Finding My Way Back Home







James Lisi 2008

Hello, my name is James Lisi and this is my story. As I sit in Cuchara, Colorado enjoying the peace of God and the beautiful mountains I reflect back on all that the Lord has done for me. Psalm 66:16 says, "Come and hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul." It is my desire to share with you the faithfulness of God to save me from destruction, and my personal journey "back home" to His plan for my life.

My life began August 24th, 1957 at Boulevard Hospital in Astoria, NY. My father, Andy, was an aluminum siding

mechanic and my mother, Anne, minded the house and my older brother Robert, who was two years old. From the time Robert was very young he had trouble with his health. As a child I was fascinated with cars and driving. In my early years the only thing I was able to drive was the ashtrays in our home. I pretended that the ashtray was a steering wheel and I drove it around the house—until I had my first accident and broke a glass ashtray.

We lived in College Point, NY (in Queens) across the bay from LaGuardia airport where my father had his business. My parents sent me to a religious school, and It was there that I formulated my earliest opinions of who God is and His opinion of me. I was taught so many wrong things about God during this part of my life--information that caused me to turn away from God during my teen years and become a captive to sin. As Isaiah 5:13 declares, "Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honorable men [are] famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst." My lack of knowledge soon brought me into the dark world of crack, cocaine, alcohol, and many evils that bound me for twelve long years.

As a child, I felt ignored by my father who spent much time with his business and with his friends. It seems to me that if he had spent more time with me I probably would not have gotten into as much trouble. My father did the best he knew and I am greatful to have had my mother and father as my parents. In school I was satisfied with just getting passing grades. My brother Robert, on the other hand, was always an A+ student. We didn't share the same friends because he didn't like me hanging around with his friends.

My parents felt that it was necessary for my brother and me to attend the church where we went to school, even though they never attended. We were finally relieved of this obligation when I was around twelve years old. The services were always the same—some music, man's doctrine, communion, and a token verse read out of the Bible. The most important thing to God (His Word) was the least important to them. Jesus said in Mark 7:7, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many such other things you do". And he said unto them, "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition." I believe that if I had heard the truth about God as a young man I would have received it. I just never heard it.

When I was seven we moved to a different house a few blocks from where we lived. I made many friends in the new neighborhood, most of whom were not good influences in my life. We played with the Ouija board and other things that the Lord never desired us to do, dragging me into Satan's world of darkness. My friend Steven and I opened a bicycle repair shop in his backyard, but we only stayed in business for a few days. One day as I was fixing my bicycle it was not going well. I felt that this was some sort of punishment for my sin and I became angry with God and shook my fist at Him. I must have come to the age of accountability because I knew I was a sinner, but I had no idea how I could receive the forgiveness for my sins. I had been taught that if I did something wrong, God would exact revenge on me. This wrong theology haunted me for many years.

Even as a child, Satan was working to destroy my life. I became interested in girls even before I was ten years old. I used the Eight Ball (a game that was popular in my childhood) to determine who was going to be my girlfriend. I would ask it a question and turn it upside down and it would give me the answer. Little did I know that God's desire was for me to seek Him for the answers to my decisions in life. By trusting in my own thinking and the counsel of my friends, I learned to be disobedient to my parents and others who were in authority over me. I was not openly, but secretly rebellious. When no one was looking I would do what I wanted to do rather than what they wanted me to do. Little did I know that I was giving the devil an inroad into my life.

Soon I came to the wrong conclusion that victory was not found in obedience, but it was found in not getting caught. My best friend was Johnny D. We built go-carts and forts together, and through disobedience we also got into trouble. One time we put a few firecrackers into a plastic bottle of chlorine. The top blew off the bottle and there was stuff shooting out everywhere. Most of the hardened chlorine attached itself to Johnny's house. At one point, Johnny discovered that there were some pornographic magazines in his garage. We spent much time together looking at these magazines, allowing them to create ungodly desires in us that would someday become reality. I believe that all these things which seemed harmless at the time set me on a course to ignore God and His counsel in my life.

