

HE WHO SEEKS, FINDS

Psalm 6; Luke 11:1-13

Tennessee Williams was one of the greatest playwrights in American history.

He wrote several classics: *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* along with several others.

His plays are still performed all over the world and most of them were made into award-winning movies.

Williams was one of those rare authors who was admired both by critics and the general public.

But Williams was a deeply unhappy man.

When he showed up in public to receive awards for his plays he was beaming and smiling but when he was alone he suffered from depression and an aching sense of loneliness.

He once compared himself to a man listening to the sound of carnival music in the distance: for others it might be gay and exciting but for him it was full of inexpressible sorrow.

Williams died as he lived: a successful, accomplished, admired artist who was lonely and depressed.

There are a lot of people in America who are like Tennessee Williams: their lives are prosperous and happy on the outside, but lonely and empty on the inside.

They are like a man in a poem named William Cory, who was wealthy and admired by everyone and then went home one day and put a bullet in his head.

As Henry David Thoreau said, *“Most men live lives of quiet desperation.”*

King David appears to have been such a man.

His life consisted of one success after another.

As a boy he became a legend by killing the giant Goliath.

When still a young man he was anointed king of Israel.

He united all twelve tribes under his leadership and established Jerusalem as the capital of a small empire.

To this day, Jerusalem is called the “City of David.”

Not only was he a great warrior, military commander and king, he was also a gifted poet and musician—writing many of the Psalms in the Bible.

Even God called David a man after his own heart.

He protected him and gave him success in whatever he undertook to do.

David had it all—everything it took to make a man proud and happy: the love and favor of God and the admiration and loyalty of his fellow man.

But listen to these words of David: *“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?...I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow.”* (Psalm 6:2-3, 6-7)

Do these sound like the words of a happy man?

David’s accomplishments—his power, his possessions and even his faith—couldn’t keep him happy.

Something made David miserable.

His son, Solomon, was similar in many ways.

God made him the wisest man who had ever lived and blessed him with wealth and power.

Yet when Solomon was old, he summarized his life this way:

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the Teacher. Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless! I, the Teacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study

and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Eccl. 1: 2, 12-14).

Something made Solomon miserable.

What is this “something” in life that made these two great men miserable?

There is a simple answer to that question: the answer is sin.

Sin led David to coveting, adultery, lying and murder.

Sin led Solomon to worship pagan gods.

Sin brought misery into David’s life and Solomon’s life and sin can bring misery into our lives as well.

How does sin make us miserable?

By turning us away from God.

By sinning, we put a barrier between ourselves and the Only One who can give us joy and peace.

Sin can lead us to spend our lives as strangers in a strange land rather than in the Kingdom of God.

And do you want to hear the real kicker?

Christians suffer more from this than unbelievers do!

That's right—Christians feel the pain of being separated from God more keenly than non-Christians do.

This is why Paul agonizes over his continued sinning in *Chapter 7 of the Book of Romans*: *“I do not understand what I do...For the good that I would do I do not do, but the evil that I hate, I keep on doing...Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death!” (Romans 7:15ff.)*

Paul knows that his sinning comes between him and God, and that God is the only source of life and joy—yet he cannot stop sinning.

As the bumper sticker says: “Christians don’t stop sinning—they just stop enjoying it.”

When you and I were baptized, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us.

Then he went to work in us, showing us our sins and pointing us to the One who paid the penalty for them and set us free of their power.

But we persist in sinning because we are saddled with a sinful nature which assaults us with temptations that draw us into sinning—and will continue to do so as long as we inhabit this earth.

And we hate that!

We long to be rid of our sin nature but we won't be until we die and put it in the grave.

So for now we can only imagine the joy of being rid of our sinful nature.

And the discrepancy between the prospect of a heavenly existence untainted by sin and our present enslavement to sinning—which is no less than the difference between heaven and hell—torments us.

Unlike unbelievers, we know how good things could be—and one day will be—and that makes how they are all the harder to deal with.

Consider, for example, divorce.

For two unbelievers who have hardened their hearts against God, a divorce may amount to little more than a readjustment of lifestyles, an amicable correction of a mutual error in judgment.

(This assumes, of course, that they bothered to get married in the first place.)

The two go their separate ways, wishing each other well, and calling it good.

But for two Christians who believe that in marriage God has joined them together as one flesh and that what God has

joined together man should not separate, divorce is tearing apart what God has knit together.

Divorce is amputation, evisceration, agony.

Both parties are forced to see and feel the ugliness of their own sin as they are shown the fruit of their hardened hearts.

So what are we to do?

We have been chosen to receive the gift of God's love in Christ Jesus and are commanded to be salt and light in a dark and hostile world.

But we are at war with ourselves and agonize along with Paul over the sin that rages in us and prevents us from doing what we want to do.

So what are we to do?

We do what God our Father has always told His children to do when they need help: we call on Him to help us!

We plead with Him to forgive our sins and to strengthen us and encourage us as we strive to turn away from them.

We ask Him to help us persevere as believers and witnesses until He takes us home to be with Him.

We go to prayer, trusting in God's promise: *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be*

opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
(Luke 11:9-13)

What a marvelous promise!

We have a God who urges us to seek Him—and who delights in being found!

Now, given that promise—and God cannot lie—why are we reluctant to pray?

We are, you know.

Most Christians have a hard time disciplining themselves into spending time each day in prayer.

Why do you suppose that might be?

Well, first of all, praying is work—asking, seeking, knocking—and like any other job we put it off because we're lazy.

Second, we have doubts that God listens to our prayers and will answer them.

Which is to say that we don't trust His promise.

That's usually because we have had a disappointing prayer experience.

We prayed for something and we didn't get it or it didn't happen.

So, we reason, why pray—God won't give you what you want anyway.

And sometimes that's true.

Like any good parent, God knows that not everything we pray for is good for us and when that's the case he doesn't give it to us.

But the real reason is that God is not as interested in changing our circumstances as he is *in changing us*.

God's goal is not to keep us happy and content, but to help us grow up in our faith so that we can be more like Christ, who was “...*the firstborn among many brothers.*” (Romans 8:29)

And growing up involves pain.

And that leads us to the third, the most daunting reason we don't pray: we're not so much afraid that we won't find God in our prayers as we are that we *will* find Him and that when we do, He *will* change us.

And that scares us because we would rather remain the way we are—sins and all.

After all, we've spent a lifetime becoming what we are so why would we want to change it how?

The sins we have may be ugly but they're **our** sins and we wouldn't have clung to them as long as we have if we didn't secretly love them.

Give them up? Not likely!

Or perhaps we should say, not easily.

But that is what God offers to those who are bold enough to seek Him in prayer.

He offers to change us from what we are into someone we can't begin to imagine: a brother or sister of Christ.

And could there be ANYTHING we should desire more than that?

Amen.