated into His life.

Second, how does it look? There are lots of ways it can look. The framework we've used at Infinitum is Infinitum: One vision – follow Jesus; Two virtues – loving God, loving others; Three vows – surrender, generosity, and mission. And we don't do this thing solo – we engage in this way of life with someone else or a few others in what we call a hub. Our rhythm goes with three Cs:

Connect daily – with God;  
Converse weekly – with your hubmates (typically an hour meeting);  
Challenge monthly – with Infinitum participants globally (optional).

And once you make one disciple, your disciple will make one, and you can make another, and so on. Then you are making disciples, plural.

The 'all nations' part? Well, if you live in a large urban area, it could be that you can disciple people from lots of nations from the comfort of your own home. And then go from there...