When I was thirteen years old we moved out to Floral Park on Long Island. It was a beautiful place, and we lived in a three-story Tudor-style home. During our first year in Floral Park we bought a York-shire Terrier and we named her Cricket. Cricket brought much joy to our house. To the natural eye all seemed well–Nice house, nice car, nice family, nice dog. Even with all this, it was becoming evident to me that there was something lacking in my life. I did not know what it was and I thought it was possessions. I would say to myself, "My life would be complete if I just had a drum set or a mini-bike." This was a time of readjustment for me—making new friends and getting acquainted with new schools and new surroundings. I was enrolled in Alva T. Stanford Junior High School my first year in Floral Park, and then I went to Floral Park Memorial for a year. The next year I went to Sewanaka High School.

Sadly, our house was not built on the rock that Jesus spoke about. When I was fifteen years old tragedy struck. My brother Robert was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease called dermatomyositis. He was hospitalized and was in four different hospitals over nine months. There was no known cure for this disease. All the doctors could do was to address his symptoms and experiment with treatments. The symptoms were: extreme muscle cramps and pain, loss of muscle tissue and use, and loss of weight. This disease attacked every muscle in his body. His weight dwindled down to 76 lbs. for a seventeen-year-old. Eventually it attacked his heart and he went into cardiac arrest and died. My family was devastated.

At my brother's funeral I heard a lot of theology, but I'm sorry to say that practically none of it was in agreement with the Word of God. I was told that God wanted my brother in Heaven more than He wanted him on the earth. No one ever told me that there was a devil and that according to John 10:10 he came to steal, kill and destroy. The religious people conducting the funeral and everyone there blamed my brother's death on God. They even misquoted scripture to enforce their twisted understanding of God. They quoted the scripture in Job 1:21 where Job said, "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." But that was Job's opinion of what happened. God said that it was the devil who took everything from Job. Everything I heard at the funeral just reinforced my previous opinion of God. After my brother died it seemed that my father lost hope. It has been said that a person can live forty days without food, five days without water, five minutes without air, but not even one minute without hope.

While my brother was in the hospital my father spent a lot of time there with him, neglecting his business. The hospital bills were more than eighty thousand dollars which were not covered by insurance, so this necessitated another move. This time we moved back to Queens to the town of Whitestone. By now I was now in the eleventh grade and attending Flushing High School. For some reason it was not easy to make friends. I would go to school, come home and watch TV. Later that year I became interested in photography and started shooting photos for the school newspaper. I made friends with a few other photographers on the paper, but these new "friends" introduced me to alcohol and marijuana. Often, we went to the park and got so high on marijuana that we would forget where we parked the car.

One summer I worked at an amusement park. It was there that I met Earl. There was something different about Earl—he never did drugs. He was a positive influence on me and we continued to be friends. One day my mother found some marijuana in my dresser drawer. I quickly lied and told her that it belonged to a friend. Lying had become a part of everyday life to me. Sometimes I would believe my own lies. Escaping from reality was my reason for wanting to get high.

I thought that the only way to gain God's approval was by my performance, but I knew that my performance was far from acceptable. Here I was living on the earth without the favor of the only one who could help me—God. I didn't know how much God loved me and how much he desired a relationship with me. After high school I went to Fashion Institute of Technology and majored in advertising photography. During my time at F.I.T. I started smoking marijuana with a fellow classmate on numerous occasions. One time I went into the city to meet a friend and we wound up smoking marijuana. That evening on the way home on the subway I passed out. I awoke to a police officer standing over me asking me if I was all right. I said yes, even though I was far from all right.

After F.I.T. I got a job as an apprentice to an advertising photographer named J. Wesley where I worked for two years. During this time, I had my first experience with a prostitute. The people who shared the studio where I worked always talked about this place down the block, so I went down there to find out for myself. I found out all right. After leaving this place I felt such shame. I believe this was the bad fruit that resulted from looking at those pornographic magazines in my early years. This sin would plague me for the next twelve years. While I was still working there my father was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer in his bile duct, and within a few weeks he died. I was devastated, for while my father was alive I found security in him. On the surface he never exhibited any fear to me or others. During and after my father's funeral God was ministering to me through a bookmark that we received at the funeral. It was the 23rd Psalm. I remember finding a new testament Bible and reading the sermon on the mount. I found great comfort in these passages of scripture. God was working in me.

