

Among Tennessee Williams' many books is one called, 'A STREET CAR CALLED DESIRE'. The fact is, we are all a street car and a bundle of desires. We do things because we want to. Someone says, don't believe it; I don't want to go to work but I go to work. No, you want to go because you would far rather work than starve. Everything we do, because we want to. There is no exception--even the hard things. How shall we order, organize these desires of which we are a bundle? It has also been said we are a bundle of habits and by the time we are mature, it is not we who control the habits, the habits control us. Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a destiny. Who are we anyway, this bundle of desires and habits? Just who are we? Animated mud? Is that all? Brothers, cousins, the animals of the field? Is that all? There's talk of a God, who is he? What's he like? Is there a heaven? What's it like? What are we here for and how do we do it. All the answers are found in the Lord's prayer.

Turn with me to Matthew 6. This is one of those many passages of Scripture that is so concentrated in content, it should be often meditated and preached upon. Please notice in verse 5 of Matthew 6: "And when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites;" notice he takes it for granted that if we claim to be Christians we will pray. "When ye pray," not if ye pray. Now please note what I say next, for a person to be prayerless, is to be graceless. Prayer is the breath of the soul and where there is no spiritual breathing, there's no spiritual living. We are dead if we do not pray. We may be the walking dead, but we're dead. To be prayerless is to be graceless; it is to be lifeless. The Son of God says, "When ye pray," he takes

it for granted, if we are believers, prayer is inevitable for us. He warns us against wrong types of prayer--vain prayers, empty phrases repeated. You shouldn't misunderstand verse 7. Christ, himself, repeated the same prayer thrice in Gethsemane. Paul repeated his prayer for healing again and again; David in Psalm 119 prayed 7 times that the Lord would teach him his statutes. And everyone of us have often prayed the same prayer repeatedly and there is nothing wrong with it so long as you mean it. The warning is against empty repetitions, not repetition. The fact is, life is a bundle of repetitions whether it is eating, or shaving or sleeping or praying. You can't dodge repetition but empty, vain repetitions, repetitions for show are forbidden.

Come now to the prayer itself. It is a prayer that has 7 petitions. The first petitions are spiritual, to do with heavenly things and then 4 are to do with human things and the first two words, in some sense, are the key to the prayer. The key usually lies at the door in Scripture. Always note what it says first. The Bible began in a wonderful way when it began: "In the beginning...God." If you thought for 2000 years you could not come up with a better introduction to the Bible than that. Notice how the prayer begins: "Our Father," this brotherhood of man--"our." This depends on the fatherhood of God. If we do not all have one father, then black may as well fight white and white fight black and Africans fight the Caucasians and the Caucasians fight the Africans and the Americans fight the Japanese, the Japanese fight the Americans, etc. But if we have one father, if it is true that we should say, "Our Father," then we are saying all men are

brothers, all women are sisters, red, yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight. The opening words of the Lord's prayer could solve half the problems of the world were they believed. There could be no such tragedies as the tragedy of Bosnia. There could never have been a bloody civil war in this country with a greater part of a million people being sacrificed over racial and economic disparities..."Our Father"...the brotherhood of man depends on the fatherhood of God to us.

You know the man who had this bumper sticker, MY GOD LIVES, SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT YOURS. That was in the days when the theology was that God is dead. "Our Father, who art"...the most significant fact of existence is that God IS. We draw our significance from the fact that we are made in his image, that we are his offspring, that we are his children but don't misunderstand it, these sons in this prayer are the twice born. You see, to be born once is to die twice. To be born twice means to die once, if at all, for when the Lord comes the twice born will go home with him without dying. But this is a prayer not for everybody. This is a prayer that is not appropriate in all public gatherings; this is only a prayer for the twice born. God, in a special sense, is father to those who have been born again. This is a prayer of the penitent. This is a prayer that is the opposite of pride and self complacency. Those who are proud and self-complacent don't pray. But this prayer is the opposite of pride; it is the opposite of self satisfaction, this is a prayer of the needy. This is a prayer for those who come in contact with reality, that we realize we walk a thin eggshell of life from moment to moment that could give way at any moment and we see the need of the heavenly father's hand

