

FAST CAR

**Inspired by the Tracy Chapman Song
Final Week of the 6-Week "Songs of Life" Series**

Rev. Richard Maraj

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SONG LYRICS TO 'FAST CAR'

You got a fast car
I want a ticket to anywhere
Maybe we make a deal
Maybe together we can get somewhere
Any place is better
Starting from zero, got nothing to lose
Maybe we'll make something
Me, myself, I got nothing to prove

You got a fast car
I got a plan to get us out of here
I been working at the convenience store
Managed to save just a little bit of money
Won't have to drive too far
Just 'cross the border and into the city
You and I can both get jobs
And finally see what it means to be living

See, my old man's got a problem
He lives with the bottle, that's the way it is
He says his body's too old for working
His body's too young to look like his
My mama went off and left him
She wanted more from life than he could give
I said, somebody's got to take care of him
So I quit school and that's what I did

You got a fast car
Is it fast enough so we can fly away?
We gotta make a decision
Leave tonight or live and die this way

So I remember we were driving, driving in your car
Speed so fast, I felt like I was drunk
City lights lay out before us
And your arm felt nice wrapped 'round my shoulder
And I-I, had a feeling that I belonged
I-I had a feeling I could be someone, be someone, be someone

You got a fast car
We go cruising to entertain ourselves
You still ain't got a job
And I work in a market as a checkout girl
I know things will get better

You'll find work and I'll get promoted
We'll move out of the shelter
Buy a bigger house and live in the suburbs
So I remember when we were driving, driving in your car
Speed so fast, I felt like I was drunk
City lights lay out before us
And your arm felt nice wrapped 'round my shoulder
And I-I, had a feeling that I belonged
I-I had a feeling I could be someone, be someone, be someone

You got a fast car
I got a job that pays all our bills
You stay out drinking late at the bar
See more of your friends than you do of your kids
I'd always hoped for better
Thought maybe together you and me would find it
I got no plans, I ain't going nowhere
So take your fast car and keep on driving

You got a fast car
Is it fast enough so you can fly away?
You gotta make a decision
Leave tonight or live and die this way

WORSHIP MESSAGE:

So how many people like fast cars? [Laughs] You know, it kind of reminds me of this rich snail that goes into a car dealership to buy a fast, luxurious car. And he checks out the Mercedes, the Ferraris, the Bugattis ... and then finally makes a choice and pays in cash for his new car.

And then he goes to the auto body guy and he says, *"Look, what I'd like you to do is paint huge S's all over the car: the hood; on the top on the doors; on the back. Everywhere I want huge S's."*

And the auto body guy said, *"That's no problem; I can do that. But why -- may I ask -- do you want big S's all over your new luxury vehicle?"*

And the rich snail says, *"Well, when I fly past people on the highway, I want them all to point and say, 'Wow! Look at that S-car-go!'"* [Congregants laugh and moan]

I anticipated the moaning, but not the booing. [Congregants laugh] But I was prepared, so here's the second joke. [Congregants laugh]

A priest was in his church, and he was placing out prayer books when a man with no arms came inside. And the priest said, *"Son, can I help you?"*

And the man says, *"Father, it has been my lifelong dream to ring the steeple bell. And I was wondering if you would give me the honor."*

The priest says, *"Well, I don't mean to be indelicate, but you've got no arms. So how are you going to ring? How are you going to pull the rope?"*

And then the guy says, *"Well, Father, I have experienced a lot of adversity and overcome a lot of adversity. And I've got a plan, and I think it's going to work if you would allow me to demonstrate."*

So the priest says, *"Very well,"* and they go up the stairs. They go up to the steeple where the bell is, and without a word, the man runs towards the bell and smashes it with his head, and it makes a beautiful sound, and it starts to move. And then he runs back again, and he runs again. He hits it with his head; it makes a beautiful sound, and it's starting to swing. And on the third attempt, as he was running, he trips and he falls all the way down to the steeple and lands on the ground on some rocks.

And then the priest is in a panic. He goes downstairs. People have gathered around. And one of the townspeople says, *"Father, do you know this man? He's bruised. He's moaning right there."* And he said, *"Do you know this man?"*

He said, *"No; but his face sure rings a bell."* [Congregants laugh, moan and applaud]

That second one might have been even worse than the first! I'm not quite sure ... But today we're talking about overcoming adversity, so I thought I would give myself some adversity to overcome. [Congregants laugh]

So, how many people here have ever had a hard time overcoming some adversity or challenge in your life? How many people here have ever tried to improve or change your life, but it really wasn't working, and you weren't getting much traction? And finally, how many people have ever had a problem or a relationship or a challenge in your life that you just wanted to run away from and get away from? Anybody have one of those?

