



## THE BIRTH OF THE HYMN "PRECIOUS LORD"

When this true story took place, I wasn't even born yet, so I relied on my Grandma's version of this. It was her rocking chair that she sat in as she shared this with my Mom and the rest of the family. I eventually inherited this chair. It will be my pleasure for you to enjoy this as much as I did when I first heard it. The person talking here is Thomas A Dorsey, a black blues musician of the same era as big band leader Tommy Dorsey.

Back in 1932, I was a fairly new husband. My wife, Nettie and I were living in a little apartment on Chicago's south side. One hot August afternoon I had to go to St. Louis where I was to be the featured soloist at a large revival meeting. I didn't want to go; Nettie was in the last month of pregnancy with our first child, but a lot of people were expecting me in St. Louis. I kissed Nettie good-bye, clattered downstairs to our Model A and, in a fresh Lake Michigan breeze, chugged out of Chicago on Route 66. However, outside the city, I discovered that in my anxiety at leaving, I had forgotten my music case. I wheeled around and headed back.

I found Nettie sleeping peacefully. I hesitated by her bed; something was strongly telling me to stay, but eager to get on my way, and not wanting to disturb Nettie, I shrugged off the feeling and quietly slipped out of the room with my music.

The next night, in the steaming St. Louis heat, the crowd called on me to sing again and again. When I finally sat down, a messenger boy ran up with a Western Union telegram. I ripped open the envelope. Pasted on the yellow sheet were the words: YOUR WIFE JUST DIED. People were happily singing and clapping around me, but I could hardly keep from crying out. I rushed to a phone and called home. All I could hear on the other end was "Nettie is dead Nettie is dead."

When I got back, I learned that Nettie had given birth to a boy. I swung between grief and joy. Yet that same night, the baby died. I buried Nettie and our little boy together, in the same casket. Then I fell apart. For days I closeted myself. I felt that God had done me an injustice. I didn't want to serve Him anymore or write gospel songs. I just wanted to go back to that jazz world I once knew so well. But then, as I hunkered alone in that dark apartment those first sad days, I thought back to the afternoon I went to St. Louis. Something kept telling me to stay with Nettie. Was that something God? Maybe it was and maybe it was just my strong urge to be with my wife. All the same, had I listened I would have stayed and been with Nettie when she died.

From that moment on I vowed to listen more closely to God through the holy Bible. But still I was lost in grief. Everyone was kind to me, especially one friend. The following Saturday evening he took me up to Maloney's Poro College, a neighborhood music school. It was quiet; the late evening sun crept through the curtained windows. I sat down at the piano, and my hands began to browse over the keys. Something happened to me then. I felt at peace. I felt as though I could reach out and touch God. I found myself playing a melody. Once in my head they just seemed to fall into place: *'Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn, through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light, take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.'*

The Lord gave me these words and melody, He also healed my spirit. I learned that when we are in our deepest grief, when we feel farthest from God, this is when He is closest, and when we are most open to His restoring power.

And so I go on living for God willingly and joyfully, until that day comes when He will take me and gently lead me home.- - -Thomas A. Dorsey.

For those too young to know who he is, Thomas A. Dorsey was a Christian and he was the one who wrote this song.

What a wonderful story of how God CAN heal the brokenhearted! Beautiful, isn't it?

Joseph E Stickney – September 2012  
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