



Precious Lord, Take my hand  
Lead me on, help me stand;  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;  
Thru the storm, thru the night,  
Lead me on to the light,  
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

This hymn, written by Thomas Andrew Dorsey (not to be confused with Tommy Dorsey, the big band leader), was a favorite of Martin Luther King Jr. Dorsey toured with the great gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson, who made it into a staple hymn for black churches across the United States. Aretha Franklin sang it at Mahalia Jackson's funeral. Most recently, Beyonce sang the hymn at the Grammy's in 2015.

It may seem a melancholy song, but when you know the story behind it, the beauty is clear. Dorsey learned music in his father's church, where his mother played the organ. The church doubled as a school for black children in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jim Crow south. Later, in Chicago, Dorsey found success playing jazz in speakeasies like those owned by Al Capone. He made a name for himself leading jazz bands.

Then at the National Baptist Convention in Chicago in 1921, he experienced a revival of the faith in which he was raised. He started using his musical talent to produce gospel music for churches. His reputation grew as he toured the country's churches instead of speakeasies. In August of 1932, he received a telegram while performing in St. Louis. Both his wife and baby had passed away.

Dorsey was devastated and angry with God for "doing an injustice." In his anger, he didn't believe he would write music for the Lord any more. But, while sitting alone near a piano, he felt the peaceful and comforting presence of God. The song came to him "like drops of water falling from the crevice of the rock."

Many of the hymns that we sing in church on Sunday morning, were written and produced by musicians in moments of deep closeness with God. They have the gift of sharing those feelings with all of us through their music. Often during my personal prayer time, I will listen to recordings of gospel singers like Mahalia Jackson. I also pick up my hymnal and sing some of my old favorites. Singing our prayers is music to the Lord's ears.

When my way grows drear,  
Precious Lord, linger near;  
When my life is almost gone, hear my cry, hear my call,  
Hold my hand lest I fall;  
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home.