

# Man's steps, ordered by The Lord

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon reflects on the mysterious ways in which God leads individuals, using personal anecdotes to illustrate how God's plans often surpass human understanding. It emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's sovereignty even when faced with confusion or unexpected changes, highlighting the need to surrender personal desires and plans to follow God's leading. The speaker shares a journey of unexpected twists and turns, demonstrating how God's guidance can lead to unexpected blessings and opportunities, ultimately pointing to the unfathomable grace and purpose of God in orchestrating every detail of our lives.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 20:24, Psalms 77:19, John 13:7, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:4

**Topics:** "Divine Guidance", "Trusting God's Plan"

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## Description

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## Transcript

In the session a few weeks ago that I mentioned, which was entitled The Lord Led Me, I read a couple of passages of scripture, several verses. I want to re-read them because they're certainly as applicable to what I'm about to share as what they applied to last time. The first verse is from the book of Proverbs, chapter 24.

In that section of scripture we read, A man's steps are ordered by the Lord. How then can a man understand his own way? Which is a very interesting statement or series of statements. A man's steps are ordained by the Lord.

How then can a man understand his own way? The fact of the matter is that no individual can comprehend fully their own experiences. The people of God are frequently baffled by his dealings with them. If you'd excuse me sharing an illustration, which some may feel is very inappropriate, but we have a lovely dog that's getting very old now, a golden retriever called Sadie.

I remember when we first got her many years ago now, I was anxious to train her and get her used to walking with me and so on. I read a suggestion in a book that we had and I sought to carry it out. That was that when I walk the dog along the sidewalk, that I should stop a number of times and just simply do a quick turnaround and walk in the opposite direction and then stop again and turn around and go back over the former area and then again and to do this repeatedly.

I remember doing it and just as the book I was reading had stated, my dog was totally confused and it was looking up at me like, what's going on? And being such a lovely animal, I think the dog was thinking something like this, well, I haven't got a clue what he's doing or what this is all about, but if it makes him happy, I'll do it. And so anyway, all things worked out really well in the end. But there's a book which has been made of some message or several messages that Oswald Chambers gave many years ago, which is entitled Baffled to Fight Better.

And the fact of the matter is that this is one of the strange features of the Christian journey and it actually includes some rather big issues. It includes on the one hand the sovereignty of God and the decisions and actions of us as individual members of his great family and where these two features, the sovereign planning of God and our own choices sort of fit together is a big issue and it's been debated by many, many people over the years and there's probably some disagreement as to how it all works out. But the fact of the matter is that as the proverb states, a man's steps are ordained by the Lord, how then can a man understand his own way? And in Psalm 77 and verse 19, I read this, thy way is in the sea and their path is in great waters and thy footsteps are not known.

I think Jesus made a statement which was stated in a different context in a different moment altogether, but maybe this sort of, I don't know, brings it all together. Jesus said in John 13 and verse 7, he said, what I do you do not know now, but you shall know hereafter. That's a wonderful reassuring statement.

Isn't it wonderful? We've been hearing songs about the love of God and the mercy of God engaging in our lives and it's so wonderful to remind ourselves that we're not out somewhere on some great ocean in some kind of little canoe or something struggling to sort of make our way to some destination, but it's wonderful that we have a God who is, as Peter prayed when he opened his prayer this morning, he said, our heavenly father, he's our heavenly father, he loves you, he loves me, he loves us and he cares for us and he has a plan and a purpose in his sovereign will and choosing for each one of us and that is very wonderful. I could go off on a tangent here. I decided to myself, I must be careful in this sort of free kind of talk this morning, not to go down any rabbit trails here, but what I want to do really and I hope I can hold your interest as I go forward here, I'm selecting a period of my journey in life.

It's like I'm cutting a slice of it out to talk about in this session. It won't bring you up to date because that will be about three or four or six or eight slices further on, but you know I remember years ago I said to a friend of mine, an esteemed friend, I was talking about my own life, this is like decades ago now, and I said you know I really feel I shouldn't have done that and I talked about something in particular and he responded by saying Fred you can't say that and without pursuing that particular conversation I confess that as time passed I became more and more aware of the fact that even when I acted in a way which to me appeared in retrospect to have been a mistake, the fact is that God in His love and grace and in the genius of who He is and in His dealings with us, He has brought good and blessing even out of those times when I could very easily in my own mind think maybe I would have been better off not to have done such and such, but then this great truth settles on my heart and brings peace as God says see what I've done, see what I brought about out of that and that's very very wonderful. You know, where shall I start?

