

The Lord Led Me

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the personal experiences and encounters that have shaped the speaker's spiritual journey, highlighting the impact of individuals like Dave, George, and Norman who exemplified deep faith and surrender to God. It emphasizes the importance of personal relationship with God, the supernatural aspect of the Christian life, and the need for individual heart responses to God's calling and leading.

Scripture: Genesis 24:27, Proverbs 20:24, Psalms 77:19, John 13:7, John 2:5, Romans 8:14, Matthew 7:13

Topics: "Personal Relationship with God", "Impact of Faithful Mentors"

Description

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Transcript

And I'd like to welcome you to this session that you've joined. It's actually a Zoom meeting that the McKenzie Christian Fellowship have each week. And this is the speaking or preaching or teaching session that you've joined and I want to welcome you.

My name is Fred Tomlinson. What I want to do today is something rather different to usual. It would be most common, of course, to have some scripture and start with scripture reading and then to look through that passage or that theme, whatever happens to be the case.

In this session, I want to share something that's more personal than usual. And let me tell you what has prompted me. We do enjoy looking at the various comments that people leave on the various platforms where they watch and listen to the messages.

And for the most part, they're all wonderfully, wonderfully encouraging to me personally and to all of us who are supporting this activity in this ministry who pray together for God's blessing on it all. But there was one particular comment and it was a woman completely unknown to me. And her comment started with the capital letters IDK.

So it was IDK who this man is, comma, but, and then she went on to say something. And it was those three capital letters that caught my attention. For those of you who are more familiar with social media,

you'd know immediately what they meant, but I'm not one of those people.

I don't do Facebook and all the other things. But I figured it out. It wasn't really that hard.

I don't know who this man is, but, and then it went on. And having observed that, I thought about it for a few moments and I thought, this lady doesn't know who I am. And that probably is true.

In fact, it's certainly true for the majority of people who listen to me on those larger platforms. And I felt in my heart that I'd just like to share something about myself. And for those who might be interested, I want to give just a small window into my personal life.

And I'm not a young man, so I've got an enormous amount of material to draw from. But I assure you that this will be just a small window here on this occasion. And I'm praying, and I have prayed before this meeting, believing what I was going to do in the meeting, just that the Lord would speak to the hearts of each one that is listening to me.

And that maybe something, either through my words or something that is prompted by them in some way, that the Holy Spirit can use to speak to you in your heart at this time. You know, when I reflect on my life, I'm reminded of the words of Abraham's oldest servant. Remember, he was sent by Abraham on a very important mission.

I won't digress to remind you of the story. But eventually, that servant found himself in a situation where he was talking to the woman that he, of course, had never met in his life before, but he recognized readily that she was the answer to Abraham's prayer and indeed to his own prayer as well. And later on, speaking to some of the family, he said, I, being in the way, the Lord led me.

And then it continues on, but you can read that if you want in Genesis 24, that's verse 27. But in the book of Proverbs, let me just quote a couple of scriptures. In the book of Proverbs, chapter 20 and verse 24, we read, a man's steps are ordained by the Lord.

How then can a man understand his own way? In other words, that no individual can comprehend fully their own experience. That goes for every one of you listening to me. And in the book of Psalms, in Psalm chapter 77 and verse 19, we read, thy way is in the sea.

This is a reference primarily, of course, to the Lord himself. Thy way is in the sea and their path is in the great waters and thy footsteps are not known. It would be tempting to stop and talk about each of these verses in particular, but I must continue.

I hope you're catching something of a theme. A man's steps are ordained by the Lord. How can he know them himself? God's way is in the sea.

It's not visible to us, but nevertheless, he knows exactly what the path is. And as that applies to each of our individual lives, he knows every step of our future before ever we get there. And then, of course, it was Jesus who said in John chapter 13 and verse 7, what I do, you do not know now, but you shall know hereafter.

Amen. The fact of the matter is that the people of God are frequently baffled by the ways of the Lord as we sense him involved in our circumstances. If we believe, as I certainly do and I trust you do, that God is absolutely sovereign over everything, then there are no surprises to God at all.

And he knows, as I've indicated already, he knows where he wants to get us and why he wants to get us there. And the actual process of him accomplishing that, as he is involved in our lives and in our circumstances, can at times appear to be baffling to us. It was actually Oswald Chambers, who I've always enjoyed reading, who one of the books, he never wrote any books actually, but many of his writings were taken down in shorthand by his wife and they've been put into that form.

