

JACQUELINE A. STROTHOFF

THE STORY OF JACQUI

“God, help me!” I screamed as I held the lifeless body of my younger brother in my arms. It was more a cry of desperation than a prayer. I didn’t have any relationship with God.

I had just injected cocaine into my own arm to be sure the drug was okay before giving any to Roger. I then gave my brother an injection of it and within minutes after pulling the needle out his body began to convulse. I knelt down on the floor and gathered him into my arms. Minutes later, as I held him, he died. He was only 19 years old.

I couldn’t believe what was happening. I had overdosed on cocaine before and sometimes I would convulse, but afterwards I would regain consciousness. But now, my brother laid motionless...his lips already turning blue.

Thinking he needed oxygen I dragged his body out onto the balcony of my apartment. I desperately tried breathing into him but he wouldn’t respond. I kept yelling at him to breathe but there was no movement. Frantically, I started screaming up into the night sky, “God help me!”

Shortly thereafter, some men in white jackets arrived along with some police officers. Someone had called for help. They pried my brother out of my arms and strapped me to an ambulance cot. I was admitted to the psychiatric ward of a local hospital. My brother’s body was taken to another hospital.

I dearly loved my little brother, as did anyone who knew him. He continued to look up to me regardless of the things I had done or who I had become. I tried to shield him from my sordid lifestyle as much as I could. But now he was gone. His death was a result of my actions.

It seemed another sequence in a nightmare that had been going on since I was 14 years old. I was 26 now and I wondered when it would ever end.

But let me go back to the beginning,

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I was the oldest of six children. My parents were good people, we lived in a nice home in the suburbs, and my childhood was “normal”. There had been some incidents of sexual abuse in my early childhood by a distant relative and a neighborhood boy, but I never had clear memory of that or ever connected it to the emptiness and pain I felt inside.

When I was 12 years old my family moved to Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C. While attending Junior High School, I began to hang around with those considered to be “the wrong crowd”. We would smoke, drink alcohol, and take pills. I had already experienced those things as a 12 year old in Pittsburgh, but now it was more routine.

The feelings I would get from using those substances made me feel peaceful and happy inside. The problem was it never lasted.

The next few years were filled with much of the same behaviors. In addition to the drug and alcohol use, I became sexually promiscuous and more rebellious, and my academic performance began to fail.

At the age of 14, I tried to commit suicide for the first time. My steady boyfriend had just broken up with me and as an adolescent I felt as though it was the end of my world. I reacted by slicing my wrist with a razor blade. On the way home from the hospital, I can remember my father asking, “How could a 14 year old feel like there was nothing to live for?” I had no answer for him.

One day I met a guy who was idolized by some of my friends. He was much older than me and lived a rather wild lifestyle, but I was flattered by his attention and the popularity it brought me. I dated him against my parents orders. When I was barely 16 I became pregnant by him and I dropped out of school and got married.

It wasn't long before I discovered he wasn't the man I thought he was. He had always treated me like a queen when we dated, but now he revealed a vicious temper. He would beat me at the slightest provocation and sometimes for no reason at all. I always felt like I was walking on eggshells and lived in fear.

I had never been mistreated by my parents and rarely saw my father angry. I didn't know how to cope with the violence but assumed it was my fault. Shame and fear caused me to keep the abuse secretive.

In my sixth month of pregnancy, he had beaten me so badly I began hemorrhaging and was rushed to the hospital. The baby was stillborn. I was treated at the hospital for a couple days and released. A few days later, my father stopped by to check on me and when he saw my condition he called an ambulance. It was discovered I had been pregnant with twins. They had to surgically remove the other dead child. I was declared sterile due to the infection that had developed.

My parents sent me to Pittsburgh to live with my Grandparents. They enrolled me in a private school. At the time I was battling anxiety and nightmares. I found a connection at school for

barbiturates and I was off and running again. The lifestyle of drugs, alcohol, and sexual behavior increased to a new level.

In the fall of 1966, I entered Penn State University, and I looked forward to a “fresh start”. But once again, I was drawn to the wrong crowd of people and quickly found myself immersed in their culture. That was the year my love affair with heroin began.

