The buzzer sounded and I hurried from the classroom with the others. But I didn't go to my next class. Not right then, I mean. I couldn't: I was too stunned by what I'd heard at the beginning of the previous class session. When Mr. Stockton made the announcement -- before beginning his Chemistry lesson -- that Jerry Boils was dead and would never again be in class with us, I thought I'd die. Or pass out. In fact, I felt it would have been a
blessed relief if I could have fainted; at least that way, for a brief period of
time, that is, I would not have felt or sensed the remorse which tormented me
and lashed my conscience.

I felt sick; all over, sick. Weak too. Jerry, dead? And by his own doing?
I was sure I'd never again be able to go near the bridge that spanned the
river. . . .

I ran down the hallway, feeling like I was responsible, in part, for Jerry
taking his own life. Jerry was one of my closest friends and for nearly three
weeks I'd felt a strange urge -- a pull, really, at my heart -- that I should talk to
him about his soul and try to "compel" him to come to Jesus. It was as if a
Voice was urging me to "pull him out of the fire."

I wanted to talk to Jerry about his soul; I really meant to. But everything
was still so new to me that I wasn't sure how to approach the subject, or my
friend. I was saved less than a month myself. So I continued to pray for Jerry,
and all my friends and classmates. And the urge continued -- "pull him out of
the fire."

I found the stair well and huddled beneath it with my face pressed
against the cold wall. I sobbed then, great, heaving, crushing, broken sobs.
Jerry was lost. Lost. And I was to blame. Or -- did he -- No! No! Anyone who
took his own life when he was in his right mind was lost. Still -- could he
(maybe) have cried out to God for mercy as he jumped off that high bridge?
Could he?

"O God," I cried aloud, "forgive me! Forgive me, please! I should have
told him about You, and how You make all the difference in a man and
woman's life. But I didn't! Oh, I'm so sorry. He may never have heard of You.
I'm responsible for his lost condition. I'm guilty. Guilty! If only I'd have
obeyed."

I thought of yesterday then: Jerry and I had walked across the lawn
together after a stiff exam by one of our teachers.

"Some exam!" Jerry remarked as he dropped to the well manicured
lawn beneath one of the stately trees.
I sat down, cross-legged, and looked across the beautiful school grounds, agreeing with Jerry's exclamation.

He laid back on the grass, knees bent upward, and said nothing for a long while. Then, suddenly, he said, "Did you ever think what changes a day may bring, Lyndon; here today; gone tomorrow?"

I smiled, not seeing the least bit of correlation to his previous statement and wondering whatever made him ask such a stupidly-strange question.

"Like failing the exam?" I asked innocently.

"No, not that," was his immediate response. Again he lapsed into silence.

"Speak to him about his soul." The Voice had an urgency to It. It was an appeal -- to me.

"Jerry," I began, "I'd like to talk to you about something important. . . ."

"I know of nothing important in life," he answered gruffly as he jumped to his feet and hurried away.

"Jerry, listen to me, please," I called, getting to my feet and hurrying after him. But he was gone.

I walked home alone, wondering what was wrong with Jerry. Never before had I heard him speak with such harshness as when he declared that he knew of nothing that was important in life.

A fresh outburst of tears spilled from my eyes as I realized the full impact of his statement now -- his last ever words to me. What, indeed, was there in life for one without Christ? Before my conversion, my life felt empty and meaningless too. Always, I had a void that niggled and tormented me. It seemed to be crying out for fulfillment and satisfaction. And I had pretty much tried everything that the world, and my friends, had to offer me, too! I had fun, it must be admitted; but it never lasted. It was such a transitory thing. And no one, nor anything I tried, had been able to fill or satisfy that empty feeling and the gnawing void deep within my soul and my being.
"I know of nothing important in life. . . ."

Jerry's words lashed me with meaning now. And understanding. I was sure that he'd felt like I did before Jesus found me and saved me. Only, he must have lost all hope of ever being helped and of finding something that would and could satisfy those ever-present inner longings and fill that deep void. He must have lost hope completely and entirely.

I never cried like I wept now. I knew I had failed Jerry. Oh, sure, he knew something happened to me; he told me I was "different." I told him that I had gotten converted -- become a Christian -- and that the things I used to love and used to do I didn't love or do anymore. He gave me a benign smile and mumbled something about it only being a brief thing, where I was concerned.

I knew differently, though, and I told him so. But I hadn't talked to him about his soul. Oh, why didn't I? Why? I could have told him so many wonderful things; things like how radically changed my heart and life was since Jesus came to live in me. And how He had met the deepest longings of my once void and empty soul and that, now, I was fully and completely satisfied in Christ. I could have told him that I had joy and peace that was inexpressibly glorious and wonderful and that, at last, life had purpose and meaning for me.

"Oh, Jerry. Jerry!" I cried. "How I wish I could call you back for a while: I'd tell you how lovely and wonderful the Savior is. Forgive me, my friend, for failing you. . . ."

I knew it was too late to ask his forgiveness but I couldn't help but verbalize my feelings. Then I cried out to God for forgiveness for my disobedience to the urgent Voice and for failing my friend. And Him too. I made some vows then, vows which I meant to keep forever; like giving instant obedience to His commands and order, and like witnessing faithfully to the saving, transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Standing beneath that stairwell, crushed and hurting like I'd never hurt before, I felt the tender forgiveness of my blessed Savior, my newfound Friend. My heart felt like He was bathing it in warm, healing oil. It was a soothing balm for the crushing guilt and the pain I'd been experiencing since learning of Jerry's death. It was a glorious experience.
I headed for the restroom, washed my face -- my eyes especially -- with plenty of cold water then hurried to my class. Mr. Platters would understand, I was sure, for by now I felt confident and was convinced that news of Jerry's untimely death had spread through the entire school.

Taking a deep breath, I walked into the classroom and took my seat, seeing a room full of other "Jerrys," only this time I purposed within my heart that not a single one of those in the room would ever be able to say that no one had ever told them about the suffering, dying, risen-again Savior Who died to save them from their sins and keep them victorious over sin then take them to Heaven someday to ever be with Him.

I had a mission field in my school. I would be scorned by many, laughed at by others and ridiculed by the majority, I was sure. To most of my peers, everything was relative: there were no absolutes, where most of them were concerned. I would be castigated and shunned. Little matter. Never again would another "Jerry" take his or her life without hearing about Jesus Christ, the great Deliverer and Heart Satisfier. Jerry was beyond the reach of recall and return; those around me weren't.

The burden in my heart was great. I could hardly wait for the day to end and for school to be dismissed.