But one of them is called Baffled to Fight Better. Perhaps the way I'm thinking of it this morning is that we may be baffled in the midst of a particular circumstance or other. Okay, it may be to fight better, I'm not disputing that.

But if God has put us in this situation that may be baffling to us, it is because he is moving us ever deeper into his purpose for our lives. Amen. I'll collect the more personal thoughts under two headings.

And the first would be this, as I refer back to an event that stands as a huge, huge milestone in my personal life. I reflect on it and I say with Jacob of old, surely the Lord was in this place and I knew it not. This event that I'm thinking about took place on the 22nd of February.

Of course, it's the 21st of February today, so I'm not talking about this year. On the 22nd of February, 63 years ago, tomorrow. On that occasion, one evening, I'd been part of a very large open air meeting as a young person in Liverpool, England.

And there were young people from other sister brethren assemblies around the area that met together each Sunday at what we call or is known as the Pier Head in Liverpool. It's right on the river and the ferries arriving and leaving there continually and during the summertime, a very busy, busy place. And we had an open air meeting, like a hymn singing session there and hundreds of people from the different assemblies would gather together.

But for us younger people, it was an opportunity to meet young people from other assemblies. On the 22nd of February, 63 years ago, I asked a pretty 16 year old girl if I could take her home on my motorcycle. She was not just any girl, she was a Christian girl and she was, as I've indicated already, she was from a sister assembly.

In the midst of different circumstances around that time, she seemed to keep appearing, so that I definitely was almost made to recognize her. But I won't tell you all the story. But little did I know on that occasion, as she climbed behind me on my motorcycle, that God had brought me together with someone he had designed to be my wife, my dearest friend and my co-worker in the ministry of the gospel.

And I can say honestly that there are not enough adjectives to describe how perfect that union has been and continues to be. Only the Lord knows how much I owe to her, not least her midnight prayers for me and for my family, our family, and for her selfless support, even when that meant at times that I left her with the children while I went on my different journeys preaching, which I don't do very much of these days. The Lord has blessed us together.

He gave us four children and we have 16 grandchildren and we have currently, this number could change, 12 great-grandchildren. All four of our children and their spouses are walking with the Lord, with one exception, a daughter living in the UK. She's not an exception to what I've just said, so I'm really not saying this right.

Let me rephrase my statement. All our family live in British Columbia, make our homes around southern British Columbia, but one of our daughters with her husband and her children, they live in the UK and they live, many of you British people know exactly what I'm talking about, but they live on an area known as the Wirral and they attend a very wonderful fellowship there. Amen.

We're very, very grateful to God for all of that. You know, having said that about my family, many years ago I wrote a booklet which I call Concerning the Family. The opening paragraph in that book read like this, The concept of family remains one of God's priceless gifts to mankind.

It was designed to be a miniature paradise, an environment of loving companionship, selfless encouragement and genuine security, a centre of pure joy. Tragically, of course, as we all know only too well, an outrageous thing is happening and that is that this idyllic divinely designed institution is being ripped apart one way and another. But that, of course, is a story for another time and for another occasion.

My second heading, and I'll take a little longer with this one, concerns three men that impacted my spiritual life and that of my wife also, and in turn it's impacted countless, I think countless hundreds of other people, but most people wouldn't have known anything about this. And I'm reaching back to the year 1966 and as was the case with that first motorcycle ride with Sheila, meeting each of these men were also divine appointments. I think I knew less about that with respect to when I was asking Sheila if I could take her home and I didn't fully understand at all what meeting these men would mean to my life when I met them, but they were indeed divine appointments.

These men have been like three doorkeepers to me, each of them in a manner reminiscent of Priscilla and Aquila. Remember with Apollos and Acts chapter 18 toward the end of the chapter we read how they were able to show the way of God more perfectly to that preacher, Apollos, and the incredible thing about him was he was teachable. Not many big Bible teachers would I think be as open and ready to be challenged as was Apollos, and there's a lot to be said about that, but they showed him the way of God more perfectly, and these men that I'm thinking of just now, they showed to me and to Sheila the way of God more perfectly.

It was not merely what they taught, but it was by the unmistakable evidence of Christ in their lives, and we, meaning Sheila and myself, as young people who've been raised in Christian homes and gone to literally I'm sure thousands of meetings from our infancy, but when we met these men at three different occasions in and around that period of time I've mentioned, we recognised a reality of the life of God in them, and we listened to preaching at that time which was such that when we heard it we embraced it, as we would say perhaps hook, line, and sinker. We just embraced it with all of our hearts. This was not some sort of casual response, but with all of our hearts we responded to this word that was being ministered in these lives that were displaying that life to us.

