

INSIDE OUT
Atmospheres, Aromas, and Appetites
2 Corinthians 2:14-15

I need to tell you something today that you may not have thought about for awhile. It may be difficult for you to hear, but you need to hear it. You SMELL. Really! Now, don't be offended. The truth is, ALL of us smell. [What I mean is, you have both the power TO smell WITHIN you \(if you have a working nose!\), and you also have the power OF smell UPON you \(for those who have working noses around you!\).](#) Smell is a huge part of our lives. Every day, we are testing the air around us with our noses to see if all is well around us. The nose KNOWS. When we smell something disgusting, we "turn up our noses" at it and run away. When we smell something delightful, we breathe it in deeply. In fact, good smells make us want to move in closer so that we can almost TASTE what we smell. In those moments, it is GOOD to have a working nose.

Smell can actually stir up or increase HUNGER. Right now, some of you listening to me have not eaten in awhile. If I were to pipe in the smells of a delicious steak and a baked potato cooking over a charcoal fire, and an apple pie baking in the oven, you would find your self salivating and wishing that I would hurry up and finish already. This is why I do not pipe those smells in here. I often remember fondly the Wonder Bread bakery that used to operate in downtown Memphis. That bakery was near an intersection that I had to drive through each day to seminary, and that smell always made me insanely hungry when I passed through it. This is a sweet aspect of life. **It is also a powerful principle of life: Attractive aromas increase appetites!** [Let me read what I mean to you out of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to members of the church in the city of Corinth many years ago. He wanted the members of that church \(and us\) to think about how they smell.](#) **2 Corinthians 2:14-15 NLT**

14 But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. 15 Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing.

Christ has been given many names in Scripture. He has been called the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon and the Bread of Life. The Psalmist said that the Messiah dripped with the sweet Oil of Gladness, and Solomon sang that he was the Fairest of ten thousand and that his name was like perfume that was poured out. In this passage, Jesus is pictured as a victorious general who is leading his captives before him in a victory train; and his captives are EXCITED to be in this victory parade. They are joyfully surrendered to him, and they smell of the strong incense that is burning around them in this parade. Some of you here may not understand images and words like this, but for those who know Christ, we cannot help but speak of how beautiful and powerful and precious he is to us. And when he conquers and

transforms us, our life takes on the distinctive aroma of Christ. I NEEDED to be conquered! **Now, the truth is that EVERY life has an aroma.** Some of you do not smell like LIFE; you smell like DEATH. This is because you have not been made alive by the Lord of Life. You are still dead in your sins. But others listening to me today are fragrant with life because of what Christ has done in you. He has bought you with his precious blood, and he has radically changed you, inside and out. Your behavior and your attitudes and your words are becoming lively and life giving. You are taking on the character of Christ in your everyday life, and it is becoming more and more evident. And you are learning how to FOLLOW Christ as he leads you into realms where you can make the biggest difference for his Kingdom by spreading the fragrance of Christ to those who need to smell his sweet perfume! Thank God for that! **I believe that there is NOTHING MORE ATTRACTIVE than a life that is lived in wholehearted submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. It makes some people hungry for God. Of course, it may cause some to react in the opposite manner. We must be ready for either response.**

We are in the midst of a series that focuses on our MISSION and our VISION as a church. We must understand why God established his church on this earth in the first place, and we must realize what that means practically for us as his people in our everyday lives. **So far in this series, I have reminded you that our MISSION is to bring hope to the world by helping people FIND and FOLLOW Jesus Christ.** We exist to point people to the One who has rescued and redeemed us. This is our privilege. I think that it is extremely important for us to think about HOW we are going to fulfill that mission. This is where our VISION comes in. **We help people find and follow Jesus Christ by seeking to ATTRACT Outsiders in, to BUILD Insiders up, and to SERVE: Inside and out.** This vision statement helps us to remember where we need to focus our ATTENTION and our ENERGIES for maximum use by God. Last week, I focused on the CENTRAL COMPONENT of our vision. I talked about how important it is for us to BUILD INSIDERS UP at CHC by developing genuine relationships with each other as we help each other connect with God and grow in our faith. This will help us to stay HEALTHY as we GROW in strength and size. **Today and next Sunday, I want to focus on the first part of our vision: Attracting Outsiders In. I want to help us see what that means for us INDIVIDUALLY and COLLECTIVELY.** To refer back to our opening analogy, I want us to think about how we smell as a church . . . practically. **This is the main point of this message. I want each of us to do our part to develop the kind of atmospheres and environments at CHC that make people hungry to know Christ.**

