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Editorial Introduction

by Major Stephen Court, editor

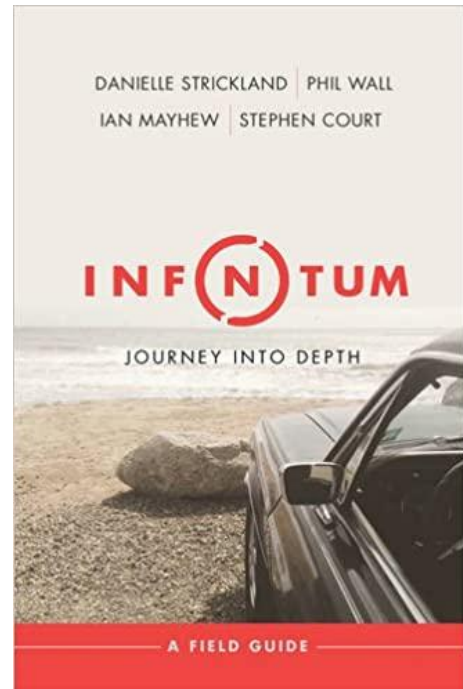
Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. I trust the battle progresses well on your front.

Welcome to JAC133, the Infitum: Journey Into Depth Issue!

This is a special 'ebook' edition of JAC. There is even a cover and amazon link: [Infitum:Journey into Depth: Amazon.co.uk: Danielle Strickland, Phil Wall, Ian Mayhew, Stephen Court: 9780857218216: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Danielle-Strickland-Phil-Wall-Ian-Mayhew-Stephen-Court-9780857218216-Books/dp/B000000000) (good cover, eh!)! But this is the only place to find the actual contents of that book!

Eminent missiologist Alan Hirsch favours us with the foreword, a play on words called 'Add' Infitum.

The rest of the contents blend conversation transcription and commentary among four Salvationists who made up the rule of life Infitum: Danielle Strickland, Phil Wall, Ian Mayhew, and Stephen Court.



For those who are not acquainted with Infitum, you'll get to know it well in JAC133. Here's some context...

Launched at the Blind Beggar pub in the East End of London (also the spiritual birthplace of The Salvation Army) during the Boundless International Congress of 2015, Infitum (which, from Latin, can be translated 'boundless') has burgeoned to become an uncommon spiritual influence in many people's lives. More than 40,000 people in more than 40 countries are practising Infitum.

Subscriptions to Infitum reading plans on YouVersion Bible App are into six digits. You can participate with your friends, here: [Infitum | YouVersion Search | The Bible App](https://www.youversion.com/infitum). People in more than 130 countries have downloaded the free Infitum App (as we encourage you to do, too). Tens of thousands use the InfitumLife.com website, and many engage with Infitum podcasts and videos (as we encourage you to do).

Infitum can help you and your friends centre Salvation Life on Jesus in your discipleship. Discipling is a process of assimilating our lives to the Kingdom of God and assimilating Jesus into our lives. Assimilation includes 'absorbing' and 'integrating' Jesus into our priorities and schedules and identities and, over time, coming to 'resemble' more closely the Lord Jesus Christ. (quotation words are derived from

dictionary definitions of various forms of the word assimilate). Infinitum can scaffold this whole process.

Thanks to the contributors. May the content be applied deeply and widely for God's greater glory.

Foreword: 'Add' Infinitum

By Alan Hirsch

Whose disciple are you? We are all born into a culture that gets to shape us—in fact, disciple us—from the time of birth to death.

The overwhelming economic and social environment in which we are raised in the West profoundly impacts us all. The truth is that Western culture at the dawn of the twenty-first century is a particularly potent culture because of the omnipresent pervasiveness of media and the predominant role of market forces (with associated money and consumption) in our lives. We have simply to assume that the prevalent values and perspectives of the culture are being downloaded into each one of us from an early age; some of them are clearly good, some of them not so much.

The problem with these cultural ideas is that we generally can't "see" them. Culture is invisible to those immersed in it; it's like asking the proverbial fish to define water. We assume its rightness until we are confronted with an alternative vision of reality that calls it into question. It takes a fair bit of self-reflection, and I would say a very proactive, untamed discipleship in the Way of Jesus, to discern the darker sides of the culture. This is why the kingdom of God can only be experienced as a conversion from one system (kingdom) into another (e.g., Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:9).

The point of this unnerving piece of information is that we simply have to be more aware of our own largely middle-class, and profoundly consumerist, biases if we are going to be effective missional agents in our time. Once again, it's not that being middle-class is wrong per se; it's just that it has some values that are consistent with the kingdom of God, but make no mistake, it has others that work to undermine Jesus' mission and purpose in the world.

The founders of Infinitum have recognized first-hand these challenges and have been journeying down this path for a while now. They've plunged into a proactive way of life – the Way of Jesus. And they've crafted a simple rule that provokes continual self-reflection and reflection within the context of what I call *communitas*. So important is the communal aspect of Infinitum that you cannot join or participate by yourself. You must engage with other(s) who, with you, ultimately form an Infinitum hub.

The church in the West has largely forgotten the art of disciple making and has largely reduced it to an intellectual assimilation of theological ideas. As a result, we have a rather anemic cultural Christianity highly susceptible to the lures of consumerism. This in turn works directly against a true following of Jesus. In our desire to be seeker-friendly and attractational, we have largely abandoned the vigorous kind of discipleship that characterized early Christianity and every significant Jesus movement since.

Infinitum – a Latin spin on the 'boundless' salvation God offers – acts as a refreshing reminder of what has been forgotten, an 'expansive' against reductive tendencies, a vigorous bulwark against corrosive and invasive cultural influence.

It supplies a supple framework that reinforces your good intentions and fortifies your missional discipleship. Essentially, this involves the irreplaceable and lifelong task of becoming like Jesus by embodying His message. This is perhaps where many of our efforts fail. Disciple making is an irreplaceable core task of the church and needs to be structured into every church's basic formula. And Infinitum can effectively scaffold the accountability and discipleship elements of the mDNA template of your missional community.

The decision to 'Add Infinitum', as the title suggests, will help ensure that you can answer our lead query – 'Whose disciple are you?' – with the glorious affirmation, 'Jesus is Lord! Jesus is my Lord! Jesus is our Lord!'

Introduction: Why Infinitum?

We are convinced that Christianity is not merely a 'personal relationship with Christ', but that it is meant to be lived out in community. Appropriately, this book is not the product of a 'solo artist'. As we kick things off, you might be interested in meeting the members of the band.

Phil: My name is Phil Wall and I've been a follower of Jesus now for 37 years and I spend my life these days doing two things primarily. Number 1- I run a business, I am a business psychologist by trade and spend most of my working life, which about 70% of my actual time, coaching leaders and organisations in the financial services and retail services, media industry, and sport. The other part of my life is raising money for a charity called We See Hope that Wendy, my wife, and I were privileged to be involved in starting back in 2000.

Danielle: I'm Danielle. I'm involved in some initiatives such as Amplified Peace, Brave Global, Women's Speakers Collective, and IMBY. I'm married to Stephen and am the mother of three amazing boys. I'm a fan of God's kingdom come, I've been a follower of Jesus for more than 25 years. And I've helped start Infinitum, this journey into depth.

Ian: My name is Ian Mayhew and I am father of three teenage boys, and married to Ruth, a nurse. I am a support worker for people with learning disabilities. I enjoy watching my lads play sport and getting out on my own bike. I've attempted DIY projects with mixed results!

Ruth and I are part of a small Salvation Army congregation in the north of England.

Stephen: Steve Court, here, and, with this crew, I carry the luggage, mostly. I'm married to Danielle and father of three sensational sons. I submitted my life to Jesus when I was six years old at a Salvation Army camp. More recently, I've been taken with the concept of 'salvation life' and the challenge to see it experienced by 7.8+ billion people. And I'm anticipating that Infinitum will help advance the cause.

Phil: Just to try and give you a little bit of background to understand where this came from, there's a number of conversations that took place over a year or a year and a half period between the four of us, who are the founding members, if you like, of this community. We were noticing a number of things as we travelled around the world and Danielle and I particularly have the privilege of travel, and get to see the church at work in all sorts of different kinds of contexts. And there are a number of things that became evident to us.

Number one, there was this 'aching journey' of a framework, a means to go much, much deeper in terms of our relation with Jesus. Activism is important, and we're all pretty militant activists, but actually, our perception is, as we talk together and listen to some of the people we respected most around the world, that the Church's greatest need was not more activities, or more mission, or more compassion but actually greater depth.

Because once people are deep into what it means to be a follower of Jesus then out of that depth flows all of those other things and they flow out not as duty or as a burden or as a responsibility. And they just flow out of a life of thankfulness to Jesus for the amazing things He's done in our lives, and the calling He's put upon our lives.

So, first, we kept bumping into people who live this consumptive version of Christianity, that people like me, people like Danielle, we've helped to kind of create, are saying, "that's not enough; I want something deeper."

The second thing, for lots of people in my world, in the business world, was this: "you know, I love going to church, I love going on a Sunday, but I need a framework of thinking about my faith and understanding my faith and applying my faith that works Monday morning to Friday evening in the workplace."

The frontline in terms of mission in the world is not Sunday morning between 10.30 and 12.00, the front line is Monday morning and the school day or lunchtime in the office of university or whatever community you spend the bulk of your time in; that's the frontline.

We also wanted something that we felt like in this kind of increasingly fragmented culture of ours would be a unifying force and give people something they could gather round together as part of community that could make sense of the militant deep faith in that context.

Stephen: I've actually moved away from 90 minutes on a Sunday morning staring at the bald spot of the guy in front of me followed by 10 minutes of sports and weather talk nursing a warm(ish) coffee as the standard of the normal Christian life, looking to fill the other minutes of the week with (at least) as much intention to 'trust and obey'.

Ian: Certainly Sunday can re-charge, reinvigorate, re-vision things spiritual for us, for the real front lines stuff you refer to, Phil. There often seems to be a lack of understanding from the pulpit about the real demands, dilemmas, and discussions that exist in the workplace.

So, we understand the "gather and scatter" model - but the HUB proves to be a place where Sunday's "preach" is interpreted into actual "practice".

Stephen: Not only can Sunday's message be interpreted there, but also, Monday's disappointment, Tuesday's confrontation, Wednesday's challenge, Thursday's surprise, Friday's shock, and Saturday's opportunity...

Phil: It's really interesting thinking about the lives that people are leading these days. Somebody described Starbucks as a 'lifestyle in a cup', because life is changing, Christian faith and discipleship particularly has been based around a geographic parish system, where, of course, these days, particularly for urbanites like us life is on the move - it's frenetic, it's eclectic, it's really diverse, it's social and obviously it's increasingly digital, so we tried to find a way to articulate something which might meet

the need of people who live that kind of life and really want to live their lives with deep intent in that environment.

A third thing is a gathering point; to have something that was rich and deep, that was community building and community focused, and that people could gather round and say I'm actually on a journey with this community of people and together we're going to see God change the world in us and through us.

It was those conversations that we began to have.

Danielle: For me one of the things I kept finding really disconcerting was just the amount of leaders and a lot of amazingly talented people who had started out on the journey that were no longer on it.

Ian: I have had periods of my life when I wondered whether, "I wanted to be on the journey". I have seen both guys I grew up with and those whose books and sermons that inspired me duck out from it all.

More subtly, I have seen friends who are still on the Christian journey but don't seem to want to have anyone close speak into their lives.

Is it too controversial to say - I don't know what's worse?!

Stephen: Ouch. That might be a bit too controversial to say. But, look, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5, wasn't beyond crossing that line when it came to discipline within the Body of Christ. And I recently heard Alan Hirsch at a Community In Mission conference quote William Temple this way:

"If your conception of God is radically false then the more devout you are the worse it will be for you. You are opening your soul to be moulded by something else. You had much better be an atheist." - William Temple

So, you have some good company, Ian.

Danielle: And I was asking some really hard questions after being on the journey this long time for myself, thinking about - am I going deeper? Or is this some experience that I once had that I'm just riding the fumes of that, or is this fresh for me every day, or is this actually working for me every day? Am I actually following Jesus? Or is this just a bumper sticker I ascribe to and then just get on with my life? There were these sorts of questions of depth in my own life and in people that I really admired and aspired to be more like that I found out weren't really that deep after all.

Another factor? - The amount of leaders I talk to that have no safe places with regular, deep, spiritual conversations. I would talk to people about this Infinitum thing and meeting with somebody and talking through, 'this is what's on my mind this week or this is a temptation I'm struggling with now in my life', and leaders will just look at me with

these wide eyes saying 'what? I have no one I would ever say that to out loud.' And I realised there were so many, especially Christian leaders, because we've bought into this weird idea that they're perfect, and we forgot they're humans and that we're following Jesus together - that this is practice and there's going to be seasons and different things that come and go on our lives.

Stephen: it's understandable. For centuries, we made 'saints' to esteem. The Pope famously promoted Mother Teresa to sainthood. And, look, I see the benefits of having such examples to inspire us. We've just got to make sure honesty – both subjectively and objectively – is in play here. Let's not blow them out of reality, and let's try to ensure we are getting an accurate picture of who they really are. There's a challenge in there not to water down biblical expectations and opportunities because we don't want to exaggerate someone's personal character.

Danielle: So many people just don't have places of intent where they can share that journey with other people, so I just realised the loneliness of leadership. I think for me - I've been really transient in my life, and that's just the nature of my job and what I do - I move and so relationships are hard to sustain, and then also this vacuum in our current culture of depth or relationships. So I have movie buddies or I have people I catch up with for coffee, and we talk about the details of raising kids and things like that. But actually getting to places of 'How's your walk with Jesus', what does a spiritual conversation even look like and how do you hold one and have it without everyone feeling awkward and weird about it. That's something we discovered, a deep need for a culture of cultivating spiritual relationships.

Phil: Right. There're two things actually during those formative years, two things said by two friends of mine, women at the church that I attend. One is my friend Claire.

Claire I've known for many years. She's now just 40 and has two fantastic young boys, very talented woman, very talented musician, and in the days when I was working full time for the church we would travel all over the place with a group of people and she would sing and we would speak and preach - it was just amazing and a full-on, 'in your face' dedication to Jesus.

She gave a really candid and really fresh and helpful testimony and couple of years ago where she used this phrase which really stuck with my she said, 'I look back to those days and think where have they gone, here I am now running a business, busy, busy, busy - I've got two boys that are always all over the place and I realise that what I have now is a middle-aged faith.' And by that she meant something that's safe something that's pretty bland, something that's conservative, something that she spends most of her time just sustaining and not putting herself under too much pressure and it's just pretty vanilla.

I've thought about that quite a lot and that's exactly the kind of thing I have experienced as an older man in terms of a nominal faith. There was another conversation I had from

another friend of mine at my church who is quite a bit older, June, or 'Sister June', as we like to call her.

