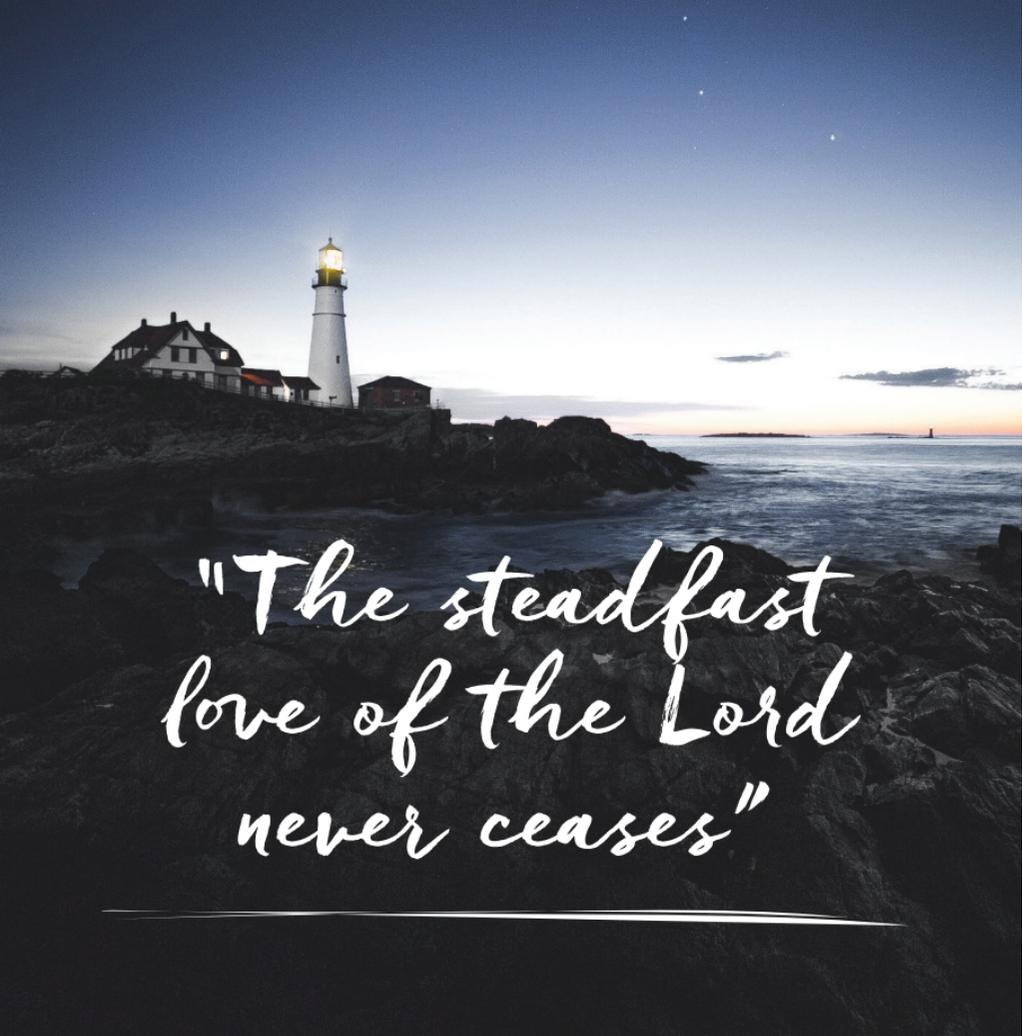




# George's Story

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A photograph of a lighthouse on a rocky coastline at dusk. The lighthouse is white with a black top and a glowing light. To its left is a white building with a dark roof. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the sea is dark with some whitecaps. The foreground is dark, rocky ground.

*"The steadfast  
love of the Lord  
never ceases"*

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I was born on a croft in Dingwall in the north of Scotland on my dad's birthday. I am the oldest of a family of 5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls. At the age of five I had a very serious illness that nearly cost me my life. I was in hospital for three months; I had several operations and a prolonged period absent from school. For a long time I couldn't walk properly, and I was put back a year at school into the same class as my younger sister.

