

Here are a few fun facts about smell¹

The science of smell is actually super fascinating.

- What do you think is a man's favorite smell? How about for a woman. According to the latest research, the aroma of breakfast is a man's favorite smell while for women it is a newborn baby.
- Who has a better sense of smell? Men or women? A woman's sense of smell is much stronger than a man's.
- Here's something I bet you didn't know: your scent cells are renewed every 28 days, so every four weeks you get a new "nose".
- Smell is the most sensitive of the senses. People can remember smells with 65% accuracy after a year, compared to visual recollection is only 50%.
- The idea of using smell as a weapon has been around for some time, however. The Office of Strategic Services for the French Resistance considered using a horrific garbagelike smell called "Who Me?" against German soldiers in World War II. The only problem? The sulfur that made the scent so pungent had a nasty habit of escaping on its own and lingering on everything it touched.
- Research has shown that smell is the sense most linked to our emotional recollection. One of the most evocative smells from childhood is crayons. A survey found that 85% of all people

¹<http://www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/20-fascinating-facts-sense-smell-1977351>

remembered their childhood when they caught the smell of Crayola crayons. Another is the smell of Chlorine. It takes people back to childhood memories often.

- Studies show that 75% of emotions are triggered by smell, which is linked to pleasure, well-being, emotion and memory – handy when you want people to buy your products.

This is called “Scent Marketing.” Real Estate agents have practiced it for years instructing sellers to bake cookies or apple pie right before showing their home. Housing developments, hotels, stores, and even car manufacturers are turning to customized scents to help set a mood and maybe even make an impression. Some companies even strive to develop a “brand scent,” something that customers will associate with the company as much as a logo.²

A classic example of this was practiced by Abercrombie and Fitch for years. They use a specific scent strategy called “ambient scenting.”³ They regularly blast their signature scent called “Fierce” at the doors of every store. The cologne is described by the company as not just a scent, but a “signature scent”... “not just a cologne,” but a “lifestyle... packed with confidence and a bold, masculine attitude.” Associating their cologne with their shopping experience is just one of the many ways that their brand is specifically calculated to not just attract a certain demographic but keep them returning and continually buying into a multi-sensory image of themselves that they hope to realize through their purchasing choices.

[Transition] – Now, Did you know that Christians are intended to be smelly?

²<http://health.howstuffworks.com/mental-health/human-nature/perception/smell4.htm>

³ <http://sociologyofstyle.com/ask-anna-why-do-stores-like-bercrombie-fitch-blast-a-scent-at-their-doors/>

Today we are taking another step in our Corinthian series. And according to our section in 2 Corinthians today, Paul explains that Christians are designed to function like these diffusers up here in front of me—radiating and emanating the fragrance of Christ as we walk through life. Let's look at the opening thoughts of 2 Cor. 2:14a

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession..."

God places Christians in his victory parade (14a).

The thing I want you to notice right off the bat is that Paul is celebrating a "God action" here. "Thanks be to God, who always leads" Christians in Christ's victory parade. God is actively doing this. It's born out of him. It's sustained by him. This is his victory parade, and he decides who joins him in it.

Paul's metaphor of a "triumphal procession" or parade here would have been a completely recognizable illustration for these Greek Christians. These types of victory parades occurred whenever a warrior-king, prince, or general would return in victory from a battle.

The victor entered the city in a chariot, preceded by the captives and spoils taken in war, and followed by his troops. The processional proceeded in formation along the sacred way to the Capitol, where he offered sacrifices in the temple of Jupiter.

He was accompanied in his chariot by his young children, and sometimes by confidential friends, while behind him stood a slave, holding over his head a jeweled crown. The body of the infantry brought up the rear, their spears adorned with laurel.

They shouted "triumph!" and sang hymns in praise of the gods or of their leader.⁴ Some of these victory parades would last for three days. At times

⁴ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 298.

the people of the city would erect scaffolding in order to get the best view of the parade while clothed in white garments.

Now, normally, captives made to parade in the captors' victory procession were humiliated, embittered, scared, and defeated. At the end of the parade, some were sacrificed to the gods of the Greeks in thanksgiving for the victory.

But here Paul is celebratory. He's grateful to be captive in Christ's procession because he is a deliverer from a prior deadly master. We are now his possession! And Christ's procession does not lead to death, but to life. He leads in love, as a deliverer, and with a posture of protection. One scholar put it well, "Paul "would rather be God's prisoner and slave than Satan's vice regent in a promenade leading to eternal damnation."⁵

[Transition] - Now, not only has God included us in Christ's victory procession, but he has also designed us to diffuse the aroma of Christ as we walk, or march in that parade. Look at the second half of verse 14-16b.

You are called to diffuse the aroma of Christ along the parade route (14b-16b).

This aroma idea flows right out of the victory parade image as the captives were made to carry incense as they walked. At the same time, the keepers of the religious temples to the Greek gods would burn incense in preparation for the parade so that the victor was greeted with a cloud of sweet-smelling perfume. The fragrance was a key aspect of the ancient religious ceremonies. It conveyed the presence of deity.

According to Paul, our lives as Christians are designed to function in this way. As we walk in Christ's victory parade, we diffuse the knowledge and awareness of the presence of Christ everywhere. To those who embrace it and accept it and join the victory parade, it is a sweet fragrance that leads

⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 145.

to life. But, to those who reject the truth of Christ, they recoil because it smells offensive to them.

And this is exactly what Jesus said about his life in Luke 12, *“Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; **52** for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. **53** They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”*

Please realize, Jesus did come to bring peace, but his point here is that the truth of his life and message will bring every person to a critical point of decision. Acceptance will result in peace and life, but rejection of his life and message will result in hostility and death.