The first time someone injected it into my vein, I knew I had found what I had been looking for all my life. The peace and feeling of euphoria was incredible. The pain was gone! Little did I know then that the peace was a lie...nothing more than a cheap imitation conjured up by the devil. And the pain that he had hidden beneath this false pool of peace was far greater than anything I had ever imagined.

By the end of that summer in Wildwood, N.J., my 17 year old life had become drug infested. Every single day found me high on something. My mind deceived me into thinking “this is really the life”, and the enemy of my soul worked hard to support those thoughts.

Nobody ever really intends to become a heroin addict. We don't wake up one morning and say “Gee, I think I'd like to become a junkie when I grow up.” Even in the early stages of using you tell yourself you will keep control. Somehow you will manage to do what none of the others could. You believe the lie that you will be able to control the monster.

It reminds me of a scene I witnessed during a circus performance. A lion tamer had been putting on quite a show with his whip and chair as he dictated to the lion every move he wanted him to make. Suddenly, that huge beast refused to follow his master's directions and turned on him, slapping the chair out of his hands. The trainer was shocked and tried to regain control. But it was too late. He had to be rescued.

That was how it was with me and heroin. After thinking I was in control of my drug use, one day the monster turned on me. Getting high became the focal point of my existence. My life was consumed by chasing bags of dope. All my time, money and energy were directed toward that chase.

Things that used to frighten me became ordinary. I became a con artist and seasoned liar. Stealing progressed from petty larceny to armed robbery. The world of prostitution, sexual assault, and physical abuse became real. Arrests were happening more frequently as well as jail time. As the violence in my world increased, I began to keep a gun. Waking up in psychiatric wards or strange places after overdoses was common. It all seemed so unreal. How did this happen?

The first time I ever tried to stop using heroin happened as a result of an accident. It was June, 1972, and I was living in Florida. Frequent moving had become a normal way of life for me as it seemed I was always running away from a bad situation toward what I believed would be that "fresh start".

My Grandparents were planning a silver wedding anniversary celebration for my parents in Pittsburgh. My Grandmother persuaded me to come for the weekend and bought me an airline ticket. I had a sizeable habit at the time because I was living with a dealer.

I made up a package of dope and placed it in the lining of my purse for the trip. My Grandmother picked me up at the airport and then stopped by my aunt's house that night. After greeting everyone, I went straight to the bathroom to shoot up. To my horror, I discovered the package was gone! The pain of withdrawal would begin by morning. My family only thought I smoked pot. I was panic stricken.

Sneaking out of my Grandmother's house that night, I headed for Shadyside to try and find some dope but all I could get were barbiturates. They helped me sleep that night but I awoke sick the next morning. Deciding my only hope was to get a dose of methadone from a sympathetic doctor, I went to St. Francis Hospital. I had asked my friend, Michael, to come to Pittsburgh the day before. He met me at the hospital.

The doctor refused me methadone, but suggested talking to their drug counselor. Waiting for him in the emergency room, I became sicker. Finally, I said to Michael, "I can't stand this any longer." I slipped a syringe off a medical cart, went into the restroom and shot up the barbiturates. When I didn't return Michael went for help. As they unlocked the restroom door they found me slumped over the toilet with the needle still in my arm. My lips were already blue and they thought I was dead.

Waking up in the emergency room with IV's in my arms, the first face that I saw was my father's brother's. He was crying. Uncle Bob had been the only one left at my Grandmother's house when the call came from the hospital. Everyone else had left for the party. His kindness toward me was incredible. The story of how we found some heroin was beyond belief. But I got fixed and then we went to the party. By then almost everyone else had left. Together we told my parents the truth.

The next morning I woke up with the awareness that my father was standing in the doorway of the bedroom. When he realized I was awake, he crossed the room, knelt down beside my bed, and began to cry. I was devastated. I had never seen my father cry before. He pleaded with me to get help. I agreed to go back home with them to Virginia to find a program. If the first part of my nightmare was living the life of a junkie, then the second part had to be trying to get free from that life!