I believed my being put back a year was because I was a dunce, and I began to feel that I was not good enough. Once I put my hand up in class to answer a question but got it wrong. As everyone laughed I felt ashamed, so I decided I would never answer another question again, just in case I got it wrong. I made a conscious decision not to learn.

My mind became more and more set in a negative attitude. It seemed that at every turn I could more evidence of rejection. As a result I lost all interest in the croft and in a conscious way I distanced myself from my dad. I desperately wanted him to like me, but believed I didn't measure up to what he wanted.

Just before my 11th birthday my dad died of bowel cancer. I was devastated, and withdrew even further into myself. My behaviour became very difficult at times, and I can recall making another conscious decision that had negative consequences. I said to myself, "I am never going to let anyone get close to me again so that I will not get hurt". I was convinced I was a failure. I was angry with my father for leaving us, and I was angry with God, angry at the lies I had been told at Sunday school about a loving God.

I reasoned, "How could a loving God take my dad?".

Having experimented with alcohol on several occasions, when I was quite young I had discovered just how alcohol changed the way I felt. It allowed me to escape from myself into a make believe world where negative emotions would dissolve. It seemed to calm me, and to give me a measure of confidence. I thought that being able to drink more than other people made me a man, and from a young age my whole life revolved around alcohol. I got into trouble for drunkenness, and went through times of depression. For about 17 years I hid in a bottle.

Alcohol eventually took over my life. Yes, it changed how I felt, but it simply numbed the pain, fear and anger that brewed within me. I tried moving to the south of

England to work, and I planned to stay sober for a year and save some money. I was sober for three days and I was drunk for the rest of the year! For a period of time I lived in a rundown old caravan; I didn't wash or shave, and only changed my clothes when they fell off! Many years later my boss told me that he truly expected to find me burnt to death or face down in a ditch.

One day, I was very depressed, feeling lonely and sorry for myself, all I could see ahead was prison, mental asylum or death, my life seemed so hopeless. Thoughts of killing myself were very common. I thought of jumping off the Bonar Bridge, although I am not sure how serious I was. On my way to the bridge I saw a sign for half price beer, so I changed my mind and went and got drunk instead. I ended up pouring my heart out to

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a barmaid, who told me she had a friend in AA who would come and see me.

That turned out to be my last drink! For about 3 days I sat at home, sobering up. Nights were bad, and days were even worse. I was fearful; I had heart palpitations and I thought if I moved I was going to have a heart attack and die! Any noise made me jump, my nerves were on edge, and I began planning how I could get away again. I planned to sell everything I had left to get the fare to go south again, but I couldn't get it arranged.

Then a knock came on the door and there were ladies there, I had forgotten I had agreed to go to an AA meeting. I had no drink in me and the prospect frightened me, because I never did anything without drink. But hopeless as I felt I went with them full of fear. They put me in the back seat of a two-door Mini and I couldn't get out.

I believe God heard my desperate cry for help, and that night I found hope, just maybe there was a way out of this mess for me. For two years I went to AA meetings got involved in everything that was

going on and tried to sober up the world.

I needed to talk to someone about what was happening in my life and decided to phone a friend called John, who lived in Tain. I phoned the wrong number and ended up speaking with a different John whom I'd only known for a few weeks. In God's plan, however, it was the right number. He invited me to his house, explained the gospel to me in a simple and powerful way from two gospel tracts. That night in John's living room, both John and a Dutch man called Yan, led me to the Lord. I came as a sinner to the foot of the cross, confessed my sin and asked God to forgive me. In repentance I turned from that sinful relationship and asked Jesus to be Lord of my life.

Psalm 40 was the first chapter from the Bible to make sense to

me. It spoke of how God had lifted me out of a slimy pit, out of mud and mire, and had put my feet upon a rock.