beneath and around and over. So this is a prayer for the penitent. They are the ones who say forgive us our trespasses. This is the prayer for those with broken hearts. This is a prayer for those who have learned humility by seeing Christ and thereby seeing themselves because when a person sees themselves as they really are there are only two options; one is suicide and the other is Christ. Oh, this word is so significant "Father" because if there were no father this world is a hell. I can imagine no worse hell than this world protracted forever, and ever and ever. The teachings of this prayer, "thy kingdom come," promise that pain will end, that cancer will be no more, that wars will cease, that crime will disappear from the face of the earth. But if there was no Father, life would not really be worth living. Life would be one series of deceptions after another--as it is. When you are very young the world, life and existence is covered with many veils. We do not see life as it really is when we are young. Growing up is a period of disillusionment in many respects. We find that life is hard, life is tough! Life is pain. Life is choosing and choosing is difficult. We often choose wrongly and pay the price. But this word "Father" tells me that reality is good, supremely good--if I know Him, if I am his child. This is a little segment of truth that talks about leading, lead us not so and so but lead us so and so. This is a passage that says life is not conditioned by chance to the believer. Chance occurs only once in the New Testament and then only in a parable. Chance is atheism. The New Testament teaches providence. All things are thy servants, all things are of him, through him, to him. The Bible does not believe in chance at all. It does believe in testing, it does believe in education, it does believe in trials and troubles. These are realities but they are not meaningless and you can put up with any what if there is a why.

The men who survived the concentration camps of Auswich (?) and other places were not the strong, burly muscular men. They were sometimes wispy frail men who had a vision of God, a vision of truth, a vision that one day right would triumph. That's what counts. You can put up with any 'what' if you have a 'why' but the why depends on this, is there a loving heavenly Father or not? What a name--Father. The Old Testament used the word but never in prayer. When Jesus first used this word it was as though he said 'daddy' which is the Aramaic term like daddy and he was the first one to ever introduce it into prayer. And, you know, further on in this Psalm as you read about the will of God--but the will of God is a terrible thing! Unless you're in love with God. We will talk more about that later.

I want to suggest to you that this little prayer has our photograph in it and it has our biography. We will briefly notice how our photograph is here and how our biography is here: "Our Father who art in heaven..." That tells me I'm a child but I am away from home. "Our Father who is in heaven." I'm a child but I am away from home. This world is not my home. How stupid am I if I live as though I'm just here to heap up things. I'm only passing through. We are children away from home. That's the first thing we learn from the prayer. Our Father is up there, the real family is up there. "Hallowed be thy name," this is the second thing...I'm a worshiper. "Hallowed be thy name," adoration. Life begins with adoration. Even if you are a worldling life begins with adoration, often. We call that falling in love, infatuation. But in the deepest sense; that is true and God invented it; but in the deepest sense, life begins with adoration..."Our Father, hallowed be thy name." We are worshipers, children first, then, worshipers. The word worship comes from worth-ship. Worship has to do with giving attention to what

is of most worth. This little prayer tells us how to order and organize our desires and our habits. It tells us what is first, second and last. It tells us what is best and what is least. Oh, it is a marvelous prayer.

You know, one day this week I read from Virgil who lived one century before Christ, a great Roman poet, I read from Confucius who lived in the 6th century before Christ, I read from Plutarch who was the great Roman biographer, also, around the time of the early Christian century, I read from Plato who lived in the 5th or 6th century B.C. Why was I reading all these? I wanted to check out a theory. Gil and I have talked about it as we walked. In all of them there were stamped with allusions to the contemporary culture, the place, the people, the habits. Some is irrelevant unless you had the key but there is nothing in this Lord's Prayer that is irrelevant to anyone or any place or any time. Nothing in this prayer is dated. It could have been written tomorrow, so to speak. There is nothing here that says it is 2000 years old. There is nothing here that says it is for the whites, the blacks or the brindle. It's for everybody. There is not one superfluous word. There is not one central need of the human soul that is missing. It is so comprehensive and it is so durable. It is so appropriate, so applicable to everyone, every time in every place. What a prayer! Children first of all, worshipers second, "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come," we're subjects--we belong to someone. It is good to belong. Gil and I were walking our neighbor's dog last night. I said, "He likes to be on a leash." It was in the dark so we were not taking any risks--cars. He likes to be on a leash, he knows he's owned. We are subjects; we belong. We would like to think we are free. Being free is dangerous. Free and unattached is dangerous; free a tree from