THE CHALLENGE HAD JUST BEGUN!

There was a drug detoxification program in a hospital near their home that I entered. While in treatment, I was visited by a Federal Marshal. It seemed there was an outstanding warrant for my arrest in Virginia. Upon my release I was taken to a hearing in Alexandria, and the judge ordered me to treatment at the government program in Lexington, Kentucky, simply known as "The Cure".

Theory was that if you stayed the 6 months at the end of that time you would be "cured". In a matter of weeks I was thrown out of the program. (I later found out their "cure rate" was less than 3%).

Once again hitting the "fresh start" trial I moved back to Philadelphia, quickly found Michael, and asked him to rent an apartment with me. We had been partners in crime and addiction for a while, when I had an idea. I studied the Physician's Desk Reference books at the library until I could pass as a pharmacist's assistant. Fabricated resumes listing out of state references gave me enough time to get hired, empty the narcotics cabinets, and hit the streets before anyone realized what happened.

Since the pharmaceutical drugs were pure, Michael and I were badly strung out and overdosing on a regular basis. On the evening of November 1, 1972, I returned home with another friend. We discovered Michael unconscious in the bathtub. We figured he had just done too much dope and pulled him out of the tub and onto the waterbed. He was still breathing and had a pulse. We continued packaging dope and getting high through the night.

I laid down beside him in the wee hours of the morning and fell asleep. Around 6:00 in the morning I woke up freezing cold. I quickly realized it was because Michael was so cold. He was still lying motionless, but his lips were blue, there was white foam around his mouth, and he wasn't breathing. He was dead.

Feeling as if I were in a trance, I walked to the corner payphone and called my friend that had been with me the night before. "You need to come over right away", I said. "There is something wrong with Michael". He told me to stay by the phone and wait for him but I went back to the apartment and sat down at the kitchen table.

When he arrived, he went into the bedroom and then returned, confirming what I already knew to be true. We shot up and then went for a ride to talk about what we were going to do. Calling the authorities was out of the question. I reasoned that if the police came they would confiscate the drugs and send me to prison. Michael was dead. Nothing we could do would change that. We decided to bury him ourselves!

My friend had been employed at the time with a construction crew and had access to a bulldozer. But we would have to wait until Sunday to dig the ditch. By the time we went back to retrieve the body Michael no longer looked human. The image was horrifying and the stench repulsive. It was just horrifying. We wrapped his body in the blue rug, dragged him down three flights of stairs, and pulled him up on the bed of a pick-up truck. We drove across the river to New Jersey where the job site was and buried him.

It was so hard for me to believe that drugs were more important to me than a human life. This was the life of someone that I loved dearly. How had I become so cold and calloused? What kind of animal had I become? I had to accept the fact that for me, even life and love took second place to narcotics.

Life became increasingly difficult for me to manage and I began having serious mental problems. A friend called my father and alerted him of my condition. My dad paid for a ticket to get me on a bus back to my Grandparents in Pittsburgh. They admitted me to a psychiatric ward in a local hospital. It was there that I talked about what happened with Michael. But nobody believed me.

They sent me to another drug program in Virginia. This time it was a Therapeutic Community. In a counseling session I mentioned what happened with Michael. The next thing I knew I was being extradited to New Jersey. At the hearing, the judge found me guilty of “illegal disposition of a dead body”, stipulated me to finish the program and gave me years of probation.

Soon after that I ran away from the program and hit the streets again. There still hadn't been a “cure” but I was becoming more desperate to find one. Over the next several months I would participate in hospital day treatment programs, primal therapy, residential 12 step programs, methadone programs, meetings and support groups. After exhausting every treatment option there was available, the frightening conclusion was this – I WAS STILL A JUNKIE!

Believing there was no escape from the hell I had created for myself, and despising the things I had to do for my habit and who I had become, I tried to commit suicide once again. Waking up in the emergency room, I began to cry as I realized I had failed. My father was in the room and walked over to me. All I said to him was “Will you take me to the clinic to get my methadone or not?” They hadn't even taken the tubes out of me yet but all I could think of was getting my drugs.