You know, it's true to say that if the Christian life as we call it is not supernatural, it's not the authentic Christian life, or to just restate that the Christian life, the true Christian life is always supernatural, because we've made the words Christian life a sort of synonym for a Christian lifestyle, but that's not how we're to understand it at all. The Christian life is the life of Christ, and the Gospel is of course a declaration of how we may actually receive that life of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and it indwell our own hearts, and that will always be a supernatural event. This is not merely a mental ascent to doctrine or theology, but it's a heart, deep, deep down in the very core of our being, it's a heart responding to the word of God, who at the same time quickens faith in our hearts that we might actually receive and know and experience the blessing of

that life.

This is the Gospel. Amen. So with these three men I want to talk about, I will highlight just a few features from each of their lives and their impact upon me.

I'm not setting one of these three men above the other in any way by the remarks that I'll make, because in a very real sense each of these men shared the same qualities equally. Yes of course they were individuals, and that makes for certain features being emphasised more than others. And one last comment before I go ahead, there's no significance, for anyone who senses that they know who I'm talking about, there's no significance in the order in which I present them.

They're all, each one have been God's gifts to me and to Sheila. The first man, I'll just call him Dave, and I've got to discipline myself because there's so much that I could say about each of these men, so I'm trying to limit myself and focus my thoughts to be particularly meaningful to you today. But when I first met Dave, what struck me, and I remember exactly, he'd actually arrived on our doorstep uninvited, but that's another story, but when I first met him my sense was that here is a truly childlike man.

There was a childlikeness about him, a warmth, a simplicity. A couple of days later I met him again and we were now visiting my mother who'd recently become widowed, and Sheila and I were going on a holiday to Scotland with some other members of our family, not our children, they weren't born yet. But this man Dave was there with my mother and my brother and I didn't want to stay around because I wasn't really into what he represented.

I didn't know what it was but I wasn't into it. I was content and satisfied with what I knew to be the things of the Gospel and the Christian life. But before we could get out of the door, we'll never forget him saying, let's just pray before you go friend, and he did.

You know, it wasn't what he prayed, it was the way he prayed, and Sheila and I recognised that we were in the presence of a man who truly knew God. You know, it's true to say that there's no more accurate measure of a person's knowledge of God than when you hear them pray. I believe that, strongly.

And, you know, we need to recognise we're not talking about our ability to string together Christian cliches, you know, or a list of grocery requests from God, as it were, but there's just something that is truly spirit, actually, that is revealed when a person opens their heart up to God. If they know him, it will be recognised most clearly, I think, in those situations. For the rest of our holiday, I don't believe there was a day that passed that we weren't reflecting on that man, that man Dave, and the way we'd heard him pray, and it was profoundly challenging to us.

At that time, little did I know that a few years later, I would actually share the eldership with him and several other men of a large house church in Liverpool, and we actually lived in the same house. So, for four years, we lived there, there were other people, there was a team of us living there, but Dave lived there, and I could write certainly a couple of chapters of a book on those days and the things in connection with that man Dave. He was the epitome of the love of God.

I've heard many other people make this same statement. As a matter of fact, I'll digress just for a moment. I was actually speaking in a Bible study one evening in a very casual setting with a group of young people all around me from the church that we were involved with, and we were talking about fellowship together, and one person spoke up, and he wanted to illustrate the point that was being made.

He said, you know, when I first met Dave, I felt as though I was his very best friend, and then I realised everyone was Dave's best friend. Dave, with the love of Christ within his heart, he made everyone feel as though they were truly special. Wonderful.

Dave was a single man, a single man with an uncompromising diligence to moral purity. You know, when he became ill toward the end of his life, he was hospitalised, and Dave was at his weakest, and he there in the hospital bed, he passed into that closer experience of the presence of God. While he was laid there, it was found, before he'd been removed yet from the bed, it had been found that one of the nurses had taken a rose from some flowers nearby, and she'd just lay it on his body as he lay there.

That was the impact of Dave on her at his physical weakest moment. Amen. I'll just tell you one other thing about Dave.