You know, today We are in the sixth and final week of our "Songs of Life" series, taking famous songs that we love and extracting a spiritual message and life lesson from. In these past weeks ... if you have missed, you can jump on to YouTube and check out the talks. You need to listen to the song first, because it's not on the website. But some of them have been, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" by the Rolling Stones; "The Happening" by Diana Ross and the Supremes; "Hallelujah" by KD Lang; "Take It Easy" by The Eagles." Last week we did "We Can Work It Out" by The Beatles.

And today we look at Tracy Chapman's hit from 1988, "Fast Car." The song won a Grammy for the Best Pop Female Vocal. She won for Best New Artist that year, and she won for Best Folk Album that year, as well. The song went to number six on the charts, and her album actually went to number one.

And interestingly, 35 years later -- this year -- at the Grammys, she sang a duet with Luke Combs of "Fast Car." And apparently, it electrified folks.

And so how many people love this song? Everybody really like this song? The reason this song got famous -- a part of the catalyst of reasons -- is, in 1998, June 11th, she was performing at a Nelson Mandela birthday celebration at Wembley Stadium. Other famous people like Eric Clapton, Peter Gabriel, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder ... a lot of folks were performing. She had a three-song set that she did that featured "Talking About a Revolution," but it did not include "Fast Car."

She, after her performance in the afternoon, kind of relaxed and thought that was it. And as the concert stretched into the evening, there was a delay with Stevie Wonder's performance because the computer disks that he needed to use were missing. And so, they were desperate. So, they sent her back on stage with just her acoustic guitar. And in prime time -- in front of a huge audience, television and live -- she wowed them with her rendition of "Fast Car." And it was within 24 hours, it became a number one album. And it became such a huge hit.

You know, in this song, she shares it from the perspective of a woman whose life is not going very well, filled with all kinds of adversity. You know, dating a guy who may have a fast car, but he was unemployed, lazy, unresponsive, unsupportive and irresponsible. And she works in a convenience store, because she takes care of her father. She quit school, because the father was an alcoholic and also had

health issues, and her mother left. And so, she was facing so much in her life, she was just ready and primed to leave. She wanted a fast car to take her anywhere. And anywhere was better than what she was experiencing.

If you listen to the song, it's a pretty simple song. It's very repetitive. But the thing is, it is so powerful of the lyrics and the compelling way that it is sung and that it is shared. It is a somber song. It is an emotional song. But you can easily empathize with the main character and, at some level, relate. I mean, she's experiencing some very extreme things. I mean, poverty, abuse, alcoholism, family dysfunction. Some major things! But we can all relate to those in some way in our own struggles, in our own adversities, and in our own lives.

So, we're going to look deep into the song -- to the lyrics -- to see what message spiritually and for life lessons living can be found in this song, "Fast Car."

The first lesson I think is that it teaches us to **HOLD ON TO HOPE**. You can see in this challenging and difficult experience she has that she holds on to hope.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "*Hope is being able to see there is light despite all the darkness.*" And despite all that she was experiencing -- all that she was facing -- she chose to see the light. She chose to hold on to hope. She chose to believe that her life could get better. She chose to believe, you know, that things could change. In almost every single verse, there is a line of hope. You know, in and amidst all of the difficulties, every single verse practically has a line of hope. Let me just give you a few of them. It says:

Maybe together we can get somewhere ...

I got a plan to get us out of here ...

I've managed to save just a little bit of money ...

I know things will get better ...

I got a job that pays our bills ...

You know, hope doesn't sound like a very powerful or transformational thing, but it is vital for us living our lives. How many people have ever felt like you've lost hope? Anybody ever had that experience? Apparently five of us have had that experience. [Congregants laugh] But I bet every one of us has in some form felt hopeless.

And sometimes, when we feel hopeless, we feel powerless. And when we feel powerless, we feel helpless. I bet every one of us has had moments of feeling a level of despair. To lose our hope, you know, it's one of the most painful and difficult things.

Henry David Thoreau said, "*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*" And what he is saying is that there are a lot of people living and moving around and looking active, but inside, they feel hopeless. Inside, they feel that their lives will not get any better; that things will never change; that they feel resigned; that they feel that they're giving up, and that life isn't going to get any better than this. And they just kind of go through the motions, you know, feeling and emptiness inside, because they feel no hope.

You know the British author Rachel Joyce said the one thing in life you have got to hold on to is hope. And here's what she says:

"Even if we don't believe in church or God, we must still believe in things that are bigger than ourselves. We need to believe in those things, because if we can't be open to what we don't know, there is no hope for any of us."