June cared for her husband for over 20 years; he'd suffered a very severe stroke and she cared for him 24/7, every single day until he died a few years ago. I was asked to do the funeral - we didn't have full-time leaders at that time - and I went round the week after to see. I was told what pastoral types do and that's what's most natural. But I went to see her after the funeral and said, 'how are you doing?', and she said two things to me that's struck me.

She said, 'well I'm feeling a little bit guilty because I feel relieved that Dave's gone, I miss him, I'm grieving but...' and I said, 'June you have nothing to worry about you have honoured your husband so don't worry about that' and she said, 'also I've been praying' and I said, 'what have you been praying about?', and she said 'well this last week I've been praying Lord, what is the mission You now have for me?'

June is 88 years of age and June is still accelerating in faith, and when I grow up I want to be like June. Personally, on a deeply personal level, as a 57 year-old man with three grown up kids I want to make sure my experience on a day-to-day basis is something that's taking a trajectory to where June is going because when I grow up I want to be just like her.

Danielle: That's fantastic. We also have the focus that we're part of the founding team - we're all disciplers, we've run mission schools, we've run training centres, we've spoken and done workshops, and we train leaders and we've started training leaders of leaders. We got our heads together and shared what the best practices were and I remember having one conversation where we said out of all the things we've done, what are we most proud of and actually the things we are most proud of are the people that follow Jesus, the disciples that we made.

We realised if we could boil everything right down to the most essential part of all of the things we do, even though we're busy and started programmes and mission groups and on and on, we realised that the most important investment we made in the kingdom of God is to make disciples.

Stephen: Indeed. Not only is it the most important investment, it is the essential mission. We like to call 2 Timothy 2:2 the Multiplication Mandate:

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (NIV).

Paul is exemplifying the strategy for winning the world for Jesus. It is not pure evangelism but is actually based in multiplying discipleship.

There are three generations of disciples in that one verse: Paul and Timothy, Timothy and reliable people, and reliable people and others. And as we seriously replicate

ourselves in the lives of others, we multiply the potential evangelistic impact of our warfighting.

What jumps out at me are the words 'reliable' and 'qualified'. And accountability is crucial to identifying and developing those characteristics through 'entrusting' and 'teaching'.

Danielle: We decided that was worth investing in so we took the best of what we've learnt, the most intense things that we tried, and we aimed to come up with the best model that we ourselves followed - so that it was something authentic and deep for our own lives. If we knew that it worked for us, then we just thought what if we shared this? What if we said this is the best, we've been doing this 25 years, intentionally trying, getting paid, sometimes, we were hired to do this, we're consultants to get other people to do this. What if we just took the best of what we know and made it available. This is the best investment of our resources, our time, our energies, our history, out of all the things we've learnt, this matters the most.

Chapter 1: What is Infitum?

What is Infitum? Is it a club? An organization? A cult? A new denomination?

None of those. Neither is it a 'programme' in the sense of enrolling in a 12-week Bible study, nor a curriculum to be absorbed, nor a course to take, nor a box to 'tick', nor a burden to buckle under, nor an 'add-on' to your busy schedule.

It's not a threat to your local Christian community, to your friendship network, to your existing ecclesiastical inclinations and commitments. (it might be a threat to your status quo, though, and maybe to your priorities, depending, of course...). The point is, it isn't competition.

It's help.

It's a spiritual harness.

It's a community of relationships, a community of communities of folk clustered in what we call hubs who have expressed that they find this way of life helpful in supporting them live with deep intent.

There's no organisational chart, no hierarchy. This small group of us that have nursed this dream into being is growing because it's an iterative thing - tens of thousands of people are on this journey, and some are feeding their experience back to us, informing and shaping both definition and application.

The locus of accountability is not London or Los Angeles - the locus of accountability is in your hub. Geographically that might be your front room, your café, on the other side of the screen, wherever it is that you meet. That is the ultimate place of accountability. It's where you choose to put yourself under the accountability of your brother(s) or sister(s) and they choose to posture themselves similarly. Your hub becomes the locus of authentic accountability.

Essentially, it is a global community of believers participating in a shared rule of life – seeking to maximise our individual potential and shared impact for the Kingdom of God. It weaves intentional discipleship and mission into the everyday rhythms of life, fostering a counter-cultural movement of pilgrims following Jesus in the context He has deployed us. Accountability is micro-local.

But not only hyper-local. There are all kinds of value in networking trans-locally. The genesis of Infitum is trans-Atlantic! So we're also cultivating a global accountability within Infitum. So, rather than an epi-centre of authority and accountability and resourcing, we're crowd-sourcing it. Mutual accountability opens opportunities for sharing challenges and innovations, opportunities and 'darings-do'. So, for example, from early on, weekly cell-talk content from our friends in Vancouver Canada has

enriched the Infinitum culture. Opportunities on the ground in Burkina Faso led to the translation of French resources. And so on.

We worked on creating a feedback mechanism, and watched it grow beyond the mechanical into a complex conversation. Feedback. In eighteen directions... What is working? What isn't? Again, in every direction...

That's one of the reasons you have to register at Infinitumlife.com. Join the conversation. And of course, you are IN Infinitum as and only as you are practising the way of life in a hub.

One interesting thing to learn is what you do with your time. The apostle Paul, talking about the people of God, applies the metaphor of body with hands and feet and... Who is meeting in your hub? How do those conversations go? What are your schedules like? What gets priority in your lives? And so on.

And as the Infinitum family grows, more and more answers will be available for questions you have. And those answers might come from Australia or Denmark or some 'far-off' place...

In too many experiences, we never get to ask these deeper questions in our local Christian communities. They never come up.

Did they attend on Sunday?

Did they tithe?

Do they fill an internal role?

Beyond that, most of our lives, including some really important parts, are unknown to the folk who join us on Sundays. They don't know where we invest the lion share of our passion and time and resource and energy. How much, then, do they know 'us'?

Infinitum can help. We ask questions! What is Jesus doing in your life? How is He challenging, healing, helping, empowering you? And so on.

On the website we are asking HUBs to let us know their professions. Responses are developing fascinating insight into where people are trying to live as a surrendered disciples with love, generosity, and mission.

Nick Coke, a Salvation Army leader in England, introduced us to this amazing video called 'How wolves change rivers'. The science is not universally accepted but it makes this powerful point for the people of God:

Being present, just doing what you do naturally, can change things.

I (Phil) write this at the heart of the finance district of Singapore and as I look around at all the different brands - these giants of commerce - I am reminded that not too long

ago, large swaths of the people of God said, "This is now a no-go area for religious types."

Up until the Pietist and Puritan movements, the Christians had typically been at the heart of all that was best in commerce, education, creativity, music, art, literature, government, etc.. Yet, as a result of these movements, many amongst the people of God 'withdrew' from the world, fearing they may get contaminated, and, instead, focused all their energies on personal piety and purity of association, elevating Christian ministry within the body to unhealthy heights. The net result of such a shift, barring a few glorious exceptions, is the people of God withdrawn from 'the world' and 'the world' often bereft of the people of God. Then we complain why so little is aligned with the things the people of faith believe.

This is not a new religious story, as Judaism had walked a similar path. Somehow, the original message to Abraham, from whom God was going to raise a nation that would be a light unto the Gentile world, got lost, and Israel quickly became an isolationist race/sect believing that the blessing and choosing of God was about them rather than about 'others'.

Psalm 137 shows clearly the confusion that emerged – "How can we sing the songs of the Lord in an alien land?" (v.4).

Of course, that's exactly the point, the songs of the Lord are absolutely to be sung in alien lands! The fact the question was asked demonstrates how far from their calling they had wandered.

Jesus, in His famed sermon on the mount, sought to bring clarity and a fresh edge to this message.

"You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt preserves, and halts rotting. It enriches flavor. Light illuminates and, thus, reveals things hidden, and offers fresh perspective. Light shows the way.

As the people of God increased in numbers and dispersed throughout all the world, this is exactly what we did - salting and lighting communities, cultures, relationships, belief systems... and by doing so, changing the known world.

Wolves, when present, change rivers; Believers, when present, change cultures -- we change the dialogue, the tone, the atmosphere, the direction, and more. Far from withdrawing from 'the world' we should be marching on our knees into it, once again embedding ourselves in those realms of influence and dominance, as well as margins of fragility and lack.

As those committed to a vow of mission, one of the questions we should repeatedly address is, "how do we engage in the world?"

How do we exert influence right at the heart of our societies, ‘salting and lighting’ as we go? Wolves howl and kill; followers of Jesus love and pray – it’s time to change a few rivers!

One of the prompts in the early discussions that generated *Infinitem* was an old dream of General William Booth in The Salvation Army of a band called the Companions of the Cross of Christ. This hardcore crew exhibiting a completely unencumbered and divinely-dependent lifestyle fascinates. Its extreme regime was one template in our earliest conversations between the four of us. As you’ll see in the pages to follow, we end up being inspired more by the spirit of Companions than by the specifics, and we’ve come up something more broadly accessible to people in different stages and walks of life.

And not to give away the ending, but we ended up distilling the practices of the Companions of the Cross, and we experimented with different disciplines and combinations of habits, looking to find a simple and profound way of living.

We asked ourselves, ‘what does the best look like?’

We played for a while with the idea of ‘what is a religious order?’

We didn’t want to start an organization. We were not looking to generate a threat to anyone, nor were we aiming to add more burden to people’s lives.

We merely wanted something to help people journey with deep intent.

Our brainstorming led to best practice – now and through history. We looked at some of the rhythms and habits embedded in peoples’ lives that really change their world.

And we’ve come up with a framework facilitating and to some extent enabling motivated people to live life with (progressively) deep intent.

Yes, it’s a rule of life. But since we’re not all fond of rules, we lean more to the phrase ‘way of life’.

We’ve bandied about different descriptors, some more helpful than others. What is more important than analogy is efficacy, and early results are demonstrating significant usefulness in assisting people live the life of Jesus with deep intent.

Making Up *Infinitem*

One definition of the Latin word ‘*Infinitem*’ is ‘boundless’. ‘Boundless’ is a trigger word for the four of us, having been influenced to varying degrees by William Booth and his song about a deep ocean of love called “Boundless Salvation”:

1.
O boundless salvation! deep ocean of love,
O fulness of mercy, Christ brought from above.
The whole world redeeming, so rich and so free,
Now flowing for all men, come, roll over me!

2.
My sins they are many, their stains are so deep.
And bitter the tears of remorse that I weep;
But useless is weeping; thou great crimson sea,
Thy waters can cleanse me, come, roll over me

3.
My tempers are fitful, my passions are strong,
They bind my poor soul and they force me to wrong;
Beneath thy blest billows deliverance I see,
O come, mighty ocean, and roll over me!

4.
Now tossed with temptation, then haunted with fears,
My life has been joyless and useless for years;
I feel something better most surely would be
If once thy pure waters would roll over me.

5.
O ocean of mercy, oft longing I've stood
On the brink of thy wonderful, life-giving flood!
Once more I have reached this soul-cleansing sea,
I will not go back till it rolls over me.

6.
The tide is now flowing, I'm touching the wave,
I hear the loud call of the mighty to save;
My faith's growing bolder, delivered I'll be;
I plunge 'neath the waters, they roll over me.

7.
And now, hallelujah! the rest of my days
Shall gladly be spent in promoting his praise
Who opened his bosom to pour out this sea
Of boundless salvation for you and for me.
William Booth (1829-1912)

We're looking for Infinitum to give expression to the song's captivating vision of extravagant love and transformation around the world.

But the word 'Infinitum' is also foreign to us – none of us being fluent in Latin – and so we inclined to something 'other', different enough in most languages that it could serve as a unifier transcending language barriers. Already, there are Infinitum resources available in a few languages and hubs active in several different cultures. It's been a strategic choice.

Chapter 2: How it works

One Vision: follow Jesus.

Look, that sounds VERY Sunday school, but ultimately that's the point and if it ever doesn't become the point then you are off track. If you're ever part of an organisation or religious system that's not actually about following Jesus then we just think we've missed it, so this is always going to be about following Jesus.

Two Virtues: loving God, loving others.

The two virtues define what it means to follow Jesus; love and love. That is, love for God and love for others. Of course, we didn't make them up:

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' (Matthew 22:37-40. NIV)

Again, simple. Biblical. Laser-sharp focus on the Lord Jesus and His priorities.

And, again, not much beyond the stereotypical Sunday School answers and approach to the Christian life. But it is what in America might be dismissed as 'Mom, the Flag, and Apple Pie' – so mundanely conventional wisdom that it means nothing and provokes no change in lifestyle. 'Let's love, love, love!'

But how do you operationalize following Jesus and loving God and loving others? To answer that question we added to the One Vision and the Two Virtues, Three Vows.

Three Vows: Surrender, Generosity, Mission

Surrender is about a life surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ;

Generosity depicts open-handed living in a close fist ed culture;

Mission lives on purpose – God's purpose for us – and features inclusivity at the margins, with outcast and poor people. We think that's what it actually looks like in 'real life' to follow Jesus and to make love the aim of our lives.

Hubs

One of the things we realised we need to challenge in our society is this addiction to individualism. It's a relatively new cultural and philosophical development, historically. We noticed in our own struggles and in those of others a symptom of the addiction called isolation. And a number of people we've encountered at conferences and other events - big platform preachers and big platform worshippers leaders – were suffering

from the same symptom. And it manifest in some of them in their marriages, in others more blatantly in spirituality and associated lifestyle choices. Lack of accountability is an obvious consequence of isolation.

To put it another way, these kinds of people are just not running the race anymore. They're not following Jesus, or they're not married to the same person that they were married to at that point. They are just out of the race.

That's one of the biggest indictments – 'you're out of the race.' Even Paul the apostle was concerned about being disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27). His preventative measures included some extreme disciplines that might make Infinitum seem very palatable in comparison!

We want things to be different.

Infinitum will help. It is developed around the concept of hubs. Hubs are not your stereotypical small groups. Normally, small groups / house churches / cell groups / Bible studies / etc. are open groups intended to provide the context for people to encounter the Gospel, the Kingdom, Christian community, and more. That's great.

And in a healthy condition, this kind of small group will complement hubs. But hubs are not open. They are closed groups that provide the environment for discipleship and accountability. You see how they complement each other. One without the other is lacking...

So, to clarify, we're not at all here to bury small groups. We want them. We need them. God will be using them toward fulfilling the great commission. But as they stand, there is no guaranteed provision for discipleship and accountability in these open groups.

Hubs are the exclusive means of participating in Infinitum life. You can't even register at infinitumlife.com on your own. I can't join it; only WE can join.