It was at this same time that I made a whole new set of friends in New York City. These "friends" introduced me to the night club scene in Manhattan. But now I had learned that I had a choice whether to seek the Lord through His Word and find true peace or to escape the pain of losing my father through drinking. Unfortunately, I chose to escape. Not only did I hurt myself, but I also hurt my mother by making this choice. Many nights I left my mother home alone while I was out escaping from reality. I left my job to open my own photography studio. I borrowed the money from my mother and found a studio at Fifth Avenue and 19th Street in Manhattan. I promised to help support my mother and take care of her, but this was a promise I never fulfilled. Even though I had some photographic talent I was a poor businessman, struggling in business for thirteen years.

Since my teenage years I had known that something was missing in my life and I continued to search for what it was. I thought that if I found the right girl, that would fill this void in my life. As I continued to go to night clubs I met many different girls and had immoral relationships with them, looking for Mrs. Right. One year after I opened my business I formed a partnership with another photographer named Sid. Sid was a hard worker and we became business partners for approximately the next five years. But this was not a good thing because we would go out to night clubs together. The next year I was introduced to cocaine and began doing cocaine on a somewhat regular basis.

My mother and I were still living in Whitestone, though I did not come home very often. She decided to sell the house because she could not keep up with it and I was of little help. The house sold for two-hundred twenty-five thousand dollars and because she owned the house without a mortgage, she received the complete sum of money. It sounds like that was a good thing, but it wasn't.

Mom and I moved to Forest Hills to an apartment for one year. Borrowing money from her, I wasted it on drugs and other useless purchases. During the next seven years I practically brought my mother to a poverty level by using her money to support my business and my bad habits. Even though at the time of my father's death I was sensitive to the voice of the Lord, this sensitivity had diminished to the point where I questioned if God even existed. I exposed myself to all sorts of New Age beliefs which brought confusion into my life.

I had a friend named Maxi who was a Buddhist and we would talk religion, but it never focused on God or our need for Him in our lives. I believe that in the back of my mind I always had a knowledge of God but sleep never came easily. I would pray and ask God's help, promising never to do drugs again if He would help me sleep.

Even though I was unfaithful in my promise to Him, He was always faithful to me. One time I was out with my friend Tom M. at a night club called Studio 54. He had a full bottle of cocaine so we went to the bathroom into the stall to take the cocaine. He slipped and dropped the open bottle into the toilet. I remember seeing the desperation on his face when this happened. What he did next shocked me and revealed to me how desperate we were. He pulled the bottle out of the toilet and drank the contents. Another time I was in a club standing next to a girl who dropped her handbag. When she dropped it I heard glass shatter. At this she began to cry. I asked her why she was crying and she me told that she had dropped her free base pipe and broke it. I constantly tried to convince myself that I was not addicted to cocaine even though I knew I was hopeless. These incidents revealed to me my own desperate condition.

By now my financial situation was also desperate. I convinced my mother that we should move into Manhattan on the upper east side. The rent for this apartment was \$1,500.00 per month–far more

than we could afford. Now I discovered new clubs that stayed open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. As my addiction grew I spent up to \$500.00 per week on cocaine. I would use my mother's bank card to withdraw cash from her account to support my habit. When I was using drugs my conversations with people always seemed to be about drugs. We would sit around and say how this was the last time we would do this. My friend Mike and I spent a good deal of time together and I began to borrow money from him. At one point I owed him over twenty-two thousand dollars.

Slowly, but surely, I began to close off my relationships with anyone who was a positive influence in my life, and I realized that I was in need of help. I went to the yellow pages, looked up drug-addiction and found an advertisement for a psychologist that said she specialized in this area. After a few visits I realized that this woman could not help me. I bounced a check on her and she told me that the reason it happened was because I resented her help. I also bounced other checks that day. My friend Elizabeth had been going to see a psychopharmacologist for her drug problem. I went to see him for a few visits and he told me that he did not think that I had a drug problem. He was wrong.