One of the big signs of hope in this song is that, whatever situation she's in, she doesn't think it's permanent. She believes in some way it's going to change; in some way she can help make it better ... that she can do something to change and transform this. That is a sign of great hope.

So, my question: Where in your life are you being called to hold on to hope? Where in your life are you being called to believe, in spite of the conditions, that it can get better? That it will improve? That things will change?

You know, the best way to learn how to hold on to hope -- since it's such a valuable and important thing for not just overcoming, but for even achieving and transforming our lives and improving our lives. And that is very simply to fill yourself with God. Because when you are filled with God, you are filled with hope. Listen to the words in the Book of Romans, Chapter 15, Verse 13. It says:

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

That, as we center ourselves and connect ourselves and ground ourselves in awareness of God, that we are absolutely filled with hope. We are filled with possibilities. You know, we are filled with the ability to transform and change and improve our lives.

You know, one of the things about the car in this song: I believe that it is a symbol of hope. You know, "You've got a fast car." And the whole idea about a car is freedom: the freedom to move forward; the freedom to move towards the future; the freedom to move away from the negativity and move to something better. You know, this whole idea of being on the open road opens a place of hope, of unlimited possibilities, of good in our lives.

This song is a painful story and it is some difficult circumstances, but the message is clearly hold on to your hope. Choose to see light even in the place of darkness. Hold on to hope.

The second message from this song is to **DIRECT YOUR DESIRE**. So it's powerful to have hope, but then it's got to turn into desire. And to me, desire is the thing that propels us forward towards greater things. In the song, she has a desire for a happier life, even though the conditions don't look that way. She has a desire for a job; a desire for a promotion; a desire to move out of the shelter; a desire to buy a big house in the suburbs; a desire to have enough money to pay her bills and to truly be living the life she wants to live.

In the Book of Proverbs 29:18, it says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* Now, I just want to say a vision, to me, is an expression of our desire. That's what a vision is. And it's saying that you have to have a vision, because when you don't have a vision, you are not expressing your desire. And that is a vital and important thing.

With no vision, you know what perishes? Our joy; our passion; our enthusiasm; our excitement; our creativity. But when there is a vision, you know what happens? We prosper. That our joy begins to increase. We awaken and we are enlivened.

So .my question for you: In whatever challenges you're going through, what is your vision? What do you see? What is your desire for your life? What do you want to have? What do you want to create? What do you want to achieve? What do you want to become? What is it that you want to experience?

Especially when we are struggling in our lives, it's important to lift up our eyes and see a greater possibility. See something in the future: some possibility that will get us excited. To look up -- to look forward -- is an important thing.

And one thing she does in this ... She has a desire and a vision for her life of things to be better, but she knows that it's even more than just a job. It's more than just a house. It's more than just paying her bills. And she captures it beautifully in the chorus, and here's what it says. And she's remembering a scene, and it says:

**I remember when we were driving, driving in your car
Speed so fast, I felt like I was drunk
City lights lay out before us
And your arm felt nice wrapped 'round my shoulder
And I had a feeling that I belonged
And I had a feeling that I could be someone, could be someone, could be someone**

And so one of the things she's saying in this: she's saying, *"Having a job is one thing, but I want to feel love; I want to feel an arm around my shoulder; I want to feel that I belong; I want to feel that I am somebody. And that who I am matters and makes a difference."*

And one thing I've discovered is that we just want goals -- job or money, all these things -- but I would say we focus too much on the thing and don't realize what we're really looking for is how it makes us feel. See, it's one thing to want a house, but what you're really wanting is comfort. You want a place to be safe. You know, we say that we want a job, but what we're not realizing is we want to feel a sense of purpose. We want to have a creative outlet and we want to make a difference and help people. When we want a partner, you know, what we really want is: we want to be cared for. We want to be cherished. We want to be loved. We want to care for someone else. When we say we want money, it's the feeling of security. You know the feeling of wealth.

So, my question is: What do you desire to feel? There are all kinds of goals we can have, but what do you really want to feel? Because, ultimately, that's what it comes down to. That we want to feel more love, feel more joy, feel more compassion; to feel more enthusiasm; to feel all kinds of things that are available to feel. We don't just want things, you know.

To direct our desire means to have a vision and it also means to get clear about what it is we want to feel in our lives. And the last thing I would say to direct our desire is towards finding meaning in our lives.

Victor Frankl wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*. And he said every one of us is looking to know that our lives mean something; that our lives actually matter and make a difference. And he said too many times we ask the question: What is the meaning of life? But he said that's not the right question. The right question is: What meaning do you give to life?

