

SILVANA IACONO

My name is Silvana and I am 31 years old. I am from the splendid city of Siracuse, Sicily. I would like to share with you how the Lord Jesus has worked in my life. Born in a very large family with various problems, my mother had to make the difficult decision to put my twin sister and me in a home for children when we were barely three years old. Growing up this way I started to understand and miss a family's affection. I was closed into myself because of being raised by very strict nuns, which brought about hard feelings of: bitterness, anger, and resentment towards my mother because of her choice of allowing us to grow up in an institution. But most of all, I had envy towards others, who had life 'easier' or at least not like mine.



Although, during those years in the institution, I received strong Catholic teachings, it was difficult to believe that maybe there really was a God and if there were then it was hard to realize He cared anything about me. Anyway, as the years went by, I had this strong desire to get out of that place!

Finally, at the age of 13 years old, I was able to go back and live with my family. From the very beginning, it was hard for me to

fit into the society and in every way it was strange for me because of having to face things that were totally brand new.

In spite of it all, after a short time, I was able to make new friends, even though they influenced me in making choices like: smoking, drinking and going out to discotheques. I was curious to try things like 'grass or the weed'. It started out with 'lighter drugs' and then I was on the road to depending on them. The first thing I really enjoyed about the effect was how it made me feel happy, sociable, and self-confident, totally opposite of the real person I really was inside, introvert and timid.

Following a fire that burnt down our house, we moved to a little town nearby. A few months afterwards, we were forced to move again because of the earthquake of 1990, to a place built by the Civil Protection Agency. I was more than ever convinced that everything would always go wrong for me, but exactly during that difficult time in my life, I met a boy who became my reason for living. I discovered how beautiful life could be, sharing it with someone who loved me. During those times, I forgot all about the past sadness. Through his love, I put aside all the drugs and alcohol. When my brother died of a drug overdose, my boyfriend stayed very close to me and helped me through the pain of losing my brother. All this bonded me even closer to him and I could not imagine living without him.

After three splendid years together, he unexpectedly decided to leave me, and it felt like my world fell apart again. I could not accept the fact that the person, whom I truly loved with all my heart, was no longer there. I thought I had no reason to live

anymore. I started all over again to abuse myself by going back to drugs and doing whatever to destroy myself physically and morally: I felt like I was, literally, falling apart inside! For several months, I closed myself up in the house and stayed all day locked up in my bedroom. I isolated myself from everything and everyone and thought for hours how to end it all! I did not want to live any longer! By now, I was in a pitiful state of mind, to the point where I could not even look in the mirror, because I did not recognize the horrible imagine looking back at me!

One morning, I woke up and decided that I needed to react against what I had become, so I left my room, went outside, just walking around with no place to go. I wanted to stay away from home as much as possible. My parents had no idea what I was going through and what I had become with all the hurt inside. During this particular time of my life, I met old friends who I knew as a small child, and seeing my condition, they offered to help me by inviting me to stay at their house. Once I moved in, I found a job, wanting to be economically independent. However, I began spending my earnings on gambling and playing the slot machine.

I was going deeper and deeper into self-destruction. However, it was right at this very moment in my life that God found me, showing me His great love and His infinite grace. My cousin introduced me to a family who are evangelical believers, who had it in their hearts to invite me to stay with them. They helped all kinds of young people with drug problems. The thing that drew me to this family was the fact that I believed it was possible for me to change, because of them gathering these types of people

into their home, showing real family tranquilly and showing real sincere love for their neighbor. Sharing my sad story with them, they told me that my problem was that I believed I was without hope and that I felt it was impossible for me to get off my dependence of drugs. They told me, instead, that there was hope if I opened my heart to the Lord Jesus. They said if I wanted, I could live with them and they would take care of me, just like they did with other young people.

Those words really got me to thinking, and I wondered if God really could hear me, would He also do something in my life! That very evening, I thought if everything they told me was true then I did not want to wake up the next morning with the same desires to smoke and to take on 'weed'.

The following morning, I remembered how it was such a tranquil day, the kind of day that I had not experienced in a long time. This helped me to make the decision to transfer to their house, and I started a cure under a medical doctor's care. I had to take very strong medicine to help me through the withdrawals, especially withdrawals from alcohol. Being that I was so hard-headed, I did not want to give up drinking alcohol, so that following evening I drank only one glass. However, it caused a terrible reaction to the medicine, spots were all over my skin and I felt my heart beating so fast that I thought it would explode! I got really scared and I never again wanted to risk with alcohol! I really decided to try and turn my life around so I went back to work again.

During this same time, I wanted to strengthen my faith by going to a church. I realized that my way of thinking and acting were changing, thanks to the work of God in my life. I really wanted to be a real believer, so I decided to be baptized in water. A short time later, though, because of a situation, I started to have doubts with my faith and started doing the things I did before. While I was going through this dark moment and crisis, I always held on to my fear of God. I remember that I asked Him for a better job and He answered me right away. I found work at a snack bar owned by believers. For a time I was able to continue going to church and also working and going to the frequent meetings. But because of the distance and because of other reasons, I would go less and less and until I found myself getting farther away from everything. I went back to doing drugs again, but this time I was surprised that I did not get the same satisfaction that I had before. And because I also knew that I was displeasing to God and that made me feel really bad. A Bible verse came to my mind often, that spoke about two roads which I could take: a very large and spacious road and another one that was very straight and narrow, difficult to follow but it was the only one that would take me to God and I would find salvation for my soul. I realized that if I continued on the large road that I would end up in Hell. I could no longer ignore the truth that was in my heart. Later on, I heard about this group of missionaries called, 'Christ is the Answer' and decided to go and seek after a deeper walk with the Lord.

Already two years have passed since then and I can see how much the Lord is working in my life. I want to invite anyone who has gone through my similar experience to not give up

when you fall but continue the good fight of faith, holding onto, more than ever, to the Lord. Only He can do above and beyond anything that we would think impossible in our eyes. He hears the prayers that come from a sincere heart crying out to Him. I want to conclude this testimony by thanking Him for all the people he has put in my path and for being with me during those darkest hours in my life. And I also want to thank Him for the opportunity that He gave me to be in His service.