Shortly after this I tried crack-cocaine for the first time. My friend Tommy had introduced me to this drug and I was instantly addicted. I traded away two of my watches on different occasions for crack. I remember walking the streets of Manhattan with a crack pipe in my pocket in freezing weather. I would duck in under the stairs of brownstone buildings on Thirteenth Street to smoke crack and then continue to walk. I usually did this by myself. One time I waited with some drug dealers on Fourteenth Street until morning for crack that never showed up. On another occasion I recall a time when i returned home early morning after smoking crack all night. This was during the time my mother had to return to work because I had spent all of her money. That same morning I waited across the street until my mother went to work because I was too ashamed to face her. After she left the apartment I went in. I felt so bad about what I had done I decided that it was time to end my life. I went looking for my mother's heart medicine (valium) but thank God I never found it.

It was at this point that my friends who did cocaine with me were now withdrawing from me because they were concerned for my wellbeing. If I was in the After Hours club with my friends and went outside, the bouncers were instructed not to let me back in because they knew I went out to do some crack. Because of my sexual misconduct I found myself in a public clinic on three different occasions having to get treatment for a sexually transmitted disease.

My life was falling apart. I was completely unreliable. I would make appointments and never show up. I looked like the walking dead. I was miserable. One night I was going to meet my friend Earl somewhere. Earlier that day I received eight hundred dollars and I went out and started smoking crack. I never showed up for Earl and I was gone for two days. My mother was extremely worried.

When I finally returned home I confessed to my mother for the first time all my involvement with drugs and other bad habits. This was a turning point for me. My mother asked what she could do to help me and recommended putting me in a drug rehab facility. I told her I needed to get away instead. I decided to move to Puerto Rico and set up a photography studio. My mother had received some money from an inheritance and was willing to loan me some more money.

In October of 1988 I left for Puerto Rico. When I arrived, I began looking for work and establishing my photo studio. At first, I was working out of my apartment, but later I had a separate studio. I had an alarm installed by a fellow named Dennis. We became friends and Dennis later became my partner in the photo business. It was in Puerto Rico that I began to be thankful for many things. By removing myself from the circle of friends that I had in New York (mostly drug addicts) I was able to stay free

from doing drugs except for a few instances. I was still a drug addict, but drugs were not readily available to me.

I decided to do a photo exhibit that would benefit Muscular Dystrophy. I hand-painted black and white photos of scenes from Puerto Rico, and each photo would take from eight to fifteen hours to paint. As I painted I listened to the radio. Flipping through the stations, I found WBMJ., and it was playing a 1940's type program called Unshackled. I was intrigued and listened to it. It turned out to be a Christian program. I continued to listen and each story had a similar story line. These were stories about people who were in trouble and were without hope. When these people discovered the love of God and the free gift of salvation their lives were turned around. As I listened to this program and others on this station hope began to rise up in my heart.

I learned of a God who was not angry with me, but that He loved me. As I listened more and more I would talk with my friend Dennis about God and we would open the Bible and discuss many different scriptures. I found out that Dennis had been born-again in his mid-teens in the Bronx, New York at a Pentecostal Church. Even though I grew in my knowledge of the Lord I would still go to nightclubs and drink. Not only did I go, but I influenced Dennis to go also.

During this time in Puerto Rico, if I met someone with cocaine I would wind up doing cocaine. I remember one time not only doing cocaine, but afterwards I went to the place where I could buy some more. This was a dark, dead-end street with about twenty people standing around at the end of it. I spoke very little Spanish at this point, but I got what I was after—cocaine. That night I proceeded to pick up a prostitute and bring her back to my apartment. She turned out to be a heroin addict. I briefly fell asleep and then woke up to find her with a needle in her arm. Though I was frightened by this experience, my fear was not strong enough to motivate me to stay free from drugs. This girl could have killed me while I was sleeping. After this experience I again experienced that familiar feeling of shame and I hoped my neighbors were not watching as I left with her to drive her back to where I found her.