It was on December 7, 1974, that my brother Roger had died from the injection I had given him. That night they had placed me in an isolation room strapped down to the bed with an attendant by my side. They began detoxing me. The feeling of hopelessness was beyond words. I knew my life was over.

It was while I was in this condition that God sent a man to me.

Frank Marcello was one of my father's best friends from Pittsburgh. They grew up together. As an artist, he took jobs from Whitaker House to design book jackets. At that time they were publishing several books that were biographies of dramatic conversions for Christ. One of those that Frank worked on was the story of Cookie Rodriguez.

He had told me a little about her life at an earlier time but it sounded like a fairy tale to me. I knew junkies couldn't change. I tried everything and for so many years. Anyway, how could some God somewhere up in the sky change anybody's life down here? And doesn't God just love good people? It didn't make any sense to me.

Now Frank had come to me against all odds with the same message. With tears streaming down his cheeks, and my father standing by his side, he looked into my eyes and asked, "Do you remember what I told you about Jesus?" I nodded yes. He continued, "He has sent me here to tell you that if you will surrender your life to Him, He will change you and use you to help others and glorify His name." I just stared at him trying to understand what he was saying, "Jacqui," he asked softly, "will you pray with me and give your life to Jesus?" Now tears were streaming down my face as I nodded yes once again.

Nothing visibly happened during or after the prayer. But the truth was that everything happened. When I asked Jesus to forgive my sins, cleanse my heart, and come live in me...He did! Whether I could feel it or not, my spirit was regenerated from death to life.

This all happened on the day of my brother's funeral.

After I had been detoxed, I was transferred to a mental hospital in Fairfax, Virginia. I was taken to a hearing in shackles before a panel who made the decision to sentence me to an institution for the criminally insane. My criminal record and history caused them to believe I was a danger to myself and others. My father was present at this time when the decision was read. I could barely look at him it was so painful.

I was in that hospital two months waiting for transfer, In the meantime, I read the book "Please Make Me Cry", that Frank had worked on and told me about. Her story was so much like mine, I thought either this woman is the biggest liar or this is the greatest news I have ever heard.

I longed for what God had done for this woman and asked Him to do the same thing for me. Shortly after that prayer, I was discharged from the hospital without explanation. They gave me cab fare voucher for wherever I wanted to go and a brown paper grocery bag containing all that I owned. The problem was I had no place to go. So I headed back to the streets and the only life I knew.

One night I was sleeping on newspapers in an empty apartment without heat in February. I still had the book and on the back was printed "If You Need Help Call This Number". And so I walked to a phone booth and made a collect call to Cookie. She and the students had been praying for me (thanks to Frank) and she had a prepaid bus ticket waiting for me at the Greyhound station in Washington, D.C.

It was February, 1975, when I arrived at New Life for Girls in York, Pennsylvania. They put me right to bed because I was high. Waking up the next morning, I looked out the window beside the bottom bunk where I had slept and all I could see were trees! Ladies of various shapes, sizes and colors were milling around and so I started to feel under the bunk to find my shoes. I didn't know what I was thinking in coming here but I knew I would be getting sick soon and wanted to get out of there.

Suddenly, there was Cookie. Rejecting all my reasons to go she made a proposition with me. "If you will let us pray for you and stay for 24 hours, then we will take you back to the bus station and give you a ticket back to D.C." She had a deal. I could do anything for 24 hours.

She and the girls laid hands on me (which freaked me out and I kept my eyes open) and began to pray. Almost immediately, it was as if a fire ignited in my belly. It began to radiate throughout my whole body. "What is this", I cried, "I feel like I am on fire?" She said it was God touching me...healing me.

For the remainder of the day I felt wonderful. There was never a trace of sickness. I had a huge appetite. I slept like a baby that night. I had no understanding of what was happening but God had my full attention. A couple days later in chapel her husband was preaching and asked those of us that were new to stand up and thank God for the new life He had given us. So I did as I was asked, raised my hands and began to thank Him when suddenly I was completely overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit.

