



Ignacio "Nacho" Ortega

Jack had been one of my best friends for almost nine years.

He had sent money to my wife and children when I was locked up in jail on a drug charge.

I had trusted Jack with my very life,

My three children called him Uncle Jack.

But the day came when Jack (not his real name) betrayed me to the police, and I was sentenced to do five years in prison!

Then one day, while I was in jail awaiting shipment to a penitentiary, I ran into Jack in the jail hallway. Did I hate Jack? Would I kill him, you ask? Let me tell you the rest of the story.

Before that dynamic encounter with Jack, I had had another dynamic encounter. My wife had prayed for me, and I, though I was a criminal and a drug pusher, I had a dynamic encounter with God, and I started studying God's word (the Bible).

As Jack and I sat on a bench just outside the nurse's

station, waiting to go in, I remembered that Jesus taught us to forgive our enemies [Matthew 5:43]. What would I do? Would I forgive him? Should I speak to him? Should I keep my mouth shut? Like most young Christians, I didn't know what to do. Looking at him did not make me angry. That was proof enough that God had really changed me and done a complete job on me. I did hesitate to speak to him at first, but God's spirit in me was so strong that I couldn't hold it longer. I turned to him and said, "Jack, I forgive you and God bless you. No hard feelings!" I didn't know what else to say, so I gave him my hand and we shook.

It was a simple act, but what peace and joy I had after I had done it. More than ever I knew that God had come into my life!

Jack had a funny look on his face. Finally he told me that he was sorry. I replied, "Don't worry about it. I'll be okay." At that moment he was called into the nurse's office and the next day I was shipped to another prison. I never saw Jack again, but I'm sure that my heavenly father arranged that meeting with Jack to try me and see what was in me, and to strengthen my faith!

Please let me go back a few years and tell about the time that God changed me and a few events that led up to that change: I'll start with my last weed (marijuana) run.

I had been running weed for several years and I had made quite a bit of money. I had a nice home, money in the bank, a boat, a nice car and truck, plus a good wife and three children. I knew that it was time to get out of that business. I told my partner that I was going to turn all of the business over to him. We had to make a run to Florida

to tell all of our connections that I was turning the business over to him. As I left my home, I looked at my house and prayed, "God, bring me back soon to all this." You see, I believed in God, but I had not yet made a commitment to obey him. There was something in me that did not feel right. It felt like butterflies in my stomach.

We had about 30 pounds of weed with us, and it was on that run that state troopers stopped us and searched our car. It took them about an hour, but they found it, and all of my dreams died. I had gambled and lost. Eventually I was sentenced to five years. In prison I started reading the Bible and praying a lot; however, I had not yet made a commitment to follow God. I still used foul language, smoked, and played con games. Oh, I made a few half-hearted commitments like most people do. I promised God I would quit all of that after I got out—what a joke! I got out and got worse—no church, no Bible, no Jesus (my excuse for quitting church was that I didn't like the pastor, he was always wanting money). I got back into the night life and took my wife with me. Before long she too was using foul language, smoking and going along with all of my un-Godly ways. Our children were also becoming rebellious.

I had quit my drug dealing and was working a job, but God still wanted to get my attention—and he got it. It was on the last Thursday in October, 1993 while I was working on my own home (I was a carpenter), someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and found an FBI gun barrel pointed in my face. "Drop your saw. You are under arrest. We have an order for your arrest from the State of Tennessee." When I was handcuffed, my

11-year-old son, screamed and embraced my leg. How embarrassing, all of my neighbors watched as I was taken away in handcuffs. My wife was also arrested.

The next morning we were in court and my wife said these words to me, "I turned it all over to Jesus. Only he can get us out of this." But my heart was still hardened to God. I was trusting my attorney instead of God.

The judge said, "No bond." My heart sank, but my wife kept trusting in God and in just a few hours she was allowed to make bond.

The next day, I called my wife, and all she said was, "Trust God!" I said Yes, but I did not. In my heart I wanted Jesus, but something kept me from making a commitment. That night I started once again reading the Bible. Something started happening in me that night. All of the men were staring at me reading the Bible, but I didn't care. I really wanted God. My wife must have been praying for me, for God's word started coming alive. Every sentence said something deep into my spirit. God changed me so much that the men started calling me "the brother," and I started talking to them about the man named Jesus! Some listened and some turned away. God had gotten my attention and had changed me!

On my fifth day in jail, I prayed for deliverance from that place. It was then that God spoke into my spirit. (No, he did not speak in my ears, but it was just as real.) He said, "You always want something from me. Why don't you do something for me?"

I asked, "What can I do for you, Lord?"

These are the words that he spoke into my spirit: "Clean my temple. Quit smoking now." (The Bible teaches

that our body is God's temple.)