There were many nights when I would be home in Puerto Rico and have nothing to do. At these times I was able to focus on the Lord. I am sure now that the Lord was speaking to me all the time I lived in New York, but I was so busy with things that didn't really matter that I could not hear His voice. I went to a Christian bookstore and purchased the New Testament on cassette and began listening to it. Mark 4:19 declares, "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." The most important thing in the world is our relationship with God our Father.

During the first three of my four years in Puerto Rico my mother was living in Sunnyside, New York. I spoke to her on a regular basis on the phone, but one day when I tried to call her at work, they told me that she had not been at work for two weeks. They said that she had fallen and broken her shoulder. My mother did not want me to worry about her so she didn't tell me. After speaking with her I learned that they found cancer in her shoulder bone and would have to operate and put in a titanium replacement. I flew to New York. to be with my mother during her surgery. While I was there I listened to Christian radio and I told my mother about all that I had learned about God, but My mother was very skeptical.

After my mother's surgery she moved down to Puerto Rico with me. She was retired and had a lot of time on her hands, so I encouraged her to volunteer at WBMJ which she did. I also volunteered by taking photographs for WBMJ. This is where I met Ruth (the founder of the station) and other workers at the station. On a few occasions Ruth and I would discuss the scriptures and what they said about

being born-again. I noticed that Ruth and the staff always seemed to have a joy operating in their life that was not subject to circumstances. This was something that I did not have in my life.

It was on Thanksgiving Day of 1991 that I made the decision to accept Jesus Christ into my life as Lord and Savior. My mother had decided to go to spend Thanksgiving with her niece in Arizona, and Ruth invited me to spend Thanksgiving with her and some of the staff at her apartment. That day, Ruth shared some important truths about being born again, and that evening when I went home I prayed to God and received the forgiveness for my sins. I had a revelation of the finished work at the cross and understood that this is what I had been looking for all those years. I was delivered of crack, cocaine, alcohol, cigarettes, depression and many other things that the devil had been using to destroy my life. I was set free just as Jesus promised in John 8:32 where He said, ". . . and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Immediately after this I realized that many people I knew also needed to receive salvation. I began to purchase books (mostly testimonies) and give them out to friends and acquaintances. There was a fellow named Melvin who was a guard at the garage where I parked my car. I would give him books in Spanish and he would read them. I also did my best to tell him about Jesus, but Melvin only spoke Spanish and I was not fluent in Spanish. One day when I was pulling into the garage I noticed that he had a big smile on his face and he could not wait to tell me that he had accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Melvin was set free from cocaine when he received Jesus. I was there when he was baptized in water and it was an honor to experience that.

The more I grew in the Lord the less important taking pictures became in my life. Approximately six months after I was saved I decided to close up the photo studio and felt the Lord was leading my mother and me to move to Colorado Springs. In Colorado Springs there were over eighty parachurch ministries, and I wanted to find a job in a ministry as a graphic designer. I did not know that the Lord had a much better plan for me.

We arrived in Colorado Springs in December of 1992. On Christmas day that year early in the morning my mother had a stroke. I heard her calling me. She had fallen to the floor and I could not understand what she was saying. I called the ambulance and they took her to the hospital. As I sat with her in the hospital on Christmas day the presence and peace of the Lord was there with me, comforting me. Here I was in Colorado Springs not knowing anyone, yet I knew the Lord was with me and from Him I drew my peace and strength. After my mother came home from the hospital I helped her recuperate. All during this time I believe my mother was aware that there was a change in me, but at this point she was not born-again.