Even then, it isn't about membership; it's about partnership. Just today I had an exchange with the guys in one of my hubs. For various legitimate reasons we haven't met for a bit, so I contacted them: "hub is as hub does. And by that 'definition' our hub isn't! So I was thinking of starting a hub, you, you, and me... We can meet at..." (it ended up serving as an effective prompt to kick start the hub. The thing is, if my hub doesn't meet for an extended period of time, it's not a hub). Our point with Infinitum isn't getting names on a list. This is not about membership; it's about partnership.

Jesus' discourse with the disciples recounted in John 13 is illuminating. These are the final words, the final things He's going to be saying before He's taken away and crucified. It's the original 'Famous Last Words' lecture. And, of course, here are all these good Jewish boys that Jesus shocks with this amazing line... 'Behold I give you a new commandment'.

You can imagine the looks around the table at that point saying, 'You can't... we've got the ten commandments, we're good on that, we don't need another one.' He disagreed. Here it is: "Love one another." What's new about that? Well, Jesus added a clause, "As I have loved you" (John 13:34). And that, friends, is gigantic. But He didn't stop there! He went further, making it the public standard for identification with Jesus: "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35 NIV).

The interesting thing about the language both in English and in Greek is 'I' can't love one another; only 'we' can love one another. At the heart of Infinitum is that mutuality, that shared faith, and Christian faith is always a team sport. If it's not, it's not the Christian faith. So, it's in the context of hubs, in the communal environment of committed support and accountability and encouragement that the infinitum life is lived.

"'I' can't 'love one another!' Besides, there is too much love to go around – remember Paul in Ephesians 3 praying and promising, "...you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God" (The Message). This is overflowing, saturating love...

Some might characterize it as boundless.

Infinitum.

And we all understood this – the four of us - because as we shared how we were staying in the game and staying fresh with Jesus and receiving divine revelation, this spiritually accountable regular relationship was one of the secrets. And maybe this was the missing link for those who succumbed to the addiction to individualism, who suffered the consequences of isolation, who dropped out of the race. We figured, 'Why doesn't everyone do this?'

And, look, there is nothing new under the sun. John Wesley's system informs our perspective on this whole exercise. He had three levels of communal engagement:

bands – very similar to Infinitum hubs (different set framework, but also confidential, vulnerable, accountable);

classes – similar to many kinds of small groups and cell groups (though required attendance and the basic means of membership, as in pure cell-based Christian communities today); and,

societies – similar to congregations today (different, though, in that societies were composed only of all the class members).

And there are all kinds of iterations on this proven model. We've experienced and experimented with some of them over the years, both existing systems and also innovated models.

The band members used to ask these four questions of each other:

What known sins have you committed since the last meeting?

What temptations have you met with?

How were you delivered?

What have you thought, said, or done which may or may not be sin?

Of course, these are different sets of questions out there today (we're partial to Wesley's Holy Club questions, Salvation Army Soldier 'Test for Self-Examination', and Richard Foster's probing on issues of money, sex, and power).

Intuitively we understood that this kind of 'rule of life', this way of life is the solution to the addiction to individualism. But it hasn't been a simple process in implementing it, for reasons that were not immediately obvious.

Contemporary culture is screaming out for Infinitum. The problem is this: Not only do people lack this kind of lifestyle, they lack the vocabulary and experience to understand it. "People not only don't do this but they don't know how to do this." So, even the starting point – get a hub – proves a challenge for many, who ask questions like, 'how do you find that person?' and, 'What does it look like?' and, 'How do I have a conversation?'

So we've developed resources breaking down each step very simply, so that you can follow along, as is helpful, to engage in Infinitum life (check infinitumlife.com or the Infinitum app for details).

Too many people don't even know what it is to have a connection that is spiritual, that is deep, that is relational, that is mutual, so it's not just about 'getting' or a 'programme' or a set time, but it's actually about a journey together.

... which just seems ludicrous because, come on, 'Really? You need instructions about having a hub conversation?'

But people don't know how to do it; they haven't done it before and this creates a shallowness in Christian experience, or an isolation which, of course, we know leads to death because we need to know how to love each other. Those of you who are reading and thinking how do I do this, what you need to do, if you are interested in trying this out, is to find somebody and say, 'will you be in a hub with me? Do you want to follow Jesus together? Do you want to give this a try?' and then register your hub and begin to practise the vows. Begin to put them into daily practice.

The Rhythm of Life

There is a rhythm to this rule, and the thing about Infinitum that throws some people off is that the only way to be 'in' is to practise it. It's not a curriculum to digest, a course to master, a formula to memorise and implement, a skill to refine...

We connect daily with God,
converse weekly with our hub, and
conference monthly with the greater Infinitum community.

Connect Daily - people we look up to are those who start the day with an intentionality - for those pursuing Infinitum we wanted them to literally consider a "wake-up" prayer: asking Jesus for His help to follow Him authentically, pursue love and live a surrendered, generous and missional life.

Conversation Weekly - this involves your HUB. Again, it's a guideline but we felt that if you wanted to have an intensity and intentionality to your walk with Jesus then being in touch with the others in your HUB on a weekly basis would be more than profitable.

Conference Monthly - we wanted to find a way in which HUBs could feel that they were connected in some way with the rest of the global Infinitum community. Stage one featured webinars. We've more recently moved into next stages (See below).

Connect Daily

For the daily bit with God, we've come up with a daily prayer with a hand posture that I use every day that has been so powerfully great in my personal life with Jesus. You might love them, too. We call these the 'Three Hand Icons' (check out InfinitumLife.com and the Infinitum app for the graphics): surrender; generosity; mission.

We're not imposing the content of your daily devotional exercises (though, I guess, we're resourcing them). Don't feel constrained to throw out your effective spiritual habits to align yourselves with this movement. But try the rhythm... (this is enhanced by the daily inspirations and challenges that you get on the app).

Conversation weekly

The daily connection with God is accompanied by a weekly conversation with a hub. That conversation is around primarily spiritual relationship and accountability - where you allow each other to ask each other questions about the vows. We definitely resource this, with different sets of questions you can choose from each week to keep things fresh.

Conference monthly

So, connect daily with God, converse weekly with hub, and conference monthly with the global community. We're developing new ways of the global community conferencing. Over the past six years, we've had variations on a number of themes:

a/ an Infinitum Day (12th of each month - to connect us to Romans 12 as our founding chapter) where we post prayers and info;

b/ a monthly Podcast - which acts as a kind of info and resourcing point;

c/ physical gatherings - where we invite those pursuing Infinitum to meet regionally or nationally;

d/ monthly challenge- hubs from around the world share a challenge for the rest of the hubs to take up;

e/ monthly prayer day online.

Chapter 3: One Vision: Follow Jesus

There are particular reasons why Infinitum is so important. The first is the part of this that is founded in the tradition of the early fathers, the monastics, and those various different movements. It's extraordinary that in the development of the concept of spiritual disciplines, these folks valued body posture and food – the physical. There grew a united liturgy of body, mind and spirit, together. What makes it even more amazing is that our emerging understanding with neuro-scanners emphasizes the significance of things such as the impact of upper body posture on state of mind.

One of the reasons why it's so helpful - in terms of the hand prayer icon positions and how we think about these disciplines wrapped up in the vows? This is how we shape and reshape the brain; it's how we change habit (which the monastics have been saying for generations). And now, through the neuroscience, we know exactly why this is. Powerful.

Another reason for us writing is that we're leaders, and one of the things about being a leader, whether it's in your community, cub scouts pack, school, or standing on a big stage, is very rarely does anyone look you in the eye and say, 'we need to talk about what I just saw in your life'. People might say this to each other, there may be letters of complaint to your lords and masters and probably deservedly so – (Phil admits) "I've had a lot of that in my life where people have been concerned about my mind-set, attitude or the language that I've used and they've written to call me to account for that. Hardly ever does that happen face to face where I genuinely feel accountable."

Phil continues, "When people are critical or push back, even though they may be exactly right and fully accurate in what they're saying in terms of harshness or over-intensity, because it comes from an external source, I'm not able to access it and so I get defensive." If we have no one in an accountability relationship WITH US, we are on a reckless course. It is crucial to find someone to ask, "Will you call me to account? Will you watch my life closely please to make sure what you hear me say I believe and want to do is genuine? Will you look me in the eye and on a regular basis and call me to account when it's different and encourage me when I'm struggling?" This kind of relationship is essential in leadership, where accountability's often non-existent."

But this problem isn't limited to Christians with a public profile. This phenomenon is happening in the context of a prefabricated online culture that on the subjective end facilitates the throwing of barbs and curses and criticisms – via Twitter, for example – correspondingly inuring us to the kinds of criticism to which we probably SHOULD listen, and on the objective end permits us to create and hide behind spiritual facades that thwart intimacy and accountability – on facebook, for example.

The hierarchical nature of traditional discipleship in Christian community is tiring. Do you know it? There's somebody over *these* folk and someone ahead of *that* person and so on until we get to whoever it is discipled Billy Graham! Any sense of mutuality in this

paradigm is either contrived or has developed outside the confines of (and likely preceding) the discipleship relationship.

There is admittedly value in such a construct – we all benefited from it ourselves – but it is suboptimal, being vulnerable to abuse and stacked against humility. And the apostle Paul doesn't even seem set on how the hierarchy is meant to look (not that he is confused, just that it is flexible). At one point he places apostles first and foremost (Ephesians 4) and elsewhere they appear to be last and least (1 Corinthians 4).

Our discipleship involved each of obeying Jesus. We each take risks and obey. Some of the Christian sisters and brothers who have challenged us the most are not (just) those who have been Christians longer than we have, or with more responsibility, or with a fruitful track record, or with a supernatural aura enveloping their every step (!). They have been and continue to be comparatively new in their salvation life, more inexperienced, and innocent in faith, pure in intention, tenacious in vibrancy, and so on. This kind of two-way influence is (super)natural with mutuality.

We can all learn to follow Jesus together. We're all on this road together. Kingdom of God hierarchy is pretty flat. Disciples share tips on following Jesus and encourage each other on! How refreshing is that! Remove the ladder and the man-made rungs that take one higher than another – separating two disciples, isolating at least one of them. They say that leadership is lonely. It's not meant to be. If you look through the New Testament, you see Jesus and His closest disciples, Paul and Barnabas (and Mark and Timothy and Luke and...). Isolated leadership isn't the Christian model. Isolated pilgrimage isn't, either. Mutual spiritual accountability empowers us to live like Jesus in this world.

Another practical thing is that we've got all of this knowledge and about the last thing most of us need, if we're honest, is another Bible study! We need more Bible-doing's, not Bible-learning's (see Bob Goff's LOVE DOES on this subject). Many of us are almost sick of knowledge without experience and what we really need is experience. We need to really work ourselves, not only in prayer and disciplines but also in faith – or 'acting on our convictions'; how does this thinking work itself out in our everyday lives?

The conventional skill-based discipleship paradigm has value, sure. But it is discounted by the knowledge we have at our finger-tips with the internet. It's not that we lack for curriculum because you can just Google whatever we want and find five Bible studies to use tomorrow. But many of us lack the practising of our faith. This might be why people are lined up at yoga studios, because there's a combination between your spirituality and your body – it's connected to real life. People are dying for this connection, and Infinitum has been super helpful with its practical nature.

Danielle explains, "One conversation I had with my hub partner was about my stagnant prayer life, and she was like, 'I've just started this thing called colouring prayer, I don't

know if you've heard of it?' "No... ('it sounds really silly,' – [I didn't say that!]) for Pete's sake! Colouring prayer!"

"The next week she bought me a colouring prayer journal with a bunch of pencil crayons and said 'you should give it a go', and because I knew I was meeting her the next week (and even though I thought it was ridiculous, and I'm not going to colour when I've got a lot of things to do, and I'm a busy and important person so this is ridiculous...), I did it. I tried it, and it was one of the most beautiful things. I was able to spend time with Jesus; my mind wasn't racing; my son came along to see what I'm doing and I said I'm colouring and praying and his eyes got really big and he said, 'You can do that?!' And he sat down beside me and he coloured and prayed and we ended up praying for our neighbours and we made this picture and took it over to their house and it turned into a beautiful family prayer time where we just were chilling with Jesus and doing something together. I'm so thankful that she mentioned it.

"We didn't have to create something from scratch. It was just a shared experience like 'try this!' Look, it's not going to be a tradition for the rest of my life, probably, but it sure spiced up my prayer life - made it really exciting that week. And it was something she was able to share with me. It's the practical nature of, 'this is how I'm doing it;, have you tried this?' It's really life giving.

Ian jumps into the fray: "One of the HUBs I am in is with my wife - which has been interesting. Ruth and I have more often than not been in separate accountability relationships. However, I have valued this one because it has meant that she has "heard" me make promises, intentions and confessions. That's not easy but our marriage has benefited from it.

"Another powerful discipleship tool for me has been meeting with a group of guys. We meet round a fire, in the same location, whatever the weather. Sun, snow, rain and wind. I love it. We cook (burn) meat, chat about an issue, pray and practise a good amount of silence. There have been memorable moments of confession, laughter, brutal honesty and renewed commitment to our wives, children, and communities."

A man called John Drain spoke in the early 90's at a conference with around 400 evangelists, people who were there as evangelists. One of the impressive take-aways was this:

'When we listen to what our world and society is saying to us about the church, for much of the 70s and 80s they said we're not relevant enough so we spent regular time trying to be relevant with our music and communications and, actually, when you look around at events like this, and the multimedia and quality, we do that well. We actually do it better than the vast majority of people in terms of our quality of communication and the relevance of communication.'

His challenge to us these days is, 'not that we're not relevant enough but, actually, when they look at our lives and how wrapped up we are with the rest of our society, it's that we're just not spiritual enough.'

Classic quote – Wow! “Why does the world ignore us? It’s not that we’re not relevant enough; it’s that we’re not spiritual enough.”

There’re spiritual rhythms and language and habits that are just not part of our lives; we’re very relevant but actually we’re just not very spiritual. In other words, we just don’t look very distinctive to anybody else. As we look at our lives and the people with whom we spend most of our time – friends, clients, customers – what is it about our habits, attitudes, bank accounts, time schedules, and mindsets distinguish our lives, not just our ‘inner lives’ but what flows out?

It offers another take on that mistaken paraphrase of the famous summary of that bit of Jesus’ prayer in John 17:15-16. The axiom is that Christians are meant to be in the world but not of it – which, using Drain’s terms, reads like irrelevant and spiritual (which, though it runs counter to the Church’s sometimes slavish thirst for relevance, seems to be what Jesus is praying). But the twisted version, the ‘too-often-for-comfort’ reality, is that some Christians are of the world but not in it – which is relevant and unspiritual! Exactly what Drain is suggesting... (for more on spirituality and relevance see Appendix 1)

Pulling it all back to the accountability piece, the thing that’s really profound is that it’s also modelled on the Jesus model.