For a while I was like the nine lepers whom Jesus healed and who went on their way. I still went to AA, and at times I went to church, but I never started to grow as a Christian until I started to go to a small fellowship in Thurso, in the north of Scotland. The pastor there spent time with me doing one-to-one Bible studies, allowing me to ask many questions, and showing me great patience. God started working with me. Passages in the Bible seemed to light up and become embossed – they seemed to lift off the page for me, and I learned to read with the Bible, and to write out notes, even my writing improved a bit. God spoke into my life taking me back to the football field, putting me on the touchline among some of the best in the

# Because He lives I can face tomorrow

world, and, putting His hand on my shoulder He said” “George, I want you for my team.”

Someone told me about meetings run by an organisation called the Stauros Foundation, that were to be held one weekend in Dornoch.

I arranged to be there and I loved what I heard. There were personal testimonies, and the gospel was shared in a practical way in the power of the Holy Spirit. What jumped out at me was the way that God can turn around seemingly hopeless situations.

That was a special weekend for me and it changed the direction of my life. I felt it was like being part of a family. At the end of the weekend I didn't want the Stauros people to leave, so as soon as I could I arranged to go down to Paisley to the Stauros meeting there, which was a great encouragement to me. It was there I heard the chorus “Because He lives I can face tomorrow” for the first time there.

Some time later I got a letter from Stan Gowdy, who worked for Stauros, saying that he was passing through Thurso on a certain date and would like to meet up with me. From that time on, and for about two years, Stan travelled up regularly and started a Stauros meeting in my flat. I got the opportunity to go down to Glasgow regularly and at times shared testimony in the meetings there and in Skye.

I was not out of the woods, and I wasn't really stable in my relationships so I made many mistakes. I thought Stauros wouldn't want me anymore, and that God wouldn't want me either. Once, as I spoke to Stan on the phone, he said, “George in this army we don't shoot wounded soldiers.” This statement broke me; I cried my eyes out in repentance and never went back to that relationship.

Stan arranged for me to come over to Ballyards Castle, which was a residential unit run by Stauros at that time. I was to come and stay there for six months. I felt as if I had moved from a caravan in the wood to the Castle on a hill. Again God met with me. Arthur Williams, the founder of Stauros, brought devotions from God's word morning by morning. I had worthwhile and rewarding work to

do around the peaceful grounds of Ballyards Castle. I received a lot of healing there and started to grow as a Christian, working alongside the residents, keeping the grounds and eventually sitting down and doing one-to-ones with people. I fitted in with the team and my six months extended so that I never went back to Scotland except to visit. God blessed me with a wife and with two healthy happy boys. It took a long time to break down my barriers, and for me to become mature enough for marriage and children.

In August 2012 I was diagnosed with cancer at the back of my nose, and a secondary cancer was discovered in my neck some time later. That certainly changed the direction of my life and that of my family. There were tests, scans, doctors, then into chemotherapy and radiotherapy; there was a hospital stay for seven weeks

and a year off work. Nevertheless, God brings good out of every circumstance, and I've learned a lot about His love, and the love of other people. I discovered that the world still revolves even when I am out of action. I've met some lovely people along my cancer journey; and I discovered that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

I believe that everything we go through is for a purpose, and God is still in control. He knows what He is doing. Having gone through cancer I felt God wanted me to help and support other people going through cancer. So, recently I completed the McMillans Cancer Support Course and I am getting involved with Family Care in Cancer.