We rented a movie called "China Cry" which was the story of Nora Lam. Shortly after that Nora Lam came to Colorado Springs and we attended a dinner that she had at a local hotel. After the dinner Nora was speaking things to different people—things that no person could have known. She came to my mother and said, "The Lord says that you had a stroke. He will restore you." My mother was astonished that the Lord revealed what happened to Nora. God did just what He said He would do! Shortly afterwards at New Life Church my mother received Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

I began working part time at Andrew Wommack Ministries as an audio tape duplicator and later was moved to full time. On November 27th of 1993 my mother went home to be with the Lord. For a while I felt guilty about how I had treated my mother before I was born again. The Lord quickly showed me that there was no reason for me to feel this way because my mother was with Him in Heaven. I received that truth and rejoiced!

Once while I was in a church service in Colorado Springs a preacher from England named Will Graham spoke to me as he was preaching. He said he saw me with a Bible in my hand teaching not one or two, but fifties and hundreds. I received this as a word from the Lord. Shortly after that I realized that God was showing me things in His Word in a way that I could communicate these life changing truths with others, so I started making tapes and giving them to others to teach and encourage them.

In 1995 I began doing a local T.V. program called "Miracles on Main Street" teaching from God's Word. Since then I have been on radio and T.V. teaching the Word of God. I was employed at Andrew Wommack Ministries for six years, four of those years I was on the help line praying with people and taking their tape orders. Later I worked freelance for Andrew Wommack Ministries producing his radio program.

On September 5th of 1998 I was married to a wonderful woman named Gail—a woman who loves God with all her heart. We ministered together to approximately eighty people through a partnership called "Streams of Healing," offering a new teaching through the mail once a month that focused in the area of healing. Once a month I spoke at the Springs Rescue Mission in Colorado Springs, and we also did a Bible study once a week. The scripture declares in Ephesians 2:12, "At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." We were committed to bringing hope to those who were strangers to Christ.

My drug problem was just an outward manifestation of a greater spiritual problem. I had no hope and I was without God in this world. When I received God's free gift of salvation through Jesus the things that I perceived as great problems in my life no longer looked big compared to having God on my side.

The story of David and Goliath has been a great inspiration to me. No one would ever argue that Goliath was not a giant, but when he is compared to God Almighty—he is a midget. To David, Goliath was not a problem because he had God on his side. David recognized that Goliath was not in relationship with God and therefore did not have access to God's power.

We only have one true enemy and that is Satan. Jesus declared in Luke chapter 10 verse 18, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." The devil is a defeated enemy to those who have received the gift of salvation. Acts 10:34 says, "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." God desires for you to have the same victory that He has brought into my life.

You may say, "You don't know what I have done." I don't, but God does and Jesus has paid the price for your sins on the cross. God gave to Jesus on the cross the penalty that you and I deserved so that He could give to us the favor that Jesus deserved. John chapter 1:12-13 declares, "But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

God desires a relationship with you. He has made it as simple as to just express faith in the finished work that Jesus accomplished two thousand years ago. You may think you need to clean up before you come to God, but that is not true. God will receive you just as you are. As you receive the love of God your heart will change. As your heart changes, everything you do will change. When I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior, my heart changed. Now, everything I do is affected by that change in

my heart. Out of the abundance of the love that God placed in my heart I now live my life. My new nature is to love people, because love is my heavenly Father's nature. God has done a wonderful work through the cross. He has given us each the free gift of abundant life through Jesus Christ. He has taken me from being a drug addict and received me as His child. Now through my new identity and the confidence that God has in me I have a brand-new life. "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17) I am no longer the drug addict who stole from his own mother to feed his own habit. Through Jesus, God has made me a new creation. I am able to reflect my heavenly Father's nature to those I meet. I am able to love them with the Father's love and to see the potential that God sees in them. I can truly say that since I have been born again my life has been wonderful—like Heaven on earth. Praise God!

Most of the people who read this booklet may never have had a drug problem. Yet, we all need a Savior! Jesus came, hung on the cross and died so that He could present us to His Father clothed in His Righteousness. It is His Gift to us. He would rather hang on the cross and die than to live without you throughout eternity.

He said "He is the way, the truth and the Life! No one come to the Father except through Him. To receive this Gift of Salvation acknowledge Him as your Lord and Savior and accept the forgiveness of your sins. The scripture declares "If we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead we will be saved." (Romans 10:9-11)

Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

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