When we think about the narrative of Jesus we think about, not just the theology, stories, and narratives He shared, but also His practice. Look at the life of Jesus: He worked with the 500, the 120, the 72, a group of 60 or 70 disciples, a handful of women, and then there were the 12, then there were three, and then there was the one. His best friend, John, who was, like Jesus, a good Jewish boy - and you would only entrust your mum to your best friend.

What’s interesting about our perspective on the disciples is that we think a lot about the divinity of Jesus, but not so much about the humanity of Jesus. We have two instances in which He just took those three out: He took them out to transfiguration and obviously took them to the garden of Gethsemene.

We tend to view that, because of the divine thing, that Jesus took those three because they needed to be trained, paired, and everything else. There’s another reason why Jesus took them, particularly to something like the garden of Gethsemene. Jesus took Peter, James, and John because He needed them.

This was arguably the single most important decision He was going to make. For our theology around Salvation to be true, Jesus, in the Garden, had a choice. At that point, He probably had to make the most difficult choice in His life, to either embrace the cross or run from the cross. He went into the Garden and prayed, ‘God help Me’, and said to His mates, ‘please would you stand with Me, help Me, I need you.’ It makes sense that

if Jesus Christ the Son of God needed His three mates to support Him so He might faithfully obey God the Father, then how much more us!

Chapter 4: Two Virtues: Love God, Love others

What's Love Got To Do With It?

Remember, Infinitum is about the One Vision / Two Virtues / Three Vows.

One Vision: follow Jesus;

Two Virtues: love and love;

Three Vows: Surrender, Generosity, Mission

Since 2016 we've created sets of questions around love (to go with sets around the three vows). This has been really helpful because of the common misconceptions of 'love as emotion'.

Danielle describes it this way: "I remember walking my son home from school and one of the guys in the class had said to a girl that he was in love and my son asked what does it mean to be in love? I answered deeply, of course, and theologically, that in English we only have one word for love and we love chocolate and we love our wives and it's the same word. I said that in the Bible there are lots of words for 'love' there is brotherly love where you love your friends and there's 'eros' love which is the way mummy loves daddy and he's like 'ewww! I don't want to talk about this anymore.' I said there's also 'agape' love which is the way that God loves us - it has no limits or measure and has nothing to do with what you do or don't do because that love comes from God and He's the source of that love so nothing can stop that love. He just looks at me and he walks off and then he just starts jumping up into the air and putting his hands up into the sky and I'm like what are you doing? And he just looks at me and said 'I'm just giving God 'agape'" and I remember at the time thinking, "I don't think you can give God 'agape' - I think you can only receive it."

"Then I was thinking about it more recently, because I was studying Mary's discipleship model, which is just love - excessive, poured out, broken love - putting everything at the feet of Jesus. And, of course, the disciple who never leaves, never betrays, is the first one at the cross, who goes to the grave, she's just the model of a love-based discipleship. I think you can give if you receive well. I think if you can receive 'agape' then you can give 'agape'. It's this lived out thing and we do know of these amazing people who exhibit such extravagant love and they're these great heroes of the faith."

Ask anybody who the best Christian is and many will name Mother Teresa (promoted in 2017 to Saint Teresa of Calcutta!). What did Mother Teresa do? She loved extravagantly and lived a life personified by love, love for the excluded, love for the lost. She exuded love. This love is big enough to encompass our 'two Virtues' that Jesus summed up for us. It's easy to say life should be characterised by love but I think it's a really deep part of the whole faith that Infinitum by its definition of boundless love is the thing that never runs out. Love's the thing that's never going to stop, that's going to conquer everything, that's going to define you as a disciple.

Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbour. Mark 12:30-31 (NIV): “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbour as yourself.””

Let’s sum up discipleship as pursuing God’s love, pursuing the God of love. And though in the earliest days it didn’t accurately characterize the disciples, Jesus indicated that this would be the measure – they will know we are Christians by our love. He said (John 13:35 NIV), “By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

And, even more profound, Jesus, praying for the original disciples and us who have followed since (v20), reiterates to the Father their joint purpose in this great salvation scheme (John 17:26b NIV), “that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” Mind-boggling verse. Among other things, God, who is good (meaning, among other things, that what God commands, God enables), indicates His purpose that disciples love Jesus as God the Father loves Jesus. So, beyond pursuing God’s love and the God of love, discipleship is spiritual metamorphosis involving accepting and reflecting Father’s love for Jesus. And this includes our partnership in the great commission (this expression of divine love is a means of making God’s name known [v26a]).

When people characterize followers of Jesus, love isn’t normally among the most popular traits. And that is simply remarkable in light of what discipleship is meant to be. Our relationships, how we relate at work and at leisure and at home – are they characterized by love? That’s a key question, all of the time.

There’s a famous story of St. Teresa of Avila about how you can’t measure how much somebody loves God because it’s an invisible relationship. You can’t see it. However, though we might not technically be able to ‘see’ it, we sure can measure how much they love their neighbour, and that’s not a bad way to start. Is your life characterised by love? That is a fundamental indicator of if you’re following Jesus. And it’s a critical part of Infinitum. The two virtues.

Phil interjects, “I find that concept challenging, personally. I find it very easy to get frustrated and very easy to judge and put people into a box. I find it very difficult to be loving, particularly to poor people, and particularly when people are watching.”

One of our good friends from Infinitum, Craig Whittaker from Sydney, a very good friend, apart from during the rugby season, wrote an article you can find on the website Infinitumlife.com where he describes love being a one-way street. The concept is both challenging and inspiring. We’ve all been married for decades, and when Phil read that article (35 years for Phil! And it was around the warped interactions around ‘love’ on Valentine’s Day) he was blown away. At its heart, love is a one-way street. The moment you look for reciprocity it becomes something other than love.

For love to be love the way that God described love in Romans chapter 5:8 – But God demonstrates His own love for us in this – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us - as we were still sinners we can give nothing back - at that point Christ loved us. God is love (1 John 4:8). It is the very character and nature of God and the love we are talking about is not a reciprocal love, it's love as a one-way street. That, Phil sums up, "is the most profound fresh insight of love I've had on this Infinitum journey. If I'm brutally honest, have I ever loved my wife that I've adored for three decades with a one-way street love? I'm still working on that one. That is really fresh and challenging."

That love thing isn't just thrown in, it's literally The Way. It's the way we follow and encounter Jesus and other people. There was a TED Talk recently about your brain and love, and it's really fascinating that this neurologist who wanted to understand what happened in the brain when people were in love got all these people who said they were in love and studied their brains with an MRI scanner. Everybody in love had three areas of the brain light up:

.one is the pleasure centre of the brain that exudes joy and pleasure;

.the second is the calculated risk area of the brain which is the part where the gamblers all in the 'it's worth it' part of the brain;

.and the third part is deep attachment.

Danielle remembers; "I thought to myself, I'm in love with Jesus. But if you put my brain in an MRI machine, would it light up in the right way? Is my relationship with Jesus still pleasurable and does it bring me joy? Is there joy in this journey or has it become joyless. Is it still risky? Am I still in it like that? Am I still all-in and willing to give? Or has it become risk-less and vanilla and comfortable. Is it full of attachment? Am I deeply attached or is it detached. I thought if we could measure our lives with love as a measure could we see 'un-love', with joylessness, riskless-ness and detachment? That is what a lot of religious lives look like: they look stingy, they look joyless and detached from God; and I literally want to be known as a person who is in love. I want to be risky, irrational, a little crazy, and maybe even emotional and that's fine with me. A life characterised by love would be a measure worth living for."

And that's how everyone will know that we are Christians!

We need to surround ourselves with people who think like that because the tendency is toward more comfort, not less, more routine, not less. Safer, not riskier. Conformist rather than crazy.

Saddening me, that.

Are you aware of that tendency in your life?

Ian reflects; "The good thing is that my Infinitum HUB, and other support groups have helped to arrest the decline, and ask some deeper, more probing questions.

“In normal church life you don't have to ask many questions. It's quite safe in a way. I was even on the leadership team of a church, leading services and occasionally doing a talk, yet I was conscious that during my term there I was just getting more proficient at Churchianity. I knew what to say and when to say it. I knew how to reveal just enough info to let people think that I was “going deeper with Jesus.”

“Conversely, the HUB won't let me get away with that.

“They want to know that there is some congruity between saying I love Jesus and acting that I do.”

There are actually three loves in the ‘great commandment’:

one, love your God;
two, love your neighbor; and,
three, as yourself.

With decades of following Jesus behind us, with a wide variety of experiences in different cities and countries and environments, we've met all kinds of people, many of whom do not love themselves, and so we've stumbled onto this postulation:

One reason it is so hard to love others is because we love them the way we love ourselves. In other words, we don't love them, because we don't love ourselves.

Phil elaborates: “I was talking to one of my mentors many years ago, very significant in the Anglican Church, a very kind and gracious man who gave me his time three times a year. My job was to come up with the questions and his job was to make the tea. He always made Earl Grey tea and I hate Earl Grey tea but didn't have the heart to tell him. One of the questions that I asked him was an insecurity question - about why I felt insecure in who I was and how others perceive me (I'm a loud mouth but people don't realise I'm just as messed up and broken as everybody else). I asked him for advice, and he did what he always did. You see, he had glasses that didn't fit him properly and he would push the glasses back on his nose and he'd say in his beautiful deep voice, ‘I have no idea, no idea at all... however...’ Well, on this day he surprised me, and said, ‘when you feel that way about yourself, the first response would be to repent because you disagree with God about how He sees you and feels about you and He's right and you're wrong’. It wasn't the warm-huggy response I was hoping for to affirm me but it was a, ‘get with the programme’ response. Once you understand how much you are loved, your capacity to love yourself has enhanced dramatically.”

This isn't meant to sound narcissistic, but at a foundational level, we need to love ourselves better. We should settle it right away to be the people God has created us to be and not some imitation version of someone else. Once we love ourselves properly, we're in an excellent position to love others properly.

Danielle has distilled some of that into this axion: *True humility is agreeing with God about who you are; True dependency is agreeing with God about who He is.*

What Love Sounds Like

To repent means to change the way we see. We grow up with the idea that being repentant is just being sorry, but, actually, it is to change our perspective. To change the way we see ourselves is so phenomenal. We present the Gospel starting at Genesis 3 (with the 'fall') and that's not where the story starts. That's a distortion. The story starts in Genesis 1 (with 'creation') where God made humanity very good, and humanity itself was stamped with the image of God. He loved His creation, including us. The fall and human depravity is a distortion of the original purpose of God. There is (meant) to be an uncovering of what is already in people, this image of God, this beautiful thing to be loved and to love.

Danielle reflected on this point when we started *Infinitem*: "I grew up in a Christian environment and home where I thought I was bad, believing that I was bad, and I've since learnt as a mother there's no such thing as a bad child. There are broken children, hungry children, hurting children - all kinds of children, but there are not 'bad' children because, in essence, they are beautifully good. I put my son Moses to bed, he's four (at the time), with a little ritual where mummy says, 'who made you?' and Moses looks at me and says, 'God made me'. And I say 'yeah, and how did He make you?' and he looks at me and he says, 'He made me good'. Every time I tuck him in at night and his four year old voice says, 'He made me good', it pierces my heart because I realise He made me good, too. I don't remember hearing that growing up, but I'm hearing it now and it changes everything, because it's this repentance, this change of perspective, that He made me good and this badness is a diversion and disruption from the plan of God and away from the original intention, a cover of what's actually underneath."

We are part of the Wesleyan-Arminian holiness stream of the people of God, and this tribe likes to identify sin as a distortion of love. David Ashton explains it like this: "The 'seven deadly sins' are merely distortions of love: anger, pride, and envy being love perverted; sloth being love of nothing; and gluttony, lust, and avarice being love out of balance, love out of bounds." This is another perspective on Danielle's testimony.

There's a beautiful song by Jon Forman that says, 'shining underneath', and in it he sings, "all God's children are shining underneath," and everything else is just this distorted, muddy cover. It's beautiful. We are made to be loved, we are made in love, we are made for love, we are made to receive love and it's this repentance thing that will really set us free to love.

Now, here's the awkward part. The Salvation Army is part of this stream of Christianity that sees sin as distortion of love. But growing up in that tradition has meant, in some cases, to understand 'loving people' to mean 'fixing people'. They are not the same thing.

To love people who are poor, and to help ‘the poor’? Completely different things. Danielle explains, “I started changing the way I view people and changing the way love is; instead of trying to fix anybody, my first priority is just to love them. What if to be loved isn’t to be fixed? What if love is actually not about function at all? Of course, it isn’t, and then when you begin to be loved, to receive the love of God, you begin to be ‘fixed’ internally.”

Danielle continues: “I was driving the other day on the highway. In Los Angeles there is a homeless crisis and on the off-ramp there was this guy on the side holding a sign saying, ‘Can you give me money for rent for my family’.

“And I have this internal discussion about whether or not to give him money... But, then, I saw his family standing beside him, his two little kids and his wife.

“It was the first time I had seen a family and kids homeless on the side of a highway, and I just felt the Lord prompt me to pull over. I remember having this discussion with the Lord like - I’ve spent all day at the office, I’ve been doing justice work, and I’m travelling tomorrow, and I’ve got my own family... And then, it’s like... this Infinitum thing, how do I want my life to be this day? How do I live this faith out?

“So I pulled over and said, “do you want to get in?” And I realised that what I was hesitant to do was embrace the need, because, internally, I was trained I needed to fix the problem. I realised in the process of having these folk over for dinner and making new friends is that I didn’t need to fix their problem, I just needed to love them and loving them wasn’t just necessarily fixing them, and it could just be the shared expression of God’s intent that He sees everybody worthy and able to receive and give love. It changes everything, this love thing really matters. It’s not just a cool word used as a transition between One Vision and Three Vows.

And, sure. That love might not have been focused on fixing but it didn’t leave obvious problems unattended. The love expressed itself in offers of friendship and fellowship, sure. But it also provided groceries and counseling and contacts for leads on expediting and facilitating processes towards employment and welfare and government resources and spiritual community. Maybe what made the whole thing surreal for them was that the aid was offered in the context of friendship instead of in a functional exchange. It is reminiscent of a disagreement Danielle and Stephen used to have about faith and works. The apostle James famously explained that faith without works is dead. And back in the day Danielle was militant about love as opposed to obedience. Stephen worked the obedience angle in opposition. But then we stumbled upon Jesus’ words, “If you love Me, obey My commands” (John 14:15 NIV), and, “Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching” (John 14:23 NIV). So, ‘we’ concluded that love without obedience lies in a grave beside faith without works. Either way you cut it, you can pick up our action bias.

Phil was working with Ian one day at a media company. It was an internal day-away! Part of it was an evaluation of the company's core values. Phil talked about how most people can stick their hands up to the values - they appreciate and maybe even 'love' them.

Then Phil had everyone put a sticker on their backs that read,

"How authentically am I living these values (which were then named)?
Call (the company's number)."