I have made it clear that our mission is to be a CONNECTED CIRCLE facing outward. We want to create positive opportunities that enable us to be around people who do not know about Christ so that we can expose them to the most wonderful message in the world. **The first thing that this requires of us is that we create an ongoing atmosphere of GRACE! Colossians 4:5-6 NLT**

5 Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

A gracious atmosphere is one that loves people right where they are without condemning them for their failures and mistakes. Many people who come to church for the first time FEEL like outsiders in every way. They are not 100 percent sure how God feels about them, but most are pretty confident that he doesn't like them. Some are riddled with guilt in their lives and do a pretty good job of condemning themselves. They don't need any help with that. We can show them grace in simple ways. This will require that you spend some time in their world with them in a wise fashion. Develop a genuine friendship with them. Give them a reason to trust the MESSENGER so that they might become open to the message. Then, INVITE them to settings where they can meet other believers. LIFE GROUP is a great place to introduce them to the Christian world; so are our Sunday services. Let them know that you would love for them to ask their questions and wrestle with the truth right here with you. Next, remember that many of the members of CHC are inviting their friends to group and to church as well, so warmly welcome everyone who comes in these doors on a Sunday. People who feel out of place in church really NOTICE when a variety of people greet them and try to make them feel welcome. This demonstrates to them that we are NOT a CLOSED CLIQUE! Many churches are.

When we say that we will strive to attract OUTSIDERS in, we mean that we will gladly welcome in people who struggle with the same hurts, hang-ups, and habits that we have faced in our own lives! Right now, this room is full of former drug addicts and alcoholics and thieves and adulterers. Guard your purses! In all seriousness, I want us to openly and humbly share the truth about what Christ has freed us FROM, and what he has freed us TO. Every difference in our lives is because of his grace. What they need to hear is that God's grace is GREATER than any problems that they are facing, that God loves to be the VICTOR over their sins and struggles, and that OUR LIVES are simply trophies of the SAME grace that is available to them. I love being a trophy of grace that points people to God. In fact, next week I am going to give us all a practical lesson about how to share our own personal Faith story with our unchurched friends. We must learn how to do this.

Now, our desire to create an atmosphere of grace is a SPIRITUAL and RELATIONAL issue. But we must also focus on the PRACTICAL aspect of the way that we make our unchurched friends feel by the environments of HOSPITALITY that we create. **Hospitality is important in EVERY environment at CHC. Hebrews 13:2 NLT**

2 Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

I want to remind all of the members and regular attenders of CHC today of how important each of you is to what we are doing here. You are CREATING a message

that will be sent out of here by our angel-guests, and I want to plead with you to make sure that it is a powerful, positive, God-directed message. In the passage that we just read, Paul had to tell us “not to forget to show hospitality to strangers” because he knew that we are prone to lose sight of this aspect of church life. We are used to just showing up and doing what we do. You take your kids to their areas and you find your normal seat and sit down for the music and the preaching. And then you go home. But there is so much more to BEING CHC than this. Your responsibility and privilege (like mine) is to serve as a HOST to all those who are with us today. You are to help create IRRESISTIBLE ENVIRONMENTS that make our guests want to come back . . . again and again! Why? Because it is here that they will find so many of the answers that they have been looking for and the love that they have needed.

This means that we cannot be BLIND to the way that our church atmosphere affects our unchurched friends when they come to be with us. That is entirely possible! You see, God designed our brains and our noses in such a way that if we are exposed to the same smell repeatedly, then we lose the ability to smell that odor any longer. That is a blessing for those who work at sewage plants or paper mills, but it can be a sad reality for those who work at Krispy Kreme! Maybe. No matter where you work, it means that you lose the ability to really KNOW what your physical atmosphere smells like after being there over a long period of time. You go NOSE BLIND! The same is true of the PRACTICAL atmospheres at CHC. **Our environments are the first impression - or “smell” - that greets all of our guests, but we often do not know if that smell is still GOOD or not. In order to protect ourselves from this kind of blindness, we have to THINK like an Outsider and consider how we would act if this were our first time in our environments at CHC. I would also ask you to make a solid commitment to HELPING US IMPROVE our environments in any way that you are