The fullness of God's love seemed to sweep over me in waves. Though my eyes were closed, my vision was flooded with an intense brightness. It was as if the fire of His love was burning out of me all the sin, shame, and guilt that I carried. Unclean feelings I had about myself were being washed away by the continued waves of His mercy and forgiveness. Although I couldn't comprehend what was happening to me I knew it was unlike anything I had ever experienced in my life before.

A few hours later, when I finally stood up, I knew beyond any shadow of a doubt, that I would never be the same. Whatever just happened had changed me from the inside out. It had touched the deepest part of me. I felt as if I was a brand new person. What was this?

The staff began to share with me from God's word explaining more fully what it meant to be spiritually re-born and have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What seemed most awesome to me was the fact that He died for me before I ever heard of Him. While I was still a very bad person, He extended His love to me. So many others had withheld their love until I could clean myself up and get my act together. Jesus knew I could never do that.

Loving me first, He offered the only thing that could clean me up – His own precious blood shed 2,000 years ago for all mankind. I could never comprehend that kind of love. It was too much to even try. But even without my understanding that amazing love captured my heart.

That year spent in the program was the most wonderful year of my life. They were spiritual honeymoon days filled with Bible classes, chapel services, prayer times, and fellowshiping with other women who had once been just like me but now we had received the gift of a new life. My hunger to know God was great and the more I was fed the hungrier I became. There were many struggles in my life as I was being disciple, but the things I used to live for no longer held any attraction for me. What the world had to offer seemed like a cesspool after drinking from the living waters of Christ.

From the beginning, I knew one day I would be working with women who were bound by the same kinds of sin that I had been. Initially, I expected that it would start as soon as I had graduated the program. But God had another idea.

A man of God by the name of David Wilkerson had established a school of ministry called Twin Oaks Leadership Academy. It was designed to equip and train graduates of discipleship ministries who felt called to work with people who had life controlling problems. That was me!

Those of us who were chosen arrived at Twin Oaks in Lindale, Texas, on a hot summer day in June, 1976. My year at that school was the other best year of my life. Once again there were Bible classes, prayer times, great church services with some of the most famous guest speakers, and evangelistic outreaches in places like Fort Lauderdale and New York City.

My love for and devotion to Jesus increased daily and our relationship grew deeper and deeper as the months flew by. After Commencement we were required to complete a one year internship in a ministry related to our calling. I was invited to go to Southern California Teen Challenge in Riverside, California. My assignment was to work with the wives of the men who were in the program there.

On November 11, 1977, I had just finished watching a program about abused women. I closed my eyes, bowed my head and wept quietly to myself, as I asked God why there were not more places for these women to go for help. Suddenly, with my eyes still closed, it was as if I was watching a movie of a large home that God was describing to me as a spiritual hospital. It was

filled with women who had all manner of problems but they were all being changed and healed in the glorious presence of the Lord. It was thrilling!

However, I was still a new Christian, and my expectations were naïve. I thought this would all fall into place within a few months or so. When it didn't happen that way I became discouraged but I never could forget what I had seen and heard.

In Arlington, Virginia, on February 17, 1979, Robert Strothoff and I were married. We had met at Bible school and rumor has it that everyone but Bob and I knew that God has chosen us for each other. His former life had been like my own, and the desire of his heart was to reach other men for Christ who were bound by the same kinds of issues he had been.

Since neither of us thought we were able to have children we thought God must have considered this when He brought us together. But we figured wrong. God gave us a gift on our first wedding anniversary in Oceanside, California. It was on that day I discovered that I was pregnant with my son. The Lord had healed me.

We moved from California to Texas and from Texas to Missouri as we continued serving God together and raising our young son, Justin. In Springfield my husband attended Evangel College, while I was a student at Southwest Missouri State University pursuing a degree in Social Work. Because of school, several jobs, family and ministry, our years there were difficult. But 3 years later we both graduated with highest honors.

From Missouri we moved to Virginia to be near our family for the first time as we waited for our "marching orders" from the Lord. We both obtained positions in the mental health field and assisted pastoring at an Assembly of God church in Bethesda, Maryland. We also connected with the local Teen Challenge in that Metro area.