This was inspired by those trucks / lorries that have that sign "how's my driving? Call 1-800...".

He then asked how many people would be prepared to walk outside with these stickers and to be aware that others might be watching our lives and how closely they were lived to the values we so readily espouse and love within this office and company.

Do your regular 'actions and living' match up to the values you love?

Love and Action coming together!

Phil's take: "One of the lessons I've learnt over the last seven or eight years is the power of language around the value that people have and how precious they are. As a business consultant I coach senior leaders in lots of powerful industries and I would often use the words 'precious' 'powerful', 'beautiful' to a leader to describe who and how they are. I had a profound experience some years ago on my 20th wedding anniversary. Wendy and I went to the country of Uganda to visit refugee camps where we had quite a lot of work - I'm thinking, this is a guy who knows how to show a girl a good time, taking Wendy to a refugee camp for our anniversary! We weren't sure we were going to be able to make it because the rebel army had been on the runway we were going to land on, and there had been gun-fire and we weren't sure we were going to get in. So we landed and then met the headman and the elders and then we had an hour's drive to the refugee camp. It was quite a stark and unsettling experience as we sat in the back of a 4x4 truck with eight soldiers at the front and eight soldiers at the back and us in the middle. For the entire journey they had cut down every tree either side of the road so snipers couldn't hide behind them, and we ended up at this refugee camp.

"Unfortunately, I was really unwell and had to spend quite a lot of time in a little hut out back. I wasn't feeling great but they said, "the community would like to welcome you," and I just heard these drums and this singing, so I was led to this huge tree in the refugee camp and watched this great procession of over 800 orphans that were in this community in a big long line that had been bought out by the white guys who funded all this stuff to do a welcome. You felt really uncomfortable, almost colonial and imperialistic, but we were the guests so we were in this situation where they were singing and dancing.

“It was about 40 degrees and I was feeling awful and we were seated behind this table, and well over 1000 people gathered around this big tree with us in the middle. People came and did skits as a presentation and one woman came and declared her status as HIV positive, and she read poems and people sang - it was an amazing thing for the guests to see. I thought that was it and then the man who ran the camp came over and asked if I would say something. Wendy and I are sitting here with over 1000 people - it's extraordinary and I feel really bad, and I'm going to say what? What do you say to hundreds of orphans who have been born and bred in a refugee camp and have had their parents killed? A number of the teenage orphans had been child soldiers that were then rescued and their lives had been awful - what do you say? Just then this revelation came to me, and God said, 'It is good' as clear as day. So I stood in the middle and turned round and round as I spoke and said, 'it's a privilege to be here, many of you would've have heard the Bible story that when God made the trees He said they are good and then on the last day when He looked at humankind He said it is very good and I'd like to give you a message from God today,' and I turned round and round in the circle and started pointing to people and looking as many in the eyes as possible saying, 'God is looking down from heaven and is saying to you, you are very good, you are beautiful, you are good.' Then everyone started joining in this, 'you are good', and suddenly we've got this chorus in the circle saying, 'you are good'.

“It seems to me that if we could just as people, followers of Jesus in our workplaces, with our families, with our children, with our colleges, with our friends at our churches, if we could be people who live lives that communicate in every way, not the snarky little sarcastic comments that people like me find too easy, not that insecure nonsense that often comes out my mouth but actually tone, posture, and demeanor saying, “live a life that says to you ‘you are good’,” then people's capacity to hear the voice of God would be greatly enhanced. That's why love is so profound.”

That's what love sounds like.

Chapter 5: The Three Vows: Pathways To Change

At a basic level, Infinitum anticipates that exploration of our spiritual status quo through the lens of the three vows will uncover areas of change required in order to advance. These may include behaviours, mindsets, and belief systems/stories that restrict and constrain.

Obviously, substantive change can only take place by a work of the Spirit. However, our cooperation and effort is also required. From the ancient writings of the monks to modern psychology and academic research, we find four consistent themes essential sustainable change:

1) Dissatisfaction with the status quo - if this is not present, change will not take place. Deep-seated desire for change emerges from intolerable frustration with our current situation. For example, we need to 'hate' our sin sufficiently for change to occur.

The truth is, sometimes, even though we know current behaviours are not healthy / right, we enjoy them, and are willing to tolerate their toxic impact on our lives. For example, have you ever met smokers who actually believe smoking is good for their health? No. But their belief of the harmfulness of nicotine is subservient to the needs that it would appear to meet. For any change to take place, a potent dislike and rejection of the current norm is critical, with zero compromise.

2) A captivating vision of a better future - this normally provides the 'Why' of change leveraging momentum to perform the crucial effort. Nietzsche asserted, 'A man who has a why can live with any form of how'. With a captivating vision, the necessary components of will, emotion, and discipline can align to make change, even very difficult change, possible. Vision can demand endurance through hardship and inconvenience. As long as the vision/dream is powerful enough, human beings will continue to master the courage to embrace the hard work of change.

3) A plan - a vision without a plan is called 'wishful thinking'. Lofty visions can sound wonderful and lift the spirits but without a solid plan they quickly dissolve, often causing disappointment and cynicism in the hearts of the 'true believer'. A plan is a solid commitment to behave in certain ways, in certain time frames, on a consistent basis to achieve the desired result. Answer questions like this when contemplating the realization of your vision:

What will you be doing differently?
How often will you evaluate progress?
What are the markers of early success?
What do you need to deny yourself?
And more...

The best plans make sense, are written down, and shape the nature of decisions in the midst of the change process.

4) Accountability - Psychologists tell us that when we are accountable for an action, particularly to those for whom we care and respect, we load the emotional deck in our favour in a significant way. Knowing that your choices are transparent and known, makes long term change more likely. Real accountability can only be invited, and rarely effectively imposed, by others, even within a hierarchy. For our behaviours and beliefs to change it needs to be something that matters, not just to us but to others whom we really do not want to let down or disappoint. They also provide the critical support and encouragement required to press on through hardship.

As you explore a life lived through the lens of the three vows, ensure that when required change becomes apparent, you have in place the necessary - Dissatisfaction and Vision and Plan and Accountability. Without these building blocks, change is often an empty dream.

Chapter 6: Vow 1: Surrender

Remember, there are the three vows, and we worked really hard to think what the buckets would be, if you like, the places that we could place all these things that we want to be at the heart and focus of a life living deep intent.

We started with Surrender. As Danielle says, this is the permanent posture of a disciple - it's that open handedness that says, "God, it's all Yours, although You've entrusted it all to me and You said it belongs to me - I want to give it back." When we think about our lives, our possessions, our careers, our ministries, our reputations, our homes, our kids - a really important part of being a disciple every day is that we're in a posture so we can give it all back.

Phil elaborates: "I'm a parent of three children, they'll always be my babies, although they're not babies anymore, but I do remember very clearly each of their dedication services.

"In The Salvation Army we don't practise christening or water baptism, but we do 'dedicate' - the parent at one point gives the child over to The Salvation Army officer and dedicates the baby, and it's the symbolic thing of giving the child back to God who has first given them to us. It's really just that, that every single day surrendering our motives, our ambitions, our dreams, our possessions, our fears, our anxieties, the very essence of who we are - saying, 'God, I am surrendering this to You and Your purposes and Your will because You know what best to do.'"

Surrender is a most basic and a most profound thing. It's basic because it's the way into the Kingdom. There's no other way into the Kingdom, no other posture you can assume - the only way in is to be surrendered. It's like recovery communities, the only way into recovery is to admit that you can't do it. It's counterintuitive, because it's like, 'Great, I'm going to get to recover,' and then the first step is to admit you can't.

The same is true in the Christian faith. Danielle's favourite way to describe surrender is to say, "I give up - I can't do this; it's beyond me - this life of following Jesus." This might capture some of what Jesus means when He says, 'lose your life in order to gain it'. Here is where it is so profound. There has to be a willingness to give up before you can begin. That's ultimately this posture of surrender. We hang this beautiful William Booth quote on the shingle of the first vow: 'the greatness of a man's power is the measure of his surrender.'

Most Christians would testify that we aspire to be like the ones most like Jesus. Even Jesus Himself would say, "I don't do anything that I don't see the Father doing (in John 5:19)," living a completely surrendered life, even surrendering up until the point of death. Surrender seems to sum up the most basic way in. So if you don't know how to follow Jesus, maybe just give up trying to do it yourself.

This also combats religiosity, which says, 'try harder, do more stuff, try more discipline, try to measure up,' which is the equivalent of trying to get yourself clean by showering without water. Have you ever tried that? Here's the thing: if you're showering without water there's no way to lather your bar of soap and so it just hurts. Not only that - it also doesn't work, it doesn't clean. Trying to follow Jesus without surrendering is actually like trying to get clean with a bar of soap but without water. Surrender protects the disciple from mere religiosity (hey, maybe that's the title of a sequel to *Mere Christianity?*). This is not just about adding a thing to your life, it is about giving up and allowing God to do something in you. The postures of surrender are counter intuitive to functional people. The functional types respond to action points: "if you give me something to do, if you want me to run a race, do a 'Tough Mudder', give me disciplines, I can do it."

Religiosity can be really easy for some people – a sort of 'paint by numbers' Christianity - tell me what to do and I'll do it. The posture of surrender is the opposite to religiosity by saying, 'I can't do it'. That recognition, that posture shift, is so profound for 'the functional types' every day to say, "I can't be like Jesus today – God, You're going to have to help me." The simplicity and profundity of that posture frees us from ourselves.

That's the power of it - it's the 'setting free'-ness of it that is so powerful. As we think about, 'how do we live the most powerful and focused lives', part of it is getting rid of the clutter that gets in the way.

And it's not just us. Conversations with people sharing this journey with us and are leaders in denominations - it doesn't matter what the label is Anglican, Salvation Army, Baptist or whatever, the same is true across all – confirm that each denomination is always at its most powerful when it is least self-aware because then it's not about the denomination or labels but it's about Jesus and it's just about Him. Giving up our false identities, our false hierarchies, our false labels, the false things we put so much store into and saying, 'Jesus, this all belongs to You,' is of course good theology, as the Bible says, 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'.

Here's Danielle take: "It's funny because I've always used Samson as a sort of a prototype in my life, as someone who really loved to pick a fight with oppressors. His whole life, that's all he did, he picked fights – that's why I really like him! Because he exposed the oppression by picking a fight. Then at the end of his life he is compromised, he is blinded, he's mocked by the enemy. It's this posture of total oppression.

"The scriptures say that in his last act, in which he took more of the enemy out than in all of his previous acts, he finally finds the strength within himself to give himself up. It's that posture of surrender, you know, that is the disciple's most powerful, confirming as it does that, "it is no longer about me." And you see this life of strength, of fighting for justice, and freedom from the Philistines, and all these great acts that Samson did – there was no one like him in the land. And all of a sudden he realises, "wait a minute, it might not be about me." In that final act of surrender he takes out more of the enemy

than in all his previous exploits. Of course, this foreshadows Christ's final surrender, rendering death and sin conquered forever.

"And just to think, really? Is that what it is? And so I feel like every day when I go I give up, I put my 'hands up' in that daily prayer and I literally say, "'I give up'. I don't have this, I can't do this." I do it because my natural inclination is to say, 'oh, I got this!', 'I can do this', 'Oh, be like Jesus? ON IT.' 'I got this, I can be better than any other disciple...' it is literally the opposite posture of a disciple's posture which is to say, 'I don't have this, and I need some help.' It's liberating."

Whether it's cowboys, soldiers, villains, or bank managers we have all seen movies where these guys have been told to hold their hands up! It's over! You've been caught.

The surrender prayer is that stark really.

The game is up; you've been rumbled. You can no longer get away with it.

For me that means that my attempt to fake and force, steal and smile my way into living the Jesus life is over.

Instead, I need to surrender - hold my hands up, and say that it's all about Him.

Now of course I don't want to do that. I often come out kicking and screaming but in the end I know that the only way is to let Jesus do what He does best and accept humble, surrendered people.

So when I hold my hands up, I do feel a bit of an idiot, but that's the point really. Most of my life is spent trying to demonstrate that I know what's going on. That I can make things happen. That I am in control.

But, deep down I know that this is not true.

Hold my hands up.

Sorry.

Let's start again shall we, and this time I choose to surrender myself to Him.

As Bonhoeffer says, "when Jesus calls a man, He bids him to come and die." That's what surrender is all about.

Chapter 7: Vow 2: Generosity

Surrender is an excellent start.

And we follow hard on it with Generosity. There are so many words we could have used that focus disciples on choices we're going to make during the day.

And tried several of them on for size!

Generosity, in its broadest sense, is about the choices we make, about our mindset, our attitude, our behaviour, our money, our language... We chose generosity – and again, those of you who are from a westernised context forgive us, because we live in a narcissistic, hedonistic world that's utterly obsessed with the entertainment of and the fulfilment of self. The power of generosity, when it's experienced, can be truly transformational and prophetic.

What's the most powerful thing we could do in a society like ours to express something of the wonder of this boundless love of God? Generosity. Because at the heart of the boundless gospel is a generous extravagant God, or, as the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians, 'God has lavished His love upon us' – His extreme, completely over-the-top love, we want to be those kind of people.

Ian testifies: "I have known amazing generosity from people. From housing, cars, computers, cash, clothes, food, holidays, conferences, flights, bicycles, comments, furniture, etc.

"It's overwhelming.

What absolutely disturbs me is that I can still be as tight / closed -fisted as I am.

"Why that is, I do not know.

"I am embarrassed about it, and have often talked about it in our HUB.

They say, "but Ian, you did this and that, etc." but deep down I know that there is still this root of possessiveness that governs my money, thoughts, comments and attitudes.

"However.

"The vow of generosity is teaching, I would say, forcing me to give beyond how I feel. I can see some change.

"Holding my hands out in that prayer is again a useful way of physically demonstrating how I want to live.

"I often hold my hands shut tight and feel the pressure and anxiety rise up in me. The contrast with open hands is unbelievable.

"That's where I need to be even though it is taking an age to get there."

We want to fight against a stingy spirit. While the world is dominated by a 'take' spirit, we combat that mindset in the opposite spirit. Generosity is the opposite of take; we give instead of take.

Take, take, take is the spirit of the world. And so you grab at whatever you can at whatever is free, whatever is going, you grab that, you hang on to that. You're tightfisted with your possessions and your bank account because you carefully earned this lifestyle, and that's yours and you don't let anyone else take it from you.

So there's that spirit of take. But in parts of the Church there's this incredible spirit of stingy – Danielle talks to waitresses who just can't stand working on Sundays, and she wonders 'Why?' The place is full right? On Sunday's Christians love to eat, that's one thing we've got down.' And they respond, 'yeah, but you're the worst tippers – it's my worst day'.