Let me come at it this way, this is where I break in to this slice.

As a young police officer in Liverpool, England, I'd just been given an award which was quite remarkable and it was such that my future in the police department had a unique and huge plus to it and everything looked very very good and then, I'm sorry if this is, you probably as I go forward you probably wonder what happened well in between that and this what happened, well I can't take time to go through all the details but I had received this award and the other thing that happened at that time which I talked about in one of the other sessions is that both Sheila and myself had been, our pathways had converged with some people who were able to show us the way of God more perfectly and we had opened our own hearts and our lives up to the Lord as never before and that aspect of our lives was thrilling to us and I could talk about that very easily and very freely of just how the Lord blessed us and how he joined us to some people whose hearts were aflame with a love for God and we wish for the rest of our lives be thankful to God for that. So that had happened in our spiritual lives within weeks I received this award which was for a certain thing I will choose to talk about just now and so I had an excellent career, we had a house, we had, Sheila was expecting our second child and the Lord spoke into my heart the unthinkable and it was this that I should resign from the police department and again that was completely baffling to me so much so that Sheila and I asked a senior brother that we esteemed very very highly as a spiritual man, we asked if we could get together and talk with him and I explained just where I was up to and what had happened and I said the thing that's so baffling to me is that the Lord very clearly opened doors for me to even get into this career and everything was going so well and yet this is what I'm sensing in my heart how could this be if I was so sure that having prayed and seen the Lord open the door that I'm now at this point in time and I remember him saying well it's very simple Fred and I thought well there's nothing very simple about it to me it seems he said well the fact is God led you in and now he's leading you out I thought well I mean the question would be well well why but I don't think I asked that question verbally in that moment I just said well well what why not he's God he can do what he wants and now the fact is we I went through with that and submitted my resignation I could talk more about that but in proceeding with that we lost the house because the house we had was a very nice house came with the job so we lost the house that was the end of the career and so on and uh you know there were moments I'd have to confess to you when I felt perhaps in a way that most of the Israelites felt when they were coming out of Egypt and they're now standing on the banks of the Red Sea that they need to cross that seemed to them impossible and they're told that they're going through to the other side and I think the natural inclination could very well have been I'm not I can't be sure what they thought of course it could very well have been well why why don't we just stay here this looks this looks dangerous in the extreme and I'm sure there were times in my life when I felt like that maybe you have experience is in your life that you can think about maybe even right now you're facing one and you're sensing God leading you in a particular way but there's no obvious reason or perhaps no obvious way that this is going to work out but the big thing is who's speaking who is leading who's doing the leading and it was at that same time that I met and Shira and I both met John Harrison who is in this meeting right now we met John and his family and we made friends with them and they've got their story but they ended up moving about 16 miles away from Liverpool and had a lovely bungalow house there and they they convinced us that maybe we should do the same and we were able to do that and we we moved into a bungalow right opposite to John and his family and we both remember some very precious times of fellowship there and traveling backwards and forwards to meetings and so on I'm sure he's thinking about those days as I share these things and I had a different job I was working in an advertising and printing department of a firm in Liverpool so things were looking up spiritually everything was wonderful and then we had a invited to a holiday in in Devon down to Exeter where Bob who sang earlier is from and Bob and Margaret of course and this was with an elder spiritual couple and there was