And as diffusers of the knowledge of Christ, the world will either be drawn in as if smelling the sweet fragrance of fresh baked cookies, or a tasty BBQ; or recoil as if getting a whiff of a rotting corpse.

You could argue that this is why Christians are often hated, targeted, and not tolerated as easily as many other religious groups around the world. They recoil at the “aroma” of Christ, spread by Christians. They don’t want to be around them. It’s repulsive to them.

Illustration: I’ve shared this story, but it’s worth repeating.

- Black bean spill in my SUV and the stench worsening after I cleaned it. To help it air out I left the windows down whenever I parked it. But, you could smell it about 10 feet away. No one wanted to ride with me. I didn’t want to ride with me. It took weeks for that smell to go away.
- Another time I left a gallon of milk in my trunk...whew that was a nasty smell.
- Years ago, my parents forgot a whole raw chicken in the back of their Lexus. That car was never the same.

[Transition] - Now, let's think for a moment about how you as a Christian function as a diffuser, "spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ."

It's been said, "you are what you eat." Israeli chemists say the food we eat, drugs we take, gender and even state of mind, all combine to make each person's sweat unique.⁶

[Illustration] - I experienced this truth firsthand back in the day when I was playing Basketball for my workouts. Let me just tell you, when guys start to sweat on the basketball court, you can often tell what spice they had on their dinner the night before. You can tell if their salsa had lots of onion? And you can really tell if their Italian food had lots of garlic? If they had eaten it the night before it was coming out of their pores. And if asparagus was in any part of their cuisine...well...that's a whole other therapy session.

The same is true spiritually, you could say. The more Christ you take in and digest, and metabolize, the more Christ you are going to radiate out.

What does a life that diffuses the aroma of Christ look like?

We radiate or diffuse Christ in many different ways:

- We diffuse the aroma of Christ in all sorts of ways in our lives in how we treat people.
- We diffuse Christ through our actions
Your style of relating, and the way you treat people can really be a sweet aroma of Christ, or something else very off-putting.
- We diffuse Christ through our speech
It's not just what we say, but how we say it.

⁶ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/lifestyle/health/20-fascinating-facts-sense-smell-1977351>

- We diffuse Christ through our attitudes
It's not just what we do, but the attitude we have while doing it.
- We diffuse Christ through our moods
- We diffuse Christ through our motives.
- Obviously, we diffuse Christ through the truth of the Bible as we teach it, refer to it, talk about it, and live it out. It can't just be a fish bumper sticker.

These are all the vents of our lives that allow the aroma of Christ to radiate out.

I think the key to becoming a sweet-smelling aroma of Christ in your life is self-awareness, and mindfulness. Be aware of your attitudes, and moods. Be self-aware of your countenance and body language. If Jesus is in your heart, notify your face.

Be aware and mindful of how you are treating people. Are you lifting them...or sort of bringing them down, discouraging them.

Each of us has to choose to be mindful and self-aware. It's about choosing what kind of influence we want to be on people. It's about choosing what we want to radiate out from our faces, and our body language. It's about intentional living in a way that radiates the love and hope of Jesus.

[Transition] – I said at the beginning of this message that all this is born out of God and sustained by him. He won the victory, as Christians we are now saved and delivered by him and he calls and enables us to walk in his victory parade, and to be diffusers of the knowledge of Christ. God does all of that. So, what's our part? We are called to cooperate...but how?

It starts by recognizing we're in Christ's victory parade, and so we keep walking, or marching as it were. Moment by moment we seek to stay in step with the Spirit.

But, what does that look like? What can you do on Monday in the office, or Tuesday with that client, or Wednesday in the teachers meeting or Friday with your next-door neighbor? How can you best cooperate with God's diffusing work through you in order to be effective diffusers? In the final few verses of this passage Paul offers a few beginning ideas that help us "be up for the task" of being effective diffusers. Read verses 16c-17.

Reminders for being an effective diffuser of Christ's aroma (16c-17).

Now, please recognize in these comments here Paul is beginning to lay some foundation for a much bigger topic in this letter going forward. He's beginning to lay out a case to demonstrate to the Corinthian believers that his ministry efforts are legitimate and authentic. And in so doing, he also gives us a peak at how we can seek to be effective diffusers.

1. Maintain honesty and integrity - The word translated "peddle" in verse 17 is only used one time in the New Testament. It refers to a dishonest salesman, or huckster that existed among Greek merchants. These were merchants who were known for watering down wine or shorting grain quantities but selling it as if it were pure or complete. If you want to be an effective diffuser, you must operate with honesty and integrity.
2. Sincerity - Paul says, "on the contrary, we speak before God with sincerity." Literally, the word means, "pure, unadulterated motives." This involves being truthful, honest, and genuine.
3. Mindfulness. This is the self-awareness and mindfulness I mentioned earlier. Paul says, "like men sent from God." This means

always being mindful of God and accountable to him for how we live and how we talk, and how we function.

Conclusion:

Think about the powerful link between aroma and well-being, emotion, and memory that we talked about at the beginning—what is the ambient “aroma” of your life?

If we don’t keep these kinds of things in mind, we’re going to start to “smell funny.” Our relationships are going to begin to stink. When people hear about Christ, they are going to remember the odd smell in your life and develop an aversion to Christ.

But, when we keep these things in mind, and seek to practice them, our lives will effectively diffuse a pleasant aroma, one that is attractive, one that imprints positive memories in a person’s mind regarding Christ, and one that helps to draw them closer to him (like A&F retailers, like real estate agents baking cookies) try to do.

You were designed to be a diffuser of the aroma of Christ.

How are you smelling these days?