If you have been touched by reading this testimony, and wish to know Christ, whom George has

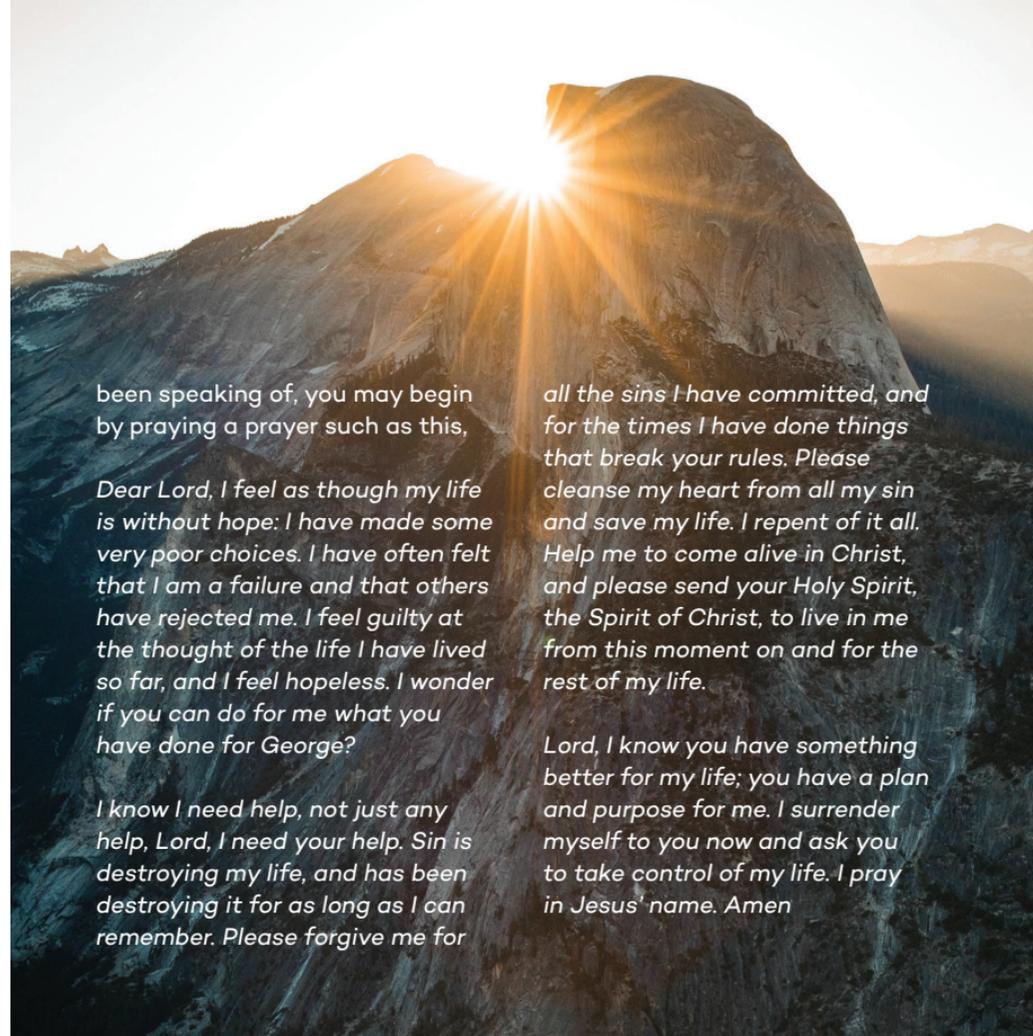
been speaking of, you may begin by praying a prayer such as this,

*Dear Lord, I feel as though my life is without hope: I have made some very poor choices. I have often felt that I am a failure and that others have rejected me. I feel guilty at the thought of the life I have lived so far, and I feel hopeless. I wonder if you can do for me what you have done for George?*

*I know I need help, not just any help, Lord, I need your help. Sin is destroying my life, and has been destroying it for as long as I can remember. Please forgive me for*

*all the sins I have committed, and for the times I have done things that break your rules. Please cleanse my heart from all my sin and save my life. I repent of it all. Help me to come alive in Christ, and please send your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to live in me from this moment on and for the rest of my life.*

*Lord, I know you have something better for my life; you have a plan and purpose for me. I surrender myself to you now and ask you to take control of my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen*





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