



## Jamie Buckingham

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### Runner's only answer is a 'talk' with Jesus

He was watery-eyed, fiftyish, and had tiny red veins which showed through the skin on his nose. I was engrossed in a magazine article as he settled wearily in the seat beside me on the plane.

After fumbling with his seat belt he sighed, reached in his coat and withdrew a pocket calendar. I glanced at it and then turned back and stared. I thought my travel schedule was full, but I could see nearly every day of the month on his calendar marked with the names of such cities as Dallas, St. Paul, Fresno, Omaha, Richmond. . .

He looked up at me and smiled weakly. "Wonder how the weather is in Chicago this morning?" he commented.

We chatted a few minutes and I finally asked him what he did for a living.

"On the surface I sell pharmaceuticals," he said. "But if you really want to know the truth, I'm a runner."

Having just written a book about a Harlem Black who "ran" heroin for the Mafia, the word "runner" had only one meaning. I stared at the man, finding it hard to believe that this tired, pudgy man was involved in a dope ring.

"Runner?" I asked, swallowing hard.

"That's right," he said. "I'm running away from my family, myself, and reality."

Seldom do I find such honesty in a total stranger. Something must have happened at home that morning to drive him to the desperate measure of talking to a total stranger. I closed my magazine and said, "Tell me what you're talking about."

"Most guys like me are running," he said, speaking so softly I could barely hear him over the roar of the engines. "On top I'm a fabulous success. I'm the sales manager of one of the nation's largest drug companies. Last year I cleared more than 80 grand. I've got a big estate in the country and a 'man' who drives me to the airport. But my family doesn't respect me."

"I have no close friends, just a bunch of subordinates who would like to cut my throat and have my job. I drink too much and don't respect myself. No matter how successful a man may be financially, unless he respects himself he's a failure. That's the reason I run."

He gulped the cocktail the stewardess had put before him and motioned for another. "Can you imagine what it's like to spend the night in 200 different motel rooms each year, alone or with a bottle?"

He turned and looked me in the face. "What's the answer to my problem, stranger? I can tell by looking at you that you're not running. You've found something." His eyes were pleading.

"I haven't found anything," I said. "Rather, Someone has found me. Let me tell you about a Man who can give you the power to overcome failure and loneliness." I settled back in my seat and for the next hour, until our plane landed in Atlanta, I talked to him about Jesus.

I usually don't get into conversations like this with strangers. But on the other hand, recently I've been doing a lot of things that aren't usual. The plane rolled to a stop at the terminal and we both ran to meet connections, he to Chicago and me back home. I doubt if I ever see him again. But I'll see others, thousands of them, who have the same problem. They are the successful failures. Those who are honest enough to admit it will find the God of reality and love reaching out for them, speaking to them even through strangers on planes. The rest will keep on running.