Look at that! We misrepresented God by our stingy-ness – we're bad tippers?! Who knew? But Danielle started paying attention to it whenever at a Christian table. Whatever she's thinking she now doubles to fight against a spirit of stingy-ness! A spirit of stingy-ness just creeps in and, in some traditions, we've valued thriftiness as good stewardship. In some ways it was - you don't want to be lavish in a sense that we lavish on ourselves, we wanted to be really selfless and all of those things. But thriftiness can manifest itself in a 'spirit of cheap'. Danielle confesses, "I think I've tried to cast that puppy out of some people, and it's returned seven times stronger – It's a hard spirit to get rid of!"

This is the point. This is how people see us. With the exception of exceptional folk like Mother Teresa, it seems more likely that Christians get labeled negative, oppositional, mean-spirited than loving, kind, generous. It's pretty much the opposite of the Gospel. We're not about 'no'. We relish God's big 'yes' to the world, this generous giving of His Son.

It's such a big 'yes' to the world that we want continually expand our capacity to express generosity. Phil testifies: "I think I'm a generous guy, I love to give, particularly when people are watching... no, but I get real joy from giving.

"I went away for a trip with my family, and Wendy (my wife) it was her 50th birthday, and she said to me, 'What do you want from this?', 'What do you want to do?' because someone wanted to do this, and someone wanted to do that, and the girls wanted to do this, and Jake wanted to do that, and I said 'Darling, all I want to do is see you having a great time.' She replied 'yeah, but' and I said 'I love being involved in giving something to someone – I love that'. So I'm good, I've covered that generous bit.

"But what I find much harder is being generous to people who don't like me. People I know who have been rude about me and critical and have told lies about me and have been cynical about me, people that are harsh and negative towards me. I find that a lot more difficult to be generous. I have to go beyond not just reacting, or turn the other

cheek. I actually walk towards them and say not only am I going to give you the other cheek to hit, I'm going to go beyond that because that's what generosity is. I find it easy to be generous to those in need, I find it easy to be generous to orphans in Africa. I find it easy to be generous to people that I love. The people I don't like, the people I really find it hard to be around - this vow has really challenged me to say, 'look, Phil, what does the spirit of generosity look like in relation to your response to that person'. At that point, generosity as a vow becomes really, really important."

Ian comments: "Ruth and I talk about generosity with my lads, although one of my sons really struggles to get it. He has recently rejected Christian faith and this has caused him to question many of our actions, generosity being one. Why would we choose to give when there is nothing in it for us.

"None of my carefully weighted arguments and responses has made any difference so far.

"Of course his stance deeply saddens me, particularly when he has been the beneficiary of so much generosity.

"However the challenge for me is to still embrace him in a generous way despite all his uncomfortable lifestyle choices."

That's absolutely essential.

The idea is we are living open handed in a close-fisted culture. It's the opposite of the spirit of take. Philip Yancey, in *Vanishing Grace*, interviews a palliative care worker who's been doing palliative care forever, and she's known as the most loving and kind and generous person ever. Yancey asks her, 'how do you keep that up when every day you meet someone who is dying – you invest in them, and then they die, and then you start again? How do you do that?' And she said, 'you know what, I pause outside my door, every day before I go in, and practically what I do is I open my hands, and I imagine a picture of heavenly resource – of love and generosity, and goodness and grace being poured out. And I just open my hands as a symbol of opening my life and I just receive, receive, receive. Then when I open the door, I just look for where I can give it'.

I thought about that posture we use, and ever since that story I've been using that posture as a receiving and a giving posture. So, first I say all of the inexhaustible resources of heaven – because this is the trick about the lack of generosity, is it's a 'lack'. It's a poverty spirit, it's to say there won't be enough. I don't forgive because I think I'll run out of forgiveness, and I won't give mercy because I think I'll run out of mercy, or I won't give money because I think I'll run out of money. It's this idea that we will run out of the resource that makes us stingy. So, it's the opposite of a poverty spirit.

All I do is I say, 'all the inexhaustible resources of heaven that are mine – I receive'. Every morning – literally like a topped-up credit card to spend every day. It's not mine;

it's heaven's. God has lent to me to give out. So, actually, I can be way more generous with something that has come to me from a source outside of myself. I've used this prayer posture as a means for receiving and also for taking, but leaving my hands open so I can look to see where to give it out in the world.

Here's Phil on the issue: "A few years ago, when I was travelling a lot and speaking at a lot of churches, I was at a church speaking in the morning and I laid out a challenge. I was talking about this concept of surrender and generosity – my view is that materialism and is probably one of the biggest hurdles for the church in the west to allow God to use it in the way He wants. You may disagree with me, you, maybe, sat there saying 'hey, Phil Wall, that might be a problem for you, but I've got it sorted'. And I would say that if you've got it sorted – great! Just try one thing. I'd like you to go home today, I'd like you to find the most expensive thing in your home, I'd like you to find someone who needs it, and I'd like you to give it to them.

"And so, of course, parents start complaining, as their kids have gone home and given away loads of these things. But, I say, 'hey, if you want your children to know what it is to follow Jesus, then this is partly what it means'.

"But on this occasion in the evening, I was saying goodbye to people at the end of the meeting, by the door. This older couple came up to me and they both looked quite disturbed, and I couldn't work out if they had been crying. As they came closer I saw his eyes were full of tears, and I thought, oh, no, I've offended someone again. I was very clumsy in those days, even more than now.

"The lady took hold of my hand and put something in there, and closed it. She said, 'We went home this morning and thought very seriously about what you said, so we want you to take this – have it and sell it, and use the money for the great work you're doing amongst young people'. So I open my hand and in the palm of my hand is a platinum 22 diamond eternity ring which he had given her on their wedding anniversary. I got a bit choked up, and said, 'look, that's really kind of you,' and I went to hand it back. She closed my hand over it again and he put his hand on top of hers, and he said, 'Phil', he said 'you must keep it, because we want Jesus to know there is nothing we wouldn't give to Him, because He gave it all to us in the first place.' Those are two people who know what the value of generosity and surrender look like.

That's beautiful. And it's that spirit of generosity that's infectious because it makes no sense. It's the personification of grace, it's undeserved, open handed... it's beautiful. It's such a great reflection of Christ, and it has such power. The other thing about that generosity is that it's infectious. Once you get how much joy it brings, even you when you're generous, it becomes infectious, you keep wanting to give, you want to 'out-generous' yourself even because it's so exciting.

It's also overwhelming sometimes. Many would have seen the musical theatre production 'Les Miserables'. There are these two moments, where on the one hand, the main protagonist is caught stealing. And when the police brought him back to the priest

he said, 'Ah, you forgot these!' Having been robbed, the guy's only response is, 'let me give you more'. There's this moment of generosity which so speaks into this man's life that many years later, as his main enemy, the police captain, chasing him down to put him back in chains, comes after him and he forgives and doesn't kill him, it sets him free.

I remember sitting watching that and at the end as a follower of Jesus. I just remember wanting to stand up and be like, 'Right! Let me explain to you what this is all about' to the crowd there whilst everyone's clapping and applauding. I've seen it three or four times now and I can't watch the movie and I can't watch the movie again (because I just find it so overwhelming to watch). In fact, the last time I watched it, I got really uncomfortable and suddenly thought, if I was the priest what would I have done? I'm pretty sure it wouldn't have been what he did, and that's really quite uncomfortable because I want to be like him.

Danielle's take: "I read the book and I've seen the musical as many times as I can because and I love it, as it's the Gospel story. It makes every other musical seem shallow. I'm always like that was great music and dancing but, seriously, where's Les Mis. The part where Jean Valjean receives the silverware and then finds himself in this revelation. It brings light and clarity that Jean Valjean has actually become the very thing he hated, which is the monster, it's the problem and it's in him. This stingy-ness, this 'take' spirit, this criminal - he's become the criminal even though he's protested that he's not that his whole entire life. So his generous spirit is unlocked at the revelation that he is the thing that he never wants to be.

"It literally leads to his conversion and in the book it is very clear that that's what happened, that he's converted and he realises that he's become this monstrous thing. It's so profound I read it on the plane and I was literally just bawling on the plane, this guy was sitting beside me like, "err... are you okay?" "No! I am a monster, too!" I was just falling apart on the plane because it was so profound and that's that generous spirit. It's so profound that it unlocks both responses and that's what the enemy/law man can't take, he has to off himself because to receive it is to actually be converted."

Early on the process we really struggled about making that vow simplicity because we're prone towards simplicity, meaning - we don't want to be worldly. But we found as we bantered it around that we looked at the elements of simplicity that are really attractive and we thought that simplicity in its deepest thought is generosity. That's what it is. Because we lean towards stinginess in religious circles and humanness we figured that leaning in to generosity will actually create ways for people to be simple but in this grace filled extravagant love joyful way. The vow of generosity is just beautiful.

It does get our eyes off ourselves.

Ian explains, "There was a time when Ruth and I became almost obsessed with simplicity.

“We became so concerned about monetary and resource-based decisions that it was becoming a strait-jacket.

“It was making us tight fisted

“More fundamentally - we had almost unknowingly stopped trusting God to provide.

“Our life was becoming characterised by a series of “no, sorry I can’t” rather than “yes, how can I bless.”

“It all felt very “worthy” for a while, but it sadly meant that we were becoming “smaller and shallower” not “expansive and deeper.”

“Generosity has helped us look at our life differently - we might well go without as we did before but the focus is not on “lack” but “give” - who can we be generous to today in all sorts of ways.

“And, how can God help us to live for that, and believe He will provide.”

The other thing that generosity tackles is entitlement. I’ve been around religious people for a long time and it is amazing how often you come across people who think the religious system they’re part of, the society, their family, their parents, their children, God owes them. When they don’t get what they’re owed, what they’re due, they go into this terrible place.

Not to psycho-babble about it, but Maslow ran his study and said the final need we need is ‘self-actualization’ and of course in the Western world a huge percentage of the church are middle class people who have basically answered all of those main questions in terms of security, provision and everything else and are only left with that last question which is self-actualization, how do I be fully human? That turns into one of two ways.

One: it turns in on itself and becomes, too easily, hedonism, entitlement, and then a form of narcissism, and eventually become nihilism, because, what’s the point? You can only entertain yourself and spoil yourself so many times.

Two: it turns outwards and says 'how blessed am I? What a great opportunity I have in my life to do great things, part of the fruit of this middle class context in which the vast majority of people will ever listen to this, will find themselves'. This spirit of generosity challenges any smattering of entitlement you might choose to embrace. Actually, it’s not about what you’re going to get, it’s only about what you are going to give because you can never even scratch the surface of what you have received and you’re giving out of that excess.

Danielle: “I wrote a book called *The Zombie Gospel* which is ‘thoughts on how to be human’. ‘Zombies’, by definition, are things that consume with no regard for what they

are consuming, they literally have just become consumption machines. They are horrifying because, of course, it's like a mirror on a society that has become a consuming machine and so the question raised in that whole genre is, what does it mean to be human? That generosity is the opposite of consumption, the opposite of having no regard for the person that you can see, the opposite of that is a generous spirit, it's how we rediscover our own humanity which is really a reflection of God."

Chapter 8: Vow 3: Mission

We struggled with the right name for the mission vow, too. We knew that the life of Jesus is characterised by a bias for the poor. His life was purposefully getting in the way so he could intentionally posture Himself to see the outcast, the folks who didn't belong, the ones who weren't welcome, whether they were economically poor, or they were ostracized, or unwelcome in religious circles... Jesus lived a life of inclusion. The hand posture we used for that one is our hands outstretched, which we really love.

Ian made that prayer up around the father, the prodigal father going looking for the son saying, 'you're welcome home' and we love the idea of going to the excluded, and that beautiful scripture (Psalm 68:6) that says, 'God put the lonely in families', and recognizing, as disciples, that we are the people who welcome the prodigals home, the excluded, the lost, whether they deserve it or not. It's that open embrace saying, we see you, we are looking for you, we're running to you, we're going in your direction, we're seeking you and please come home. There's something so profound about a life that's postured that way.

Ian explains, "This is the vow I think I need the most for the stage of life I am in.

"I live in a very middle class town which often reminds me of that one depicted in "Hot Fuzz", if you have ever seen that movie! If you haven't - people in the town go to hilarious and extreme lengths to maintain the, "purity of the town and its traditions!"

"Environment inevitably has an impact, and so I know that my commitment to "the poor", regrettably, has weakened. I am cushioned from the issues that many / most people face.

"I wish I had been brave enough to relocate.

"But I haven't.

"Just recently, though, I became a support worker in a house for people who have learning disabilities. It has helped me to connect with others very different to me, and learn some new things about myself.

"It has become a new type of mission / embrace for me.

"I should perhaps say they are "missioning" me! And they are completely unaware of it.

"For example, one of the ladies I support comes to our church and is possibly the most impactful person in the congregation. She always shouts out hilarious answers to the preacher's rhetorical questions! She sings very loudly, and occasionally in tune; which is very noticeable in a congregation of 15 people!

"She also greets everyone and gives away a lot of hugs!

“I am learning about love, and how God can use people that our culture somehow dismisses or at least finds embarrassing, to teach me.”

We really want to be explicit and say to people mission isn't for professionals; mission isn't for religious types or vicars or whatever, we are all on mission.

The Blues Brothers is a great movie – they were on a mission from God. And, of course, our tribe - The Salvation Army - has the same mission and we've even got the band! But it's a statement of truth, we are on a mission, and one of the great challenges for many folks, particularly those who don't work for the Church, is to see their life through the lens of mission. How do you go to work every day as a teacher, as a banker, as a lawyer, or as a house parent, somebody who works in the community, and make your life intentionally missional? We wanted to have this in there to help people explore what that might mean for them.

We're followers of Jesus, so, as Danielle said, we have an orientation towards the poor. For some that might mean you're a giver, or an advocate, or that you write letters... It might mean you work in different environments, but it means that in some way, somehow your life - our lives - are orientated towards the poor.

But if we take a vow of mission then in some important way we are missionaries. Now, many of us have grown up in Church and we say the missionaries are the people who, in many churches, are represented by the red wool that goes from a pin on a big map of the world to a photograph of a lovely family – people have gone here, or have been through that college, or have done that training, or been to that place. If we're all to be missionaries, we have to order a whole lot more red wool! Because everyone who says, 'I follow Jesus', is on mission. It's a vow we take in Infinitum. The only question is what does that look like.

And we have ideas about that, too, but this isn't the place to elaborate on them. Suffice to say, the more we read the Bible and pray, the more likely we are both to understand God's strategic purposes for us and to be inspired and prepared to fulfill them. And if we undertake this exploration process in the context of covenant community, iron sharpening iron, we're blessed more with counsel and support and affirmation and clarification and refinement and direction and suggestion and fellowship and...