the soil and it dies. Freedom is not the only thing. It is good to have some attachment. Who wants to be alone without wife, or child or brother or sister or parent or friend? Who wants to be alone--that's freedom and it can be terrible. We're attached. We are subjects of the kingdom of God; we belong, we are in a great family. It's good to belong. So we are children, we are worshipers, we're subjects: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." We're servants, ah, I don't know that I like to be a servant, well, I had better learn quick. I had better learn to be a servant because if **not** here to serve I'm out of tune with the universe. Everything in the universe serves. Take the biggest thing in the universe that we know...you could toss a million earths in it and there is room for 100,000 more. The sun, what's it doing up there shining. Oh, it's not just shining, it's giving life. All the energy that motivates us, whether we are thinking, doing, singing or sitting, all the energy that motivates us comes from the sun. It is stored in the food we eat. It is stored in the coal we burn, in the oil that we use. All energy in the world comes from the sun. Our world has stored it up over the ages and we unstore it, we use it. The sun serves; it gives us warmth, light, life, vitality. There is an idiot in the university who said that we ought to block out the moon by nuclear fission so we would always have spring. He is a double idiot, who wants to get rid of that lady of the night. Who would like a world without a moon? To always have spring? I like spring but, you know, some things never taste sweet unless they have been exposed to winter and the chief thing that needs winter is human beings. We need tough times. We need trials. We have to be broken. Unless you are broken you are useless. When God wanted to make a world he started with chaos. When he wants to use us he reduces us to chaos. So long

as you are whole you are useless. Unless you are broken you are useless. The moon serves, it controls the tides. If it didn't we would be flooded every day. It's just right--it serves; the air serves, the trees, the greenery. It takes what we breathe out and changes it, purifies it. There is not a bird that cleaves the air, not an insect that crawls on the earth that does not minister to some other life. Only the selfish heart of man lives to itself. But not Christians, we're servants, "Thy will be done." It is not a prayer of resignation because it says, "on earth as it is in heaven." Angels are not going around saying well, if this is the way it has to be, thy will be done. It's not meant to be just resignation; it is glad hearted participation in doing what's good and only God knows what's good. A lot of things I think may be good, may not be good because I was born in sin. My early years were spent in sin. I am being made over but it is not finished. Might be finished when Jesus comes. I have to take his verdict about what is good. Service is good. If we are not serving, we have no right to be here. Only servants will live forever. The selfish will go, finish. A self-centered life, a person wrapped up in themselves is a very small package; it has no value. And so we are children, we are worshipers, we are subjects, we are servants. Well, all that's wonderful but let us notice the next bit: "Give us this day our daily bread," we are beggars. It's good to confess it. We don't own anything. Think how quickly it can all go, a little fire, one good car accident could spoil your day. We don't own anything. It is a dangerous world. We are beggars. Every breath we draw, every mouthful we eat, every ray of sunshine, every drop of water is God's good gift. We can't make it. Start your new life by making sunbeams. We can't make anything. We are beggars and beggars should not be

proud. By nature, we are very proud..."Don't tell me what I ought to do, I know what I ought to do." We are very proud and we are beggars. There's the truth about me. I'm a dependent beggar for today, for strength, for wisdom, for love. I can't love, I'm as selfish as they come. Love is God's gift; the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit is given unto us. So I'm a beggar and I might as well confess it but it gets worse! It begins with glory in heaven but, boy, it comes down very hellishly as it tells the truth about me. I'm not just a beggar, I am a guilty sinner: "Forgive us our debts." There is no one without the need of praying that prayer. We are all guilty. We are different in so many things but we are all alike in this. It brings us down to the same level..."All have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God...there is none that doeth good...they have all gone out of the way...there is none that knoweth God...the poison of asps is on their lips...the way of peace they have not known...the heart of man is desperately evil, who can know it...who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. How can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil....forgive us our sins." I am not only a beggar, I'm a guilty condemned sinner worthy of death because I've lived such a self centered life. Not only give us, forgive us. And, you know, you need to pray for forgiveness as often as you need bread, at least, as often as you need bread.