an occasion one morning as we're sitting having our breakfast with our children I think Sheila's in the meeting I believe we had just the two children at this time as I'm sharing this and in the course of just having breakfast very ordinary but we sensed we were very privileged just to be there with this couple and you know how often maybe you don't do it like this in your house but not infrequently there's a cereal package on the table and up far away well there was one on this occasion and Sheila was trying to read something on that cereal package that she couldn't make out and it was the elder brother there who said well Sheila where are your glasses and she said well we can't afford glasses and he turned to me and he said what's this Fred you can't afford to buy your wife glasses and I said well you know by the time you pay the mortgage and the car payment and everything else you have to pay there's not much left over and his response little did I know would be pivotal in our lives what seemingly was a simple statement but he said Fred that's right he said the whole world is involved in a cycle that revolves around money and at some point we have to break out of that cycle and get into a cycle that revolves around Jesus and that moment disappeared as quickly as it came but several days later we were driving up the motorway home and our children were asleep in the back we didn't have to have seat belts in those days and they're in the back of this little mini station wagon that we had and they were asleep and Sheila and I exchanged with one another you know talking about the time that we'd just spent and this topic came up and one of us said to the other do you remember that statement that that brother said to us and of course we did and it was agreed by both of us that somehow the Lord was speaking to us through that and we decided together on that journey that when we got home and we got the children to bed that we would get on our knees together and we would tell the Lord that we were ready to leave that lovely little bungalow house that we were in to get closer to the fellowship in the center of the city and we followed through on that and the house was sold very quickly and that surprised everyone I think just how quickly it was sold and we didn't know where we were going to live exactly and it was right down to the closing date on the house and we had we'd had no communication with this realtor I don't even know who it was to this day but a realtor phoned me just as I was about to leave work on this particular day and said I hear that you're looking for a house to rent and I said well yes we are and this was a lady and she said she said well there is a house in in Garston and it's available it's the only one that we have and I said well we'll take it and she said well how can you say that how can you be so sure and I said well I said two things one the timing is impeccable and the second thing is that it's very close to my mother who had been recently widowed and it was also close to the fellowship and we will never forget going to see that house that night and it was old and it was an inner city terraced house and it hadn't been lived in for some time and you could tell that by the odour and we discovered that weekend without me going into detail that that house would for as long as we live have a name given to it and that name is this the cockroach house because it was it was filled with cockroaches and we had it fumigated twice and so on but the fact is that we have some incredibly wonderful memories of that house we could tell lots of stories but this was a time when God was moving in such a way in our hearts and we had friends who would come to visit us I had my uncle who was a brethren elder come to visit while I was painting the ceiling to get what we're getting ready to live in and he said you know Fred he said your auntie Olive and I think you're very foolish to move from that lovely bungalow for this place and he left shortly after that and he left me with that to think about while I carried on painting and there's a side of me that would readily have agreed with him humanly but we knew we were doing the right thing and we had friends who came we have memories John will remember some of these times that John had just mentioned but when we would we'd gather together we used to listen to reel-to-reel tape recordings of ministry which is the only way you could do it in those days and we would pray together there were times cockroach or not we would lay on the floor on the carpets on our faces and pray and we had no idea about ministry or any such things we were just sold out to God and I you know I

was passionate about my own studying and reading not because I was going to preach because I had never thought I would ever be a preacher and one day I'm driving this is after about two years and our third child has been born now I was driving to the Sunday morning meeting for the breaking of bread meeting and as I was driving along just in my own heart I've never heard the Lord audibly and I have some questions about people who say they do but that's another topic but in my heart this profound sense came over me that I should sell the car that I was in and get rid of the loan that we had for it and I arrived at the meeting I took my seat I can visualize exactly where I was sitting these many years later and the meeting had not yet started and a brother from behind me leaned over to me and he said he said hey Fred you're not interested in selling your car by any chance are you and I said Keith you'll never believe what happened to me on the way to this meeting and I shared with him he said this is before the meeting started he said how much do you want for it and I told him what we owed on it and he said well we'll do a bit of Christian bargaining he said we'll give you such and such and that was more than what we owed on it and he said that he and another brother that's a few people in the meeting today will recognize the name I'm talking about Keith Kelly and the other brother his colleague was Phil Williamson who's gone to be with the Lord now and he said in our summer holidays because there were school teachers they were going into Europe to visit some of the people who've gone out from the fellowship to do mission work and he said we've decided that that car that you've got was exactly what we would need for that mission and so that that was that again we don't know what is going on but we were with we had no mortgage we had no car payments and there was a business meeting in the church where we were attending right after this and in that meeting it was decided this was a very large house church though I'm going to say that there was certainly around a hundred people in the church at this time and in this meeting we were told that the man who'd been responsible for leading the work was now finding his ministry expanding and he was going to be unable to carry on the responsibility for the operation of this this house and he was putting it out I remember one of the other elders there sort of advertising the job and he was making sort of light of it really and saying you know giving the hours ridiculously long hours and there's no salary attached to it and so on and so on a couple of days later though all that went in one ear out the other for me but a couple of days later I was at my work and I was operating a machine at the time and the Lord spoke into my heart again so clearly that I remember stopping the machine and having to just sit down to digest what I'd just heard because I sensed what God was saying to me was that that I with my wife Sheila were the two people that should move into that role I had never dreamt that would be and we seemed to be the most unlikely couple for that and but the fact is the Lord had been leading us and in situations and circumstances that we couldn't relate to anything in particular except a desire to obey what we were feeling in our hearts but here we were we had no financial commitments at all and we were free and here was this in my heart and eventually there was a meeting for the church and it was agreed that this in fact was what God wanted for us and we we joined a fellowship life that was it was thrilling because in our hearts we the team of us all felt that we we were not to receive salaries that if we were doing the work of the Lord he would provide for us and meet our financial needs and also we felt you know that scripture where we read oh no man anything but to love one another and we believed that that was appropriate and applicable to us and we saw and read the words of the apostle Paul who if I may paraphrase his words he said he would rather die than put a price to the gospel and I was invited then as a young man I was 29 years of age at that point to join the eldership in that church and my ministry began to unfold then I could never ever have imagined this as those various things were happening that I can still reflect on as being very real and challenging at the time but God had a plan in it all and that was very very wonderful indeed I'm trying to think where I should go on that that there was a Monday morning we lived for four years in that fellowship house and we have that's that's another big slice I could share with you but on this