We want to craft a creative, empowering space to explore what that might mean to go to work or invest the bulk of daily time every day with a missionary focus. We are on a mission. Part of our confusion around this is this dualism thing between ministry and work and vocation. In Phil's case: “I have a job, I run a business, a job where I hope my clients are pleased with the work I deliver to them. It's my job, it pays my bills, it puts me in the community. My vocation, is actually a little bit different to that, and I think a lot of people often get quite confused thinking their vocation and their job need to be the same thing. It doesn't need to be the same thing at all.”

Think about the Apostle Paul, arguably the greatest apostolic evangelist in the history of the Church. Ask a lot of people – Phil has done this what groups Paul first evangelized. You'll hear different names and geographies. But none guesses 'clients'. Paul's job was making and mending tents, and his vocation was to preach the Gospel. Inevitably, his job meshed together with his vocation!

We have to admit to ourselves that in some ways it is easier for those who have chosen a vocational track, a denominational stream. But we all want to be intentionally missional, not just the vicars reading this. And for the vast majority of Christians, who have never been professional 'ministers', living on the front lines requires a missional mindset. We're the folk interacting every day with people who don't know Jesus. In a number of western societies, only a small minority of the population actually follow Jesus. In the United Kingdom it might be 6%. So, for a lot of people in our networks, we are the only Christian they know.

Phil adds, "I had a phone call from a friend recently and I didn't know he was ringing me. He left a message and he was really quite tearful, so it took me a little while to work out who he was. He was a guy who I cared for a great deal, and very tragically his wife at the time had been rushed to hospital with a brain tumor and so he's trying to explain what happened and everything else. At the end of the message he said this to me – 'Phil, I know you're on holiday and I'm sorry to trouble you but I had to ring you, because you're the only person I know who prays, so please would you pray for my wife'. And that's true for the vast majority of Christians on the planet. Particularly in the western world – we are quite possibly the only Christian that many of our friends know. So we need to be on a mission."

Here's Ian's perspective: "I was very challenged by my friend Brendan Nottle. Brendan is a Salvation Army Officer based in the Central Business District of Melbourne.

"He runs a ridiculous programme. It's eye-wateringly huge, compassionate and radical.

"But as impressive as that was, I was struck by one of Brendan's daily disciplines. Each morning he gets four of the City's newspapers, and reads them cover to cover. This is not because he is short of anything to do - he normally operates on about four hours' sleep! But it is so he can see what is happening in the city: who needs help, who is in trouble, and what some of the issues are.

"So after reading the paper he will text people - be it the Chief of Police, the Head of a Major Bank or a local politician - "If they seem to be in trouble, all the more important to get in touch - to reach out!"

"He is not cozying up to these guys, but reaching out his hand in love and support. "His contacts list is the envy of the city, I am sure!!

"I have never, ever heard of anyone doing such a thing. I know preacher John Stott talked about metaphorically holding the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the

other, but this man does it literally. He had a couple of phone calls from people when I was recently travelling with him in his car. I heard firsthand how he reaches out to those who are seemingly “beyond the reach of most ordinary people” but are in desperate need of a safe, caring, non-judgemental person.

“Then of course he returns to his street cafe and sits among 150 vulnerable, homeless people. Both ends of the cultural spectrum. Same love. Stunning.”

Another reason this is impressive? We’ve too often bought into the lie that people are against us.

Here’s the thing: If we’re aiming to live missionally, we are on the lookout for opportunities to live like Jesus and present Jesus. We’re Christians, after all – ‘little Christs’! But buying the conventional wisdom that people are against us? That starts us off in a defensive, wary posture.

But for the most part, people aren’t against us. Lots of people love bumping into someone who will pray for them. So, our recently went to the LA convention centre and we set up an anti-human trafficking stand at a sex show there. For all of the people participating – it was their first time. They were scared. ‘What will we do? How will this come across? How will this work out?’ Danielle recalls: “I assured them it’s all going to be great because I’ve done a whole bunch of them around the world! I trained them and then said ‘bye’, as I had to go off to Hong Kong! ‘Have a good weekend!’

“I came back to find out how it went, and they just could not believe what had happened. They had a prayer booth there for ‘free words from God’, as a way to frame it. There was just a line-up halfway down the hall of the show with people waiting in line to get a word from God. I asked if there was anything in the booth we should have had that we didn’t have? Unanimously, they all said, ‘we needed tissues – way more tissues’.”

Person after person received prayer and recounted that they just could not believe that God loved them, that He had a plan for them, that there was good news for them, that we didn’t judge them – they just carry so much shame. The team, during the debrief, repented for their own sense of ‘people won’t be interested’, their thoughts that it was going to be dangerous and the people would not be interested. We have the same thing with our neighbours, the same thing with story after story of people who we’ve convinced ourselves don’t want us or don’t want Jesus.

Danielle remembers: “I coached a high school basketball team in a rural community, so we were on the road a lot, and I would do my preach prep with them. Basically, I’d ask, ‘What do you think of this?’ and I would tell them the story and stuff. One time I was telling the Easter story, and one kid said to me ‘I don’t understand why Jesus had to die, it makes no sense to me’. So we had this amazing conversation about why Jesus had to die. It struck me that when she asked me those questions, I’d judged this entire generation as rejecting the Gospel, and I didn’t realise that actually they’d never heard

the Gospel. I was so convicted, as they'd only had this MTV version and I realised that we have not postured ourselves to communicate the truth, to be missional, to represent Jesus in the world, and as a result, people don't know.

They are judging the Church based on the information they have, but because Christians aren't being missional, they're aren't seeing Christ. Their picture is incomplete and that's one reason their judgement is lacking. It's such an important part for what it means to be a disciple – following Jesus includes representing Him to those around us. So we need to be intentional to get in the way, missionally, so that people can see Christ.

And how exciting is that, when you say, 'Hey, Lord, I want to be missional; please place me where I may even get the chance to pray with someone, or tell someone I'm praying, or even share my story, how those opportunities come about!'

Phil takes it to the extreme: "I think I've gone through a really interesting theological shift as a sharer of the Jesus story over the years. I think one of the things I used to believe was that my job, as a missionary, was to find lots of creative ways to start people thinking about God. Then I read a quote from one of the Church founding fathers, who had many beliefs I would fundamentally disagree with, but he said this – 'We worship a God who is constantly lapping at the shores of people's lives', and I reflected on that a great deal. I think, my theology shifted quite dramatically from a place of saying I need to go out there in to that world and try to start as many conversations and get in with all these people so they might start to consider God, to the place I find myself now, completely different, saying, 'For You to be the God of the Bible, every microsecond of every single day there cannot be one second of human beings' existence, where You're not seeking to win them and woo them to Yourself. And if there is, You're not the God of the Bible'.

"And believing that, my question now as I seek to live authentically for Jesus is not, 'hey, how do I get in the conversation', my first question is, 'What are You doing, God? How are you seeking to win and woo this person to Yourself? I know You are, I've just got to figure out what it is by asking questions.'

"And that is such a more confident place, because you're getting on board with the winning team, you're building what's already been built and you're just coming into their story with your story at a particular moment in time. It's just so freeing and such confidence building to come at it from that direction. So I would have probably said, 'This is the really committed missional mindset, we need to be out there, doing all these things.' I think this new fresh mindset, or insight, or however you would describe it, is much more missional. Because actually what I'm doing is finding out what has God already done and how do I get on board with that – and that's really exciting."

Ian has another refreshing take: "I also met Peter Hobbs recently, who, along with his wife Di, has been planting a church over the last seven years.

“They have totally embraced this approach of, “listening to what God is doing and then pursuing that. They have truly taken a road that few others would perhaps be prepared to travel. After three years the congregation numbered seven.

“But - these were 'people of peace' that Jesus had led him to, and although it meant he still spoke to others in the town(!) he and his wife concentrated on these seven - disciplined them and loved them. After five years the church numbered 40. After seven years - 140.

“The vast majority of these people had not been introduced to Jesus before. No one had taken the time to mention the gospel to them.

“However, all of those people had reached a time in their life - be it loss, tragedy, celebration or mystery - that made them open. Because Peter and Di Hobbs and the growing community have been obedient to observe and pursue the leading of Jesus.

“It was inspiring. I have much to learn from that. I am trying to ask a new question each day now? 'Who are You leading me to today, Jesus?’”

And that is much more about partnership in the Kingdom, rather than agenda driven pusher-truth on people.

People sense that. They know if you've got an agenda. But how much better if our agenda is first to listen and understand.

Danielle says, “I had someone come running up to me, knowing who I was, and saying 'I don't believe in God'. And I just said, 'I'll let Him know'.”

Michael Frost said recently, ‘the question we should all be asking is are we living a questionable life – in other words, when people look at our lives are they saying – what? What is that?’ It's such a great way to phrase it. If you could describe missional living, it's a questionable life, it's a ‘why are you doing that, with whom’ experience! I just love and delight in this idea of inviting normal people over for dinner and having a homeless friend who's hanging out there at the same time and just instantly their lives are expanded – they've never even though, they've seen them from a distance and now it's like ‘wow, they're friends with somebody’ when they'd never would be friends across social spectrums and all kinds of things. Is your life questionable, are people going ‘huh, what is that about?’ I feel like that is good, rather than this sort of agenda-driven mission of God, it's instead this beautiful posture of 'God's at work in the world and we're partnering with Him.' Jesus led the most questionable life of all, everyone was asking, 'what are You doing?' Missional living can be summed up in that beautiful idea of living a questionable life.

And Jesus posed more questions than He preached. Cardinal Suhard once challenged, ‘we must live our lives in such a way that they make no sense at all, unless God exists.’

The essence of mission is living a life that makes no sense to anybody at all, unless God exists. Such is the provocation of how we live.

Ian underlines, "That's why I enjoy, and need actually, these other guys around me. They are teaching me how to trust God, and reach for something that is inspired by Him, and impossible without Him."

That's a vow worth living. Mission - let's do it.

Chapter 9: Testimony

In Phil's words: "We are more than a few years in now with Infinitum. We invest a significant amount of time exploring what it might mean, and spent ages trying to sort out a name. We just love the idea of the 'boundless' dimensions (remember 'Infinitum' in Latin is defined as 'boundless') of Jesus' Gospel which Jesus transcends all barriers and boundaries, opening for us a view of expansive faith. Our first year included road-testing to prove and refine the rule of life, and we launched it all publicly in the middle of 2015.

"I have a meeting with some dearly trusted brothers early in the morning, once a week (generally) for over 20 years now. There are two solid for the two decades and a couple of more locally for the past decade or so. We've explored what it means for us to be part of an Infinitum hub and this issue of the specificity and clarity around the questions. We would always talk about what kind of week we've had and talk generally, but the Infinitum framework gives us something meaty to chew. For example, one missional result of considering a particular topic – say mission - in our meeting is a mindset bolstered that week against the distractions of business life. We go to work every single day with a real missional focus.

"The three of us, the guys in my hub, would all say we have pretty responsible and influential jobs, and we want to be able to view those worlds as kingdom opportunities. It's brought a fresh edge to a long-running journey. It's also made us more brave. We've always been pretty open and honest. But we're Protestant, and Protestantism lacks a formal framework for confessing sin. Infinitum is key on this point. We're taught in the Bible to confess our sins to one another, and there is something deeply profound about sitting in front of a trusted brother and sister and saying, 'Here are my commitments, here's my intent; but here's the decision I made yesterday that I just should've never made'.

"Having the opportunity to confess one's sin in a safe environment?

Not having to carry that as guilt and shame?

To experience and know and hear the forgiveness that God gives in this grace-saturated context?

"Very powerful.

"One last thing, from my professional perspective, Infinitum has had a surprising psychological impact on me. I've been an intentional follower of Jesus for over three decades, but now I find every morning my first thought is my morning prayer: 'Lord help me to honour You today. Help me to be a man of surrender, generosity and mission'. Actually, it's probably second - my first being that I wish I could have laid in bed a bit longer! But my first active thought has habituated in my brain a deep neurological level and then, at 6:30, when the Infinitum verse or challenge of the day pops into my inbox, it aligns my schedule to my commitment, covenant, and vow rather than landing in it mid-morning sometime thinking 'Oop, I need to be 'this' today'. For me, it's been one of the

most profound things I've had the honour and privilege of being part of throughout these 30+ years of intentionally following Jesus."

Danielle: "That's amazing, Phil. It's been an interesting season for me, too.

"One, the creative process of crafting Infinitum was a great reminder of what really matters, that following Jesus is the primary above all other things. It helped refine priorities in my life and realign my journey along paths of grace. Very spiritually stimulating!

"Two, I like the intentionality of it. I have some great relationships, some wide and varied ones, but it's always a little difficult to 'get to' the spiritual side of relationships without sounding too 'super spiritual'. It's fun going to the movies and catching up with people and praying when they need it, but I've often found myself as the giver and instigator of those things... so Infinitum flipped those relationships from unilateral to multilateral, with more of a mutuality in giving and receiving.

"During the experimental phase of developing Infinitum I moved to a new country, a new community, and a new setting where I don't really know anybody. I had to start from scratch. This was a fantastic test-case environment - how to do this from nothing, lacking as I did any deep relationships locally. I had to take a risk and say, 'hey I don't know you and you don't know me very well but do you just want to try this thing together?' And then we created these meaningful relationships. It's been a success! Right from the start, in new relationships, we took risks, created trust, and God enabled this to happen. It's been a spiritually healthy exercise."

Ian: "I didn't find it easy getting into a HUB. I had been involved in a number of accountable relationships before, and I had a number of friendships that date 30 years or more. These have been a source of inspiration, support and challenge for me.

"For those relationships I haven't 'retro-fitted' them with an Infinitum framework, although I do talk about the essential elements of the vision, virtues, and vows.

"So, instead, I have started two new HUBs which seemed a better way of doing things for me. Having said that, there is a challenge, and a little bit of bravery needed in asking someone else whether they want to journey with you. I do think the movement from 'curiosity' (Infinitum looks great and could help me) to 'commitment' (I am in a HUB and making progress) - can be a long and difficult one for many."

Stephen: "I've got a handful of hubs on the go - most are just two of us, and one is three. Each has a different feel and flavor. Each invigorates me, provides spiritual scaffolding for my schedule (I'm not limiting Infinitum to external impact, nor even the hubs - but they 'do' provide the external support as I construct my character and life). And I'm not the only one benefiting from it. Hallelujah."

Danielle adds: “The daily prayers have been so influential. I’m more attentive to opportunities God is pitching me. And I’m more aware that what I’m praying in the morning is being answered through the day.

“And the accountability helps. When I know I have to give an account, even though my partner isn’t, ‘you’re in trouble if you don’t do it’ – it helps! Seeing ahead to my Tuesday hub meeting prompts me to complete my spiritual discipline to-do list.”

Ian: “We made some Infinitum stickers in 2016 on the suggestion of our friend Jonathan Evans. On the sticker was the ‘Three Hand Icons’ for Surrender, Generosity and Mission.