So, I'm a beggar, a guilty sinner but I am also very frail, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." I cannot direct my own course aright. The person depending on his or her own wisdom is an idiot. We don't have the wisdom, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," says Scriptures. "Go to ye that say tomorrow we will do thus and thus and thus." You don't know what will be on the morrow. Your life

is a vapour, appears for a little time and then vanishes away. We are creatures of a day. We are like a breath that comes out cold winter's day. It is there for a moment and then it is gone. So guide us, lead us. "Oh, I want to be free!" Listen, we are not very free. You were not free to choose your parents, the color of your skin, your capacities and talents; we are all so different. My wife does just about everything better than I do it. She has talents I will never have in this life. We are all different and God has made us so. But we are all dependent and we are not as free as we think. It depends on the providence of God--our parents, our country, the time we were born...the civilization we inherited, the culture we absorbed with mother's milk. Guide us, lead us, we are dependent on the leading of God. With every breath we should be saying, in effect, Lord lead me because I don't know how to go. And so we are not only beggars, we are not only guilty, we are frail. So that's a description of what we are but it is also our biography. Life begins when we learn about the fatherhood of God. You know the first thing that really won my heart was the picture of Jesus who was kind, who never ever said one harsh word to anyone who felt their need. You can read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--he never ever has a harsh word to say to anyone aware of their need. All the harsh words were for those with a hard rind, the tough skin, a hippopotamus' hide, the Pharisees of the day, they needed scorching. There are some seeds in the forest that won't open under the genial rays of the sun but let a forest fire go through and they will fructify and so God sometimes has to hit us over head. You know the story of the man who bought a mule and took it back and said it did not do what it was told. "It's simple," said the owner, this is how you do it." He hit him by a 4 x 2. "First get his attention." Well, some of us God has to hit us over the head to

get our attention but Christ is so gentle to those who already have his attention. So life begins, this is our biography now, life begins when we learn of the fatherhood of God, that he is for us and not against us. That's how life begins..."Our Father," when we learn about heavenly things. Here we live in time, one day there will be eternity. We will look back here on this fragment and say, were we not idiots? Look how we worried, look at how we wasted money and time, and opportunities. We never took the long view. We did not view everybody as having the potential to live like the angels--what idiots we were! We didn't treat everyone as redeemed by the blood of Christ and very important. Be careful how you talk about a person redeemed by the blood of Christ. So life begins with a vision of God and heaven, eternity. When we take these things into account we begin to live and not until then. So this is our biography, when we learn to serve. I don't want to be around if I can't do anything. I make my living will at this desk at this moment. I have also written it out. When I can do nothing further, don't let the medicos experiment and prolong my days when I'm a vegetable. If I can't serve, I want to go. We are here to serve. We are not here for any other reason. That's what life is about. We are here to contribute. As has often been said, we are renters and we are behind with the rent. One day the landlord is going to call. So here's my biography: I learned about heavenly things, I learned that I am to serve and to worship and I am to learn about my brothers." Please observe verse 12: "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." All these phrases from the Lord's Prayer come from the Old Testament. Our Lord was the light of the world but the sun has been here before he came. He came to live it. Right did not come along when he came, he had been teaching

it from the beginning. All these phrases are in the Old Testament except this one: "Forgive us our debts AS we forgive our debtors." You won't find that just like that...linked with our forgiveness in the Old Testament.