So, think about it! What is the meaning you give to your life? What is the meaning you give to the problems and the adversity that you're facing right now? What is the meaning that you give to your goals and your dreams and your desire? You know, what is the meaning for your life right now? What is the meaning that you want to experience?

The second thing we learn in this song is to direct your desire. That vision is an expression of your desire; of the things that you want. Express your desire for what is it you want to feel and express your desire for the kind of meaning you want to feel about your life.

And the last one is to **MAKE A DECISION**. I love that line:

**Gotta make a decision
Leave tonight or live and die this way**

Feel the sense of urgency in this: make a decision!

You know, how many people ever had a hard time making a decision? Anybody ever have a hard time making a decision? How many people ever don't want to make a bad decision, so you make no decision? Okay.

You know, I think we're afraid to make decisions. We don't like making decisions. We don't like all that responsibility. We're afraid we're going to mess things up, so we just don't want to make decisions. How many people here have ever been indecisive? Anybody ever been indecisive? How many people are not sure you're indecisive? [Congregants laugh] Anybody? Okay.

In the Book of Job, Chapter 22, Verse 28, it says, "*Decide upon a thing, and it will be established for you.*" That we are here to make decisions. We are here to make choices. Every single one of us is the product of our choices. That is how powerful we are! Life is saying you need to choose; you need to make some decisions about what it is you want to do; what it is you want to create; where it is that you want to go.

I love the word choice: C-H-O-I-C-E ... especially the O-I-C. That I'm the one who has the power to make the decisions in my life. Life is saying you've got to make a decision, or you can just stay stuck right where you are, things going exactly the way they've always been.

Or are you willing to make a decision to change? Are you willing to make a decision to do something differently? Are you willing to make a decision to step up? Are you willing to make a decision to speak up? You know, are you willing to hold on? Are you willing to let go? But whatever it is, every one of us needs to make a decision. And we're the only ones who know what that decision is for us, but we need to make it.

You know, one of the things about it is: she made a decision to get in a relationship with this guy who turned out to be irresponsible and supportive, spending more time hanging, drinking with his friends. And at first, she wanted the fast car to help take her away from it. And then in the song at the end, she said, "*Take your fast car and go drive somewhere else.*" [Congregants laugh]

And so, I love that, because she was not afraid to make a mistake. She made a decision, then life showed her. She decided to learn, and she made a new decision. You know, making a decision isn't a fatal and forever thing. It is a choice in the moment!

Somebody once said, "*You need to pick the direction and then God will make the correction.*" But you need to make a decision! We need to make a decision.

And so, this song is so powerful and so emotional, filled with so much sadness; filled with all kinds of difficulties and traumas for living. And yet, my feeling about the singer is: I feel so impressed and so inspired by how she handled it. Three things about her in the way she handles herself; she showed strength; she showed that she was empowered; and she showed that she was resilient. These were the three things that she expressed by holding on to hope; by directing her desire; by making a decision.

You know, one of my favorite characters in the Bible was the hemorrhaging woman -- the story of the hemorrhaging woman. Twelve years this woman was bleeding, so not at full strength. She didn't have her full energy and power. For 12 years, she was told by doctors that they don't know what's wrong with her and they can't make it better. For 12 years, she spent all her money and she was broke.

And yet, this woman decided that she was going to go where Jesus was, where there were crowds of people around. And she got up that day and she held hope. Imagine 12 years something not working; don't you think you might give up hope a little bit? But she didn't! She woke up on that day and held hope. And then she was willing to direct her desire to say, "*I want to get healthy. It hadn't been working, but it's possible, and that's what I want.*"

She made the trek all the way where Jesus was, and it says in Scripture that she pressed against the crowd to get to him and touch the hem of his garment. She was resilient! After 12 years, she showed up there. And I guarantee you: if she didn't get there on that day, she would have been back the next day! Because she was strong; she was empowered; and she was resilient.

So my question for you: In your life, what situations have called you to be strong, to be empowered and to be resilient? And right now in your life, what situation is calling you to be strong, to be empowered and to be resilient?

In 1 John 4:4, it says, "*Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.*" And what it is saying is that within you there is the living Spirit of God. Within you there is strength. Within you there is power. Within you there is resilience.

And the way to do that and to express what is in you is to hold on to hope; it's to direct your desire; and it is to make a decision.

This song and life is calling you and reminding you -- no matter what adversity you are facing -- you are strong; you are empowered; you are resilient. And that is the message of the song, "Fast Car."

God bless you all!

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