particular Monday morning the phone rang and I answered the phone it was a man who didn't attend our church and he said hi Fred he said well you know that my wife and I are emigrating to Canada he said no I'm just wondering have you ever thought of emigrating to Canada and I said really no I absolutely have not I've never been out of the UK and I never thought I ever would go out of the UK and he said well listen think about it he said as a matter of fact he said our house is pretty well all packed up but would you like to come around to our place and have a cup of tea with us and I'll show you some slides which he did and then I ended up with an invitation to go for three weeks to Ontario and he arranged some meetings in which I could speak and the first weekend was a youth retreat in Barrie Ontario and it was there that I met Peter Boyle who you're seeing on the screen and Sharon and after the first meeting a young woman came to talk to me and she told me that she'd been raised in a Christian home in a brethren home as a matter of fact and she'd become a drug addict and had lived out in Vancouver and been on the streets in Vancouver there's more to that story but she had just returned from Vancouver and she said to me I believe that God has he's done a work in my heart and I feel he's relieved me of this addiction to the drugs but she went on to tell me how she felt that she was gripped with a fear and we talked together and I ministered and prayed for her and she believed that God really released her on that occasion I was hoping she might have been in this meeting actually but she's not here today and she went home about I don't know I'm guessing about 30 miles I should think after that morning meeting talked to her parents who were so delighted to hear what she could tell them and they came to the meeting in the evening and at the end of the meeting her father said to this young woman do you think that Fred would ever come and minister if I got some of our brethren friends together and she said I don't know go and ask him well I did go and I was given an invitation to move to Canada and two wonderful men and their wives said that if you would be prepared to consider this we will do anything we can to help you get situated and that's how I ended up in Canada with my wife and my four children and that was in 1974 so I've got that slices from a long time ago and you know there are no accidents with God there are no coincidences with God his grace toward us is unfathomable he chose me he chose you before the foundation of the world you know he chose my grandparents he chose my parents he chose which family I would be born into he chose the location in which I would be born where my path would converge with other people whose lives he was leading and guiding and he's ordained you I believe to be in this very meeting today and it's not an accident and it's not a coincidence at all in any way and I don't know what God has in his heart for you or how he's speaking to you at this point in time or how he will use what you've heard this morning and apply it to your life in the days ahead as he brings it back to your memory but what a wonderful thing it is that we have such a God you know I should draw to a close at this point if this meeting is being recorded and I don't know that it will be and you hear this in that particular way by listening to a recording can I just before I close just encourage you to find my YouTube channel which I can hardly believe I even possess because it's so out of sync with the way I've lived my life but the title of that channel is Turn to Scripture with Fred Thompson and if you like what you find subscribe and get future messages if you want to comment we appreciate them so much indeed and I invite you to just join us in this venture a fellowship with Jesus and the privilege of being able to minister the great gospel of God as Paul calls it the glorious gospel of the blessed God thank you in Jesus name be blessed amen

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