It is very important. It is not saying he forgives us because we forgive. You don't earn it. It says he forgives us AS we forgive. It is a condition. It is not a price. I'm not ready to receive his forgiveness until I have a heart that is broken that naturally forgives other people. You cannot hold onto hatred and be a child of God. You can feel irritated, you can feel upset--all that is human but you cannot cherish hatred and be a child of God. When it says, "Forgive us as we forgive," do we forgive everybody everything? No. This may be news to some. You have no right to forgive a man who has broken a national moral law who should be handed over to justice. You have no right to forgive such a person. You have every obligation not to hate them, to wish the best for them but justice must be carried out. It is wrong to let someone off the hook who has broken the law, that is the eternal moral law recognized by the law of the land. Don't think that being a Christian means being a door mat. You are never free to hate. But neither are you free to forget that evil always brings its penalty and we should not oppose the state as it seeks to enact the universally accepted moral laws. Neither think that the type of love we talk about, unconditional love, means that whether a person repents or not, you can treat them the same. That's not true! You are to love them, yes, but it says in Matthew 18 that if someone sins against you, you go and tell them their sin and if they say, "I repent," then you forgive them. So you cannot have exactly the same attitude to someone who is living in deliberate transgression. If you do, they will think it is fine. They think

they can get away with it, oh no. If they repent, forgive them. You are to love them whether they repent or not but full and free forgiveness and acceptance is dependent, according to Matt. 18, on repentance.

Observe please the connection with the next verse, "And lead us not into temptation." Oh, that's a great line because of its connection with the debtors. It is saying, we forgive our debtors, lead US not into temptation. Do you see the importance of stressing the word US? It is saying, listen, some of those people I forgive, they did it because they felt sick; they did it because they were poor; they did it because they were hungry; they did it because they were cold; they did it because they had pressures I don't know about--Lord, save ME from those pressures that brought them into sin. Do you see the connection between "forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into the temptations that overcame them."

You know, we forgive ourselves very readily; we do not forgive others as readily. Why is it so? They are doing the same thing. Well, we know what led up to our sin; look at the pressure we had, look how sick we felt; look at the bills that were worrying us; we KNOW what led us into sin so we readily forgive. We don't know what caused him or her to sin. I can't make any excuse for them but they have the same excuses and me. So this verse is teaching us something. You know, fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind. It is great revelation when we know the next guy is having a tough time too. That's a wonderful revelation because intuitively we think we are the only person who is having a tough time...no one has it as tough as I have; if all the world knew my burdens they would worship at my shrine.

What rubbish! Everybody has burdens. You can't enter your teens without beginning to pile up problems. It's tough being a teenager! And it's tough being mature and it's tough being old. The only time it's not tough is when we will be glorified. That's the only time. It will be tough until then but God will be present until then. And, you know, this prayer, while it tells our biography of our being born again and learning of God, learning the reality of life, where to organize our habits and our desires so as to serve, how to learn to love our fellowmen--it has all sorts of little additions about learning how to live, "give us this day our daily bread"...not our cake, not our comfort. Now, God has provided a lot of cake. I marvel at all the birds in our world. They are not strictly necessary. Gil loves flowers; I can't name one from another but they are beautiful. They are not strictly necessary. God does give us luxuries but he does not endorse a life of luxury. A Christian life is a disciplined life. A Christian life is aware of stewardship; I'm here to do all that I can and whatever I spend solely and wholly on myself that brings no fruit for others...sin. Give me my bread, not my cake. God will toss in some cakes but don't make it the main object of your prayers--and give it to me today, not next weeks, not next months. You know, one of the greatest lessons of life and I surely have not learned it as I want to learn it...that whenever I have tried to apply it, it has helped...one of the greatest lessons of life is here: live in day tight compartments. Some of those great ocean liners, you know how they are made these days since the Titanic? They are now so made that if they do strike an iceberg, only one section of the ship can get filled with water. They have compartments that seal them off. That's the way to live. See, anyone can carry any burden for one day.

day. You know, we all have memories, I have them, you have them when life was overwhelming. Wouldn't care if I cashed out. I felt like that scores of times. I have driven along the road at some speed and seen a big tree and thought, this could end all my problems. Everybody has had that experience. It is perfectly normal that by the time of 40 you have contemplated suicide--that's perfectly normal. Life is tough! But you know, here's a secret: "Give us THIS day, anyone can carry one burden for one day and that's all that God asks.