I didn't think that I could, so I prayed, "I can't do that in here, but, I'll tell you what, if you really are God, help me to stop. Make me not want to smoke tomorrow. If you do that, I will serve you, Lord." It sounded like I was trying to bargain with God. But, because I was young and inexperienced in the things of God, he let me get away with it. Now that I am more mature in spiritual things, I could not get away with that kind of bargaining with God. He did answer my prayer. That night I slept like a baby. Despite my terrible circumstances, I was in perfect peace. The next morning I felt like a new born baby. I thanked my heavenly father for another day. While waiting for breakfast, someone came over and said, "You ain't smoking. You want one?"

"No," I said. I couldn't believe my ears what I had just said. After breakfast I did not want to smoke. It was as if I had never smoked. When God does a job on you, he does it completely. Not only did I never smoke again, God also cleaned my foul language (profanities, using curse words). I was a changed man! I was a new creature in Jesus Christ.

That same afternoon I received another very great blessing. The pastor of our church came to visit me, and this is what I told him: "I don't want the federal marshals to take me to Tennessee. If I do, my wife will have to go there alone. I want to get out on bond so that my wife and I can go there together."

He said, "Let's pray and ask God that you will not have to go there in chains. We'll accept it by faith that you won't." We put our hands together on the glass that was

separating us, and he prayed a simple prayer. As he prayed I felt a tingling coming from my hands and going all through my body. I started crying and tears of joy were running down my face. Again I felt peaceful. I washed the tears from my face so that the men in the cell would not know that I had been crying.

The very next day God answered my prayer. I was called to court for a bond hearing. My attorney said, "You have been indicted on 18 counts of conspiracy to distribute 500 pounds of marijuana." My heart stopped. He continued, "There is a one chance in 1000 that the judge will consider a bond. Tennessee does not want a bond set. If one is set, it will be at least \$150,000." I had less than \$5000.

Next I saw my wife and I said to her, "No way will they let me out on bond."

But she responded, "Claim the blood of Jesus." Tears were running down her face. I bowed my head and did as she suggested—while trembling with fear.

In court, the U.S. attorney told the judge all of the charges that I was facing and that I was a menace to society, and I would not come to court. He added, "Tennessee still does not want him set free."

While the judge looked over my papers, I was going through a great spiritual battle. I was hearing Satan's voice tell me that there was no way I was going home, while I kept looking to Jesus. Finally the judge looked up and said, "I believe that Mr. Ortega will appear in court, and I also believe a man is innocent until proven guilty. I am setting a \$50,000 bond with a 10% surety in this case."

I said, "Thank you, Jesus." The U.S. attorney jumped out of his seat and objected, arguing that I was not worthy of such a low bond."

The judge clinched it with, "That's my decision. Next case, please."

I was out that same afternoon, and my wife and I drove straight to our church and had us a thanksgiving prayer meeting—all by ourselves! We fell at the altar and I poured my heart out to God. I never felt so good in my life. I cried for joy, the joy that is found only in Jesus Christ. Our lives have never been the same since that moment.

Our court date in Knoxville was not for another five months. During those five months, my wife and I were both filled with God's spirit and baptized.

April, 1994, my wife and I flew to Knoxville for our sentencing. We were trusting God that we would both fly back home together, but I was sentenced to five years. It was a big let-down for me, and for a few days I didn't want anything to do with God. Finally I prayed, "God, why have you forsaken me?" While walking around in the cell, I distinctly heard a voice say to me, "I have not forsaken you. I am right here. This is where I want and need you." The voice stopped. This voice was so real that I thought one of the men in the cell had heard my prayer, and was playing a trick on me. But when I looked around, everybody was busy watching television or playing cards. Again, God had spoken to me! This time in a voice so plain that I thought it was a human voice. Those words were engraved in my mind and in my heart. I immediately stopped and praised God and sang a hymn (the noise level in the cell was so great that no one heard me sing). Again tears flowed like

rain. No one noticed me. When great miracles happen, often people standing right next to them don't see anything. No one in that cell knew what was going on in me.

I immediately started reading the Bible again. There was a man who distributed books in that jail. From him I got and read many testimonies of prisoners who also had had life-changing encounters with God. One particularly interesting book was about a woman who ministered to people who were Satan worshipers. This woman had helped over 1000 people turn from Satan worship to worshipping Jesus. I wish to recommend this book: *He Came to Set the Captives Free* by Rebecca Brown (available in both Spanish and English).

Also, I spoke to many men in the jail about Jesus. One man had charges similar to mine, only worse. He was also told no bond. We prayed together, and in a few days he was out on bond (the same blessing that I had received in Texas). Many of the men that I talked to made commitments to Jesus, but as soon as some problem arose, most went back on their commitments.

My final word:
**DON'T JUST TRY JESUS,
MAKE A FULL COMMITMENT!**

This story is also available in Spanish. If you wish to order a free copy of this story, please write me at the address below. Please be sure to specify if you want the English version or the Spanish version.

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