In July of 1986, I was waiting to have a hysterectomy when I discovered that I was pregnant with my daughter, Chelsea. The doctor had said I would never be able to have children, but God had the last word as He blessed us with not one, but two, both beautiful and healthy.

During the summer of 1988, we sensed God asking us to pack up once again and move to Rhode Island. My husband was asked to begin a discipleship ministry in Providence to complement the existing one in Boston, called Outreach Ministries. It involved months of prayer. We believed God was leading us there for our next assignment.

Once we arrived in Rhode Island, two of God's best ideas were realized through my life. First, experience gained in treatment of sexual abuse victims was used as the cornerstone to build Restoration Ministries. The Lord combined my clinical skills with my Biblical knowledge to help women with these issues to receive a greater healing.

Secondly, the vision God had shared with me in 1977 regarding the home for women has now become a reality. Teen Challenge Providence for Women is in a three story building with an office annex, which used to be a funeral parlor! Where people once came to reverence the dead they now come to celebrate those who have been given new life.

While in Rhode Island, we expanded the men's program in Boston and opened a new home for men in Providence. After living in New England for 10 years we moved south to Pensacola, Florida, in the summer of 1988. My husband had begun to serve under Steve Hill, the resident evangelist at the Brownsville Revival. We were all graduates of the program and met at Twin Oaks Leadership Academy.

With a desire to continue serving God and help people, I joined Brownsville's prayer team and began to volunteer with their Women's Prison Ministry as their former leader resigned. It was such a blessing.

In July of 1999, Bob and I established "In His Presence Ministries". God had spoken to our hearts about this new work after our testimonies had been aired on "Focus On The Family", with Dr. James Dobson the previous month. We received so many calls and letters from folks who had heard the broadcast, which included invitations to come minister in their churches. During that year Bob did a considerable amount of traveling to ministry meetings. I stayed home to care for our daughter and worked part-time in a restaurant on the beach.

It was August 14, 2000, and I was driving my husband to the clinic. He had been complaining of shoulder pain and we decided it was better to be safe than sorry. We headed to the one in town which was open until 8:00 pm and when we were about 4 blocks from the clinic Bob suddenly lost consciousness and fell over onto my lap. In the Baptist Hospital, at 7:05 pm, my husband was pronounced dead from a massive heart attack.

The children and I were devastated. As you can imagine, the months that followed were filled with a myriad of emotions and tasks as I tried to stabilize my family and determine God's direction for our lives now without my husband. Making matters harder was the fact that his mother had just come to live with us because she had Alzheimer's and needed continual personal care. So I prayed and when the Lord did speak He only said two things: Maintain "In His Presence Ministries" and "Return to the land that you came from".

Our house was put on the market and the first family that came to see it bought it for the asking price. After 3 years in Pensacola, we returned to Rhode Island in May, 2001. My mother-in-law came with us and began living in a nearby long term care facility. Our other companion was our Peek-A-Poo, Bandit.

We rented a duplex in Lincoln where my daughter could begin High School where she already knew some kids from attending Elementary School in that same town. Coming back "home" without Bob was very painful for all of us as memories with him abounded there.

Anxious to be active in ministry again, I began to facilitate support groups for women who struggled with issues from past sexual abuse and eating disorders. I also formulated and conducted one day events called "Healing House Seminars", which focused on the topics of depression, anxiety, fear, and anger.

In the Spring of 2003, I was hired as the Women's Pastor at my home church, North Providence Assembly of God. It was a wonderful opportunity to help meet the needs of our women in a more personal way. The Lord also began providing new opportunities for me to speak at conferences, seminars, and retreats across the country.

In 2006, our founding pastor resigned and moved to Florida to begin a new ministry. My time of employment there was coming to an end. I prayed and asked God, "What do you want me to do next"?

On August 4th, I received a phone call from Rodney Hart, President of Teen Challenge New England, offering me a position with the organization. I was stunned! God had brought me full circle and placed me back in the home for women that I had founded 12 years earlier. I accepted with great joy!

Like many other intravenous drug users, I had contracted Hepatitis- C many years earlier. In 2008 I had to begin treatment with Interferon. Although living through that year was horrific, the result was wonderful. I have been tested annually for 9 years and there continues to be no trace of the virus.

My son, Justin, has married a beautiful woman of God named Kimberly, and in 2012 my first grandchild, Jaxon Robert was born. In 2014, his brother, Bryson David, joined the family. My daughter Chelsea graduated Rhode Island College and now serves as the Program Supervisor at the Teen Challenge Rhode Island Home for Women.

It has been 43 years since I first accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and entered into a relationship with him. At first I was afraid the miraculous change in my life would never last. It seemed too good to be true. But God's power is not battery operated. It doesn't weaken over periods of time or extended use. God is able to keep any and all of those who want to be kept.

In many ways these years with the Lord have seemed like a dream. As in anybody's life, difficulties have come. But I have NEVER had to face them alone. He has kept His promise to never leave me nor forsake me (Hebrews 13:5). He has poured an abundance of blessing upon

my life: healing of body and mind, a wonderful husband and two precious children, a college and Bible school education, ministerial ordination, amazing platforms to declare His loving and powerful gospel, restored relationships with my family, an encouraging support system of friends, the opportunity to serve in the greatest ministry in the world, and has always met my every need.

Yet all of those blessings combined could never compare to the most precious gift of all...the privilege to call the creator of the universe my Father, and to know He calls me His daughter.

How about you?

What kinds of things have you sought after trying to fill the longings of your heart? Where have you looked for the answers to life's questions? In spite of all your efforts, do you still feel empty, confused, lonely and hurting? Allow me to introduce you to my very best friend, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, but you say you never did the kinds of things that I did. Maybe you don't abuse drugs or alcohol, lie, cheat, steal or abuse anyone. Perhaps you are a good person who tries hard to do the "right thing". You don't think of yourself as a "sinner".

God would argue that. He tells us in His word that "ALL have sinned and fallen short of His glory. (Romans 3:23) It also says, "ALL we like sheep have gone astray and turned to our own way..." (Isaiah 53:6). The word ALL includes you and me.

The good news is that we don't have to remain outside God's family because of our sinfulness. God had a plan to reconcile us back to Himself. He sent His son, Jesus, to die on a cross for all humanity. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...in whom we have redemption (we were bought back) through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:3, 7) The Bible says, "This is love; not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His only son to be a way through which we could be forgiven and come back to Him." (1 John 4:10).

Finally, we can receive Jesus into our lives by an act of our will in repenting (changing our mind and attitude toward God). It is simple enough for any child to understand. God said the way to do that is "Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved." (Romans 10:9). We must come to Him in faith, believing He will do what He has promised. Jesus said, "Those who come to me I will in no way cast out." (John 6:37)

I challenge you, friend, come to Jesus. Forget your own ideas about how to change your life and go for God's idea. Forget "fresh starts" and get a fresh life instead. In your own words, pray

something like this now: “Jesus I know I am lost and I need you. I am tired of my old life. Please forgive me of my sins and give me a clean heart. Send the power of your Holy Spirit to change me. I believe that you were crucified and died for me, that you were buried but rose again to life on the third day. I surrender my life to you Jesus that you would give me yours. I thank you Jesus. Amen!”

Welcome friend to the family of God. The Bible says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:12). You have just taken the most important step in your life.

Now it is important that you get a Bible and begin to read it daily...especially the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Talk with Jesus daily as you would to your best friend. Share your heart with Him. Find a good church that preaches the gospel where you can begin to learn more about God. This is also a good place to connect with other believers so you can begin to build a network of support as you grow in your faith.

If you, or someone you know, has a life controlling problem, please call us at one of the numbers on the back of this booklet. We want to help!

May God bless you as you begin your new life and journey with Him.

IN HIS PRESENCE MINISTRIES

P. O. BOX 41315

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02904

JACQUI@INHISPRESENCEMINISTRIES.ORG

401-497-0982

WWW.INHISPRESENCEMINISTRIES.ORG