Isn't the universe marvelously made? When God pulls the blinds at night, he made us to do that too. When the shades of night are drawn and the sun has gone down, he mean't us to go down fairly soon. You see, you couldn't stand life but for night. You couldn't endure experience but for rest. You couldn't go on experiencing but for the amnesia that comes every night. We need sleep. We need rest. We need breaks, we need recreation; we need to step back so we can jump further. We need to tarry a while so we can finish sooner; we need to sabbatize to glorify the next week..."Give us this day." Don't try and live more than one day at a time, now I mean the light part of the day. Troubles are never so hard as when you fight them at night. I fought many troubles at night and in the morning I say "What happened?" They're gone. When the sun rises they are gone. They can't stand the sun's rays. Trouble seen at night are always overwhelming. Be the day weary, be the day long, a length it ringeth the evensong. We CAN endure one day..."Give us THIS day our daily bread."

So friends, we've seen who we really are. We are children away from home but it's great that we have a Father and it's great that there is a home we will have one day, forever. We are worshipers. That

means the right organizing of our lives so that first is put first. Everything I have is His--everything. It must be dedicated. It does not mean everything goes into religion! But it means everything goes to its right place. We need to spend money on loved ones for their well being. We need to spend some money for recreation because you have to be able to withstand the arrows and slings of outrageous fortune. You can't do it unless your mind has resilience. The mind has no resilience if it is always on strain. You've got to sometimes stop--recreate. But you know, recreation should never be turned into obsession. Some people want to have a week that is recreation from beginning to end and a year that is recreation from beginning to end and a life that is recreation from beginning...you can't work like that.

So, I'm a steward, I'm a subject, I'm a servant, I'm a beggar, I'm a sinner and I have brother sinners and sister sinners to whom I must exercise the same charity as I do toward myself. My love to myself is unailing. Whether I am sick or well I can still stand myself...most of the time. I've got to treat other people like that. And then it give me secrets and we've only touched the fringes of it. I am to learn one day at a time.

Now let me leave two thoughts with you. It is wonderful that this prayer does not begin, "Thy will be done." Wherever religion puts first the do, do, do, of religion, it's an unhappy religion. The only religion acceptable to God that works for man is the religion that begins with a vision of the Father. It is when we see that God accepts us just as we are. You don't try to clean yourself up to come (the lepers could not do that, the blind man could not do that), you come just as you are and He accepts us just as we are--because what we could not do, God has already done in his Son. If one died

for all, the all died. You and I have paid the price of all our errors, past, present and future, we did it in our representative. We were ruined by our representative and we had nothing to do with that; we have been redeemed by a representative, the second Adam. We had nothing to do with that! So see first the love of God. No one can ever love God and the Law demands that I love him! But no one can ever love God until they are convinced that God loves them. So it is wonderful that this prayer begins with a vision of God is a loving Father offering heaven freely to his children and only, then, does it talk about the will of God...only then. We are happy with his will when we know him. The whole trinity is here. God is present in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the Father who originally contrived all these wonderful things summed up and symbolized by daily bread. He spread the earth and sealed it with signs of his love. He decorated the table from which we eat every day...that's the Father but it is the Son who took away our sins and it is the Spirit that leads us and delivers us from evil.

You see, God is so generous, he not only takes away the guilt, he takes away the solicitation to error and then he ^{takes away the} fountain of sin that is within us. The Father, giver of our daily bread; the Son who takes away our sins; the Spirit who leads us and who delivers us in the path of sanctification from sin--the revelation of God. You see in the heart of the prayer forgiveness of sins, that's the gate into the temple beautiful of the Christian life. It is only the person who has experienced forgiveness whose heart is then filled with the love of God, who is then able to walk with Christ--the experience of forgiveness that is in the heart of this prayer is the heart of life. Unless we have known it we are not alive.