“I stuck one on my office window. Others have put them in their car, on their bathroom mirror, and on their laptop.

“A bit like Danielle is saying with the daily prayer, this acts as a good prompt - not only for you, but also others who sit in your car, office, in your bathroom (!), and opposite your laptop!”

Chapter 10: Recap: The Vision, The Virtues, and The Vows

All the early monastic orders were filled only with religious professionals for whom this was their life's vocation and they lived it in one community. In more recent times the historic orders (e.g. Secular Franciscan Order) have opened up engagement with a shared rule of life to others working in a 'day job' in the world and building missional vision for that context. It was acknowledged that non-priests could be powerful missionaries as instruments of transformation. Some leaders find themselves isolated in their on-going spiritual formation. Many who work in different professions feel something of a disconnect between their 'Sunday Faith' and the rest of the week. Infinitum is designed to serve all those wishing to live intentional vocational lives, wherever you spend most of your time.

Infinitum is not a replacement for a denomination or any membership structures that exist within them. Rather, it is a relational network of committed followers of Jesus, aligned around a shared rule of life as a means of intensifying and nourishing intimacy with the King and impact for His Kingdom. It is a servant of the people of God.

- The what –

Infinitum is built around three simple foundations:

One Vision – Following Jesus

Two Virtues – Loving God & Loving Others

Three Vows – Generosity / Mission / Surrender

The vision:

We live to follow Jesus.

Jesus said "Come, follow Me" (Mark 1:17).

This is the challenge and great joy. To be faithful to Christ and follow Him takes a daily commitment from us. It means remaining accountable to others as we live the way of Jesus.

It has become increasingly common to characterise our following Jesus in this evocative and demanding image of being covered by the dust from His feet. It implies a closeness and connection that should revolutionise who we are and what we do.

The virtues:

Too many of us have been formed in a religious culture that uses external measures to reflect internal realities. All of us who have lived this way know that spiritual health is impossible to do from the outside in. These virtues are as simple and profound as any. Jesus suggested them as a way of establishing an internal rhythm to our lives - as a measurement of our intentions to follow Him. We don't think we can improve on Jesus' take on the entire law and the prophets in a simple and deep way of living our lives.

The two virtues are exactly that - simple and deep. They are guides to help us live differently amongst the dominant culture. And they are the embodiment of who God is - love. Living a life of love is impossible to demand - it must be driven by a spiritual hunger matched by an infilling of God's Spirit in us. These virtues are about love. Fueling our hunger and need for more and more love to reflect God to the world.

Following Jesus should look like something... but what? That's where these vows come in. Again, rather than complicate and create external measurements to God's internal work in us - we simply aim for a healthy rhythm that allows us to respond to the internal nudges of the Holy Spirit in our lives, relationships, and communities.

The vows:

Surrender. The ultimate posture of a disciple. A person surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. In different cultures and at different times in history this meant different things. In Nazi Germany it meant resisting the pressure to conform to the Nazis' laws. In our day it might mean resisting the strong and subtle urges of our dominant culture to consume at any cost.

'Surrender' is a vow that helps us live like Jesus. Not simply by measuring our lives against some kind of external code but by leaning into the spiritual rhythms of an ageless posture in our current culture.

Generosity. This is all about open-handed living in a closed-fist culture. It means opening up our lives, homes, tables, wallets, relationships, and communities to God for His use for His Kingdom. For some this will be about learning to share resources. For others it will be about learning to share lives. All of us need, in our current cultural climate of 'take', to live like Jesus and to 'give'. Again, there is no external rule to accomplish this - rather a communal vow that asks the questions together, what does it mean to be people of generosity in our context? To live that out is to model Jesus in our everyday life.

Mission. Our spiritual lives are not some kind of esoteric hope. They are anchored in real life decisions in our everyday world. Jesus never instructed some kind of 'super spiritual' life - He introduced a rooted, earthy, and very real spirituality that infected every way we lived. It's not just righteous, but it's justice. It's not just internal - it affects the external conditions of our world. A faith that is healthy and alive will be making a big difference in the world. The believers who are reflecting Jesus to the world are people of action. They actually walk the talk. This vow is about being real with a living faith that actually makes a difference in real life.

The outliving of these three, shapes a rule of life that is explored by groups, which we call hubs, who agree to intentionally live in accountability in accordance with them.

Although there are monthly connections and challenges we are fully trusting Infinitum members to explore the vision, virtues, and vows together. Naturally the expressions and outcomes will differ, but that will help to build a rich and innovative diversity.

Rule Of Life

We are looking at this rhythm of life that begins to provide a framework for Infinitum members. As you can see the hub is central to this framework.

Connection Daily – pray and preview the Vision, Virtues, and Vows daily – and in the light of those think through questions like, “how do I need to live?”

Conversation Weekly – with fellow members of your hub. It is helpful to create a conversation that enables support and accountability to take place.

Challenge Monthly – Over the years we've experimented with various monthly initiatives, from podcasts and campaigns to prayer days and prayer challenges with our Infinitum community.

This has been our driving passage: Romans 12: 1-2 The Message

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."

FAQ

Why did Infinitum start?

Infinitum started as a way of providing people with the opportunity to deepen their spiritual journey. It was designed for people who wanted to journey with others to see the radical call of Jesus become a greater reality in their life.

Who started it?

Infinitum was started by Phil Wall, Danielle Strickland, Ian Mayhew, and Stephen Court. Their friendship and conversations over the years resulted in the creation of this tool.

How is it funded?

Infinitum has been funded by private donations. All resources are free, though.

Is it for a particular denomination?

Although Infinitum started among Salvationists, it is not aimed exclusively at them. There are people from all denominations, and all walks of life, who are now embracing this rhythm of life.

Is it a program?

No. Infinitum is not a course you can buy, but a journey you can explore.

There are scores of fantastic discipleship and Bible study programs out there, but Infinitum is not designed to compete with those.

Infinitum is designed as a conversational journey that is centred in HUBs of people who explore what the Vision, Virtues and Vows look like in each other's lives.

What exactly is a Hub?

HUBs are groups of people (normally between 2-6) who meet on a regular basis (often weekly). They meet to reflect on life lived since they last met, ask each other questions around the vision, virtues, and vows, and pray for each other. A HUB is not a Bible study group or small group, but a targeted spiritual development opportunity to promote radical and deep discipleship.

In fact, it is the opposite of most cells / Bible studies / small groups in that while those are typically open groups (e.g. you invite your friends to attend), Hubs are closed groups (you can't invite new folk each week. You establish your hub and then run with those people) [those interested can search "base networks" on JAC or armybarmy to see how they complement each other].

What is the best size for an Infinitum HUB?

Ideally it's small. Most HUBs we know about have two or three people. But it could be six people. There is a practical issue – obviously it's easier to get two people together than six.

More strategically, HUBs give the opportunity to ask each other in depth questions. For some, being in a HUB with two people may actually prove too intense (you are always

the next person to speak!); on the other hand with six people it can be that some get intimidated or left out.

Are Hubs best when they are single gender?

When we started Infinitum – some people automatically assumed that a HUB would consist of exclusively men or exclusively women. However, there are HUBs where couples meet. There are no rules around it. The aim is to encourage disciples on a journey of depth; so pursue whatever HUB context helps to do that.

How often should a Hub meet?

The aim is a weekly frequency. However, we know that is not always possible. The secret is to always “book in” the day and time and stick with it as much as possible.

Is Infinitum just adding rules to our Christian life?

Too many of us have been formed in a religious culture that uses external measures to reflect internal truths. All of us who have lived this way know that spiritual health is impossible to do from the outside in. We are committed to the fact that lasting change only happens through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:5).

These vows are as simple and profound as any. Jesus suggested them as a way of establishing an internal rhythm to our lives – as a measurement of our intentions to follow Him. We don't think we can improve on Jesus' take on the entire law and the prophets in a simple and deep way of living our lives. The two virtues are exactly that – simple, yet deep. They are guides to help us in living a different way than a dominate culture. And they are the embodiment of who God is – love. Living a life of love is impossible to demand – it must be driven by a spiritual hunger matched by an infilling of God's spirit in us. These virtues are about love. Fueling our hunger and need for more and more love to reflect God to the world.

How can I join a Hub if I don't know anyone locally who shares my vision/intentions locally?

You can contact us and we can let you know about potential Infinitum HUBs in your area. In many ways, though, it would be good to contact someone you know and start to explore the possibility with them. Many HUBs use a social platform to meet, and this proves to be a powerful way of connecting people who are close in terms of their discipleship intentions, but distant in their geographical proximity.

How do I connect daily?

Hopefully the 1-2-3 element really helps – see the resources section for a daily prayer and posture exercise.

Starting the day with...

1 Vision – to follow Jesus. Asking Jesus to help do that authentically throughout the day

2 Virtues – love and love. Thanking God for His love and asking for help to love Him and others in the same way

3 Vows – Surrender, Mission and Generosity. Thinking through how you might be empowered by Jesus to live in a distinctive way.

How do I keep in contact with others pursuing Infinitum around the world?

There are a number of ways

a/ the Infinitum App;

b/ See who has connected with the Facebook Infinitum Page. You can leave comments and make connections there;

c/ Get involved with monthly challenges.

Appendix 1: Spirituality And Relevance?

Getting back to Phil's comments on 'spirituality and relevance'... It's not meant to be a dichotomy – this perspective actually pulls things together. The New Testament we normally render 'peace' can also be translated 'joining all the essential pieces together.' So, worked properly, the exercise actually brings New Testament peace, wholeness.

But too often we are stuck with one or the other: spiritual and irrelevant or relevant and spiritually impotent. Danielle powerfully encountered a broken attempt at this peace – forcibly removing the dichotomy (in this instance the presence of one 'piece' contaminated the integrity of the other, resulting in the 'relevant and spiritually impotent' option) - a few years ago while running an anti-human trafficking booth in a 'sex exhibition' called Taboo in Canada. As she remembers it: "I had spoken at this big Christian youth event in Canada called YC for years with 15,000 young people attending. And I had these 18 year old girls at Taboo coming up to the booth. 'Hey, you're that lady from YC!'"

"Immediately, I'm thinking, 'oh they must be outreach kids'. So I asked, 'You were at YC?' They replied that they'd been going for years with their youth group! As the conversation 'progressed', it grew increasingly difficult to engage because I realized they didn't have any tops on! There was a promotion at the show in which you took off your top to get free air-brushing of your torso. I didn't know where to look! The whole thing was a booby-trap – but there was no visible shame, no sense that these two things (following Jesus and participating in this promotion) don't go well together. I was only there for three hours for one shift and three girls came up to me with the exact same conversation! Paul was onto something when he raged against this enemy of Christianity, Gnosticism, this dualism separating your spiritual life from the rest of your life that cosigns you doing whatever you want and still 'believing' in Jesus."

Here's one way to see the differences:

<https://williamavalos.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/worldview11.jpg>

Gnosticism is back like a revenge - there's a whole generation that has not be taught about this wholeness of life joining all the essential pieces together. They've missed out on 'spirituality as real life'.

It is alarming. When people compartmentalize their spirituality they tend to deaden it. This dualism tends toward hypocrisy because their worldview offers no provision for integrating various component of their lives. Infinitum helps on this point, too.

It helps us craft a spirituality that leaves us culturally engaged AND, at the same time, morally distinct.

Let's dissolve the lines. Let's destroy the barriers. Let's join all the essential pieces together. Let's defeat the existential angst of a generation compartmentalized into uncertainty of identity. Let's position ourselves for wholeness.

Ian recalls: "I grew up in quite a compartmentalised family. We did church - and did it very well! Three meetings on a Sunday, and because I grew up in the Salvation Army, two open-air meetings. Oh yeah, and then in the evening, because I wasn't shattered enough, we had a youth group! 9:00am - 10:00pm day!

"We also did devotions at home and prayers before we went to school. On the surface that all looked very impressive, and I do thank my parents for their influence and diligence in all these things. However, the missional impact that had on my friends at school /college / work was negligible. I did 'Jesus' stuff at home and at the church.

"In addition, I started 'journaling' later in my teens. It proved to be a very helpful tool in articulating some of the stuff going on inside and around me. I always journaled first thing in the morning - with a strong black coffee! Charismatically Caffeinated Contemplation! But what I didn't realise was that I was just reinforcing the patterns of my childhood. I did my 'quiet time' and then went on to 'get-on' with the day!

"Not until Ruth and I had our first child - and my 'blessed/sacred quiet time' was interrupted did I go through something of a revolution. After struggling with this 'rude interruption' to my spiritual walk - I felt God say to me one day that I needed to learn how to discover Him in all things - to break out of the compartments and see that He was to impact and engage me all through the day.

"It was a revelation and helped me appreciate my spiritual walk in a new way. Of course, there were times I set aside to pray - but having a Bible open in the house, or taking my journal with me so that I could write stuff down at other times helped me see a spirituality that was woven into every part of the day and week."

Part of the journey of Infinitum is to help craft holistic identity. We are cultivating lives that are honed and focused and energised, and as consistent as much as they are able to be across those spheres. We pray in church on Sunday and we go and do this thing on Monday.

Phil has this take: "I've got a refined, holistic view of life now. And with this perspective, I've entered a few toxic business situations with some angry, aggressive words. I found myself in the meeting room a few minutes before, by myself, praying, saying, 'God help this day to be holy'. What does that look like? I know what it looks like on Sunday morning but what does a life of surrender, generosity and mission look like now, in this moment, in this office, in this business? Help the authentic-me represent You effectively and helpfully in this context. At the heart of the missional focus of this is to say, 'let's be those people'."

And, of course, it is not limited to the board room. These kinds of challenges can face us in the class room, the rec room, the lunch room, the dressing room, the waiting room... And Infinitum is proving effective in all of these settings.

Danielle adds, "I was talking to these people the other day about how they view God and almost all had negative view of God from growing up in the church. That's sad – although I resonated with it." A lot of it has to do with how we represent the God of Love in the Scriptures. And there is a lot of room for improvement.

Now, that is not a specific indictment of Christianity. Hypocrisy isn't the exclusive domain of Christians. It is a condition of humanity, not just Christians. You might know doctors that drink too much and nurses that go out back of the cancer ward to smoke. This is not just a Christian problem.

Danielle continues: "It was funny because the people I was talking to said they understood it was a human problem, but that nobody else denies it. And it's the denial of the hypocrisy which makes it unpalatable - because Christians pretend they're not hypocrites. The 'penny dropped' – Infinitum brings with it a willingness to embrace the growing, strengthening, deepening journey, removing the pressure to pretend that we've got it all together already. The honesty should protect us not only from hypocrisy and from the arrogance that can accompany it."

And that's not about pretending not to be hypocritical. It's about recognizing that aspects of the human condition can be redeemed and sanctified and about believing hypocrisy is one of those aspects.