After he'd gone from our presence, because we were visiting from Canada at that time, we were invited to go into the little room that was where he lived in the Fellowship House, and our friend said to us, that is to Sheila and me, just take anything you want that will remind you of Dave. And we would not forget looking around, and this is the truth, there was nothing, the room was full, but there was nothing in that room that had any real material value at all, truly. In fact, I was heard to say way back then, the only thing that had any material value that I could see was an unopened package of three wood chisels.

That was it. The wall was covered in photographs of people, friends he'd made around the world, there were letters everywhere, and little things that people had given him over the years. He was a simple man, he was a true, authentic Christian man.

Sheila took something of great value, actually, it wasn't material value, it was his Bible, and she still has it to this day with all of his notes and writings in it. Amen. So let me move on.

The second man I'll call George. I think more than anything else, that man George taught me that God was truly knowable in the here and now. I believe it would be true to say that his greatest asset was that he had discovered the secret of retreating into the presence of the Lord.

Only infrequently did he make reference of this, or of his experiences in that holy place. But I'm certain that the clarity of his life and of his ministry were the product of what transpired at those times and in that spiritual place within the veil. He taught much from Scripture, but he taught much by example.

He taught me never to try to be popular, or try to be clever in the preaching of the Word of God. We must just bring the Word of God, no matter how people receive it, or what they do with it, is not my responsibility. He once said, and I've quoted him many times on this, all true teachers will turn men ultimately to the inward teacher.

They don't draw them, people to themselves, they turn them to him, the inward teacher, the Holy Spirit of God. And so he taught me, I think this is obvious from what I'm saying, he taught me that the secret of true ministry is to wait upon the Lord and only preach what God reveals to you. We're not just to be parrots, parroting what others have said, no matter how right or good it may be, but we're to develop our own relationship with God.

It was Mary, the mother of Jesus, who said, whatsoever he says to you, do it. And I think in the same sense, the message to me has been, whatsoever he says to you, preach it. Amen.

Many years later, I was with him, we were actually in Salinas, California, to take some meetings there. At this particular point, we were actually sitting together, just the two of us in a mobile trailer unit. They go by different names depending on where you happen to live.

And we were talking, we're talking about the Christian life and so on. And he shared something with me that I remember writing about this in a little booklet. But he had lived in Yorkshire, in England.

And, you know, in England, we're quite noted for having, at least we were noted for having some really thick fogs. We'd call them pea supers, because with all the coal that was being burned back in those old days, and the dampness of the area and the fog that came down, it would bring down all the pollution in the air. And it was almost like green pea soup.

In any event, it was one of those nights. And he at this point had been pastoring a church and it was prayer meeting night. This is the story he shared with me.

He said, you know, he said, I made my way to the prayer meeting. But when I got there, he said there was only one woman there. And her name was Alice.

And she was blind. So she was known affectionately as Blind Alice. And when they realised that no one else would likely come on that night, they decided that they would not have the meeting, but they'd just make their ways home and meet, you know, in the future.

Which they did. They said goodbye to one another. And that lady Alice went to the bus stop.

Obviously, she told her brother George this story later. But she went to the bus stop to get the bus home. And there were other people waiting for the bus.

And it was at this point a policeman came by and said, oh, he said, obviously, you don't know, ladies and gentlemen, but all the public transport has been cancelled. And before the people all parted from that spot, the policeman observed Alice there. And she was blind.

And he said, how are you going to make out? And she said, oh, don't worry about me. I'll be fine. I'll just make my way around to the pastor's house.

And he said, really? Well, who is your pastor? And so she said, brother George. She didn't say that, actually. And at that point, the policeman looked at the people, apparently, that were still gathered around, listening in on this conversation.

And the policeman said, that's right, ladies and gentlemen. And that man George, as he was sharing this with me, he followed that story by saying to me, friend, what higher honor could possibly be expressed about a man than that? Amen. My third man, Alcol Norman.

He was the first man to pray with me that I might more fully experience the life and power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Four years later, he prayed for me again. And that was when I, along with another brother, were being ordained into the eldership of that fellowship.

I remember kneeling with him on one occasion. And I remember this verbatim, never forgotten the moment, to hear this brother next to me as we bowed before the Lord. He said, Lord Jesus, make our lives impeccable.

And I can remember at that particular time, the word impeccable wouldn't have been a word that I would ordinarily have had in my vocabulary, but I knew exactly what it meant. Make our lives impeccable. And I remember thinking to myself as I knelt there with him that, well, the Lord seems to be doing a good job with you, Norman, but please, Lord, will you do that same thing for me? Amen.

That man, Norman, epitomized a life abandoned to God. And his example pointed me in many different ways, but he pointed me, I think, into a habit of unwavering personal discipline. You know, to illustrate what I mean, around that time, Sheila and I had heard the Lord directing us both to break with the cycle that revolves around money and to engage ourselves in a cycle that revolved around Jesus.

Someone had encouraged us with that word, and we received it to ourselves. And at that time, as we responded to that, and I'm not going to take time to tell you what that meant in our lives, particularly, I may mention one or two things in just a moment. But the fact is, at that time, I did not have the slightest thought in my mind that I would ever become a preacher of the Gospel.

That wasn't what I was about. It wasn't what my life was about. We had discovered a dimension of the life and blessing of Christ and of the Gospel that we had not known before, and we'd given ourselves, as I mentioned earlier, hook, line, and sinker to it.

But it wasn't in order to become anything other than to be pleasing to God and discover in ourselves what God had made available for us. I was introduced at that time to Oswald Chambers' book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, and I can remember how there were circumstances surrounding this event, but I'm not getting into them just now, but I can remember just looking at the words, which are the title on the book, which come from one of his messages, *My Utmost for His Highest*. That was all I wanted, and that was all that Sheila wanted, and in that we were in lockstep together.

I cut short my career as a police officer. We sold our cute bungalow in the country. We rented a house which, for the rest of our lives, would be remembered as the cockroach house in the inner city of Liverpool.

We sold the car that we had so that we did not owe anything to anyone. We still didn't know where this was headed. The way was in the sea, but in retrospect, the Lord was ordering our steps and revealing his purpose, because unknown to us, God was positioning us for his purpose.

And in 1970, I bid farewell to secular employment in order to fill a role of leadership, a role which was now being vacated by the brother I've just been speaking about, Norman. I was the youngest member of the eldership in this large house church fellowship in Liverpool, and Norman, while he had been there leading, he'd set the tone for that work on so many different levels. As an example, I think of the area in respect to finances.

No one in the team that was involved received a salary. Each of us must look to the Lord individually for our needs to be met. We embraced the Apostle Paul's heart when he said he would rather die than put a price to the gospel.

And I remember one of the things that Norman stressed, it was something he took to himself primarily, but people heard him, I heard him, and I took it to myself also. And that was that living as we were living, never ever make your material needs known to any human being, only to God. One of our earliest experiences tested our trust in the Lord in that area.

I recall very clearly, and it's very interesting that in this Zoom meeting that I'm also addressing here, we have a lady called Primrose. She is my wife Sheila's sister-in-law. And on this particular occasion, we'd been working full-time in the church I've referred to, and on this occasion we'd been to Sheila's sister Primrose's house, and we'd had a visit with them.

And we had three children at that point in time, and by this time we'd used all of our savings that we'd had, they were just all gone. We had enough on that occasion as we drove from Chester to Liverpool, we had enough to buy half a gallon of petrol or gas, and one bag of French fries to share between us. And that was it.

But from that moment, God began to look after our needs. And God has been faithful ever since. Amen.

These men that I've referred to, they were just regular men, but they were filled with the Spirit of God, and their transparent lives exposed that indwelling life. Amen. You know, I encourage you, we should all be grateful to God for those Priscilla's and Aquilla's, if you will, that God provides for us.

And I've indicated, I think quite clearly already, that we've appreciated these that I've mentioned. Very definitely, and they've benefited us greatly. But ultimately, the issue is this, that we must go through with God on our own.

We go through the narrow gate alone, not even with my wife. But I go through alone, and I must walk this narrow path in single file. Thank God for spouses, and for family, and for fellowship friends, and all the encouragements that God so graciously surrounds our lives with.

But the fact is, in the final analysis, my relationship, my union with God is something that demands my own individual heart response to God, and it needs to be maintained continually. You know, everything I've shared, everything I've shared in this session, is available to you also. And I encourage you, from the depths of my heart, don't make do with anything less.

Give God the opportunity to move freshly, and ever more powerfully, in your surrendered life, in Jesus' name. You know, if you sense that the Lord's been speaking to you, and touching your life, do leave a comment, which we really appreciate. And also, let me encourage you to take a look at our church website.

For those of you who are interested, it's mckenziefellowship.com. mckenziefellowship.com. And you may leave comments there, and you can contact us through that site as well. And Peter Boyle is the host of the website, so he'll be the one responding to you initially. But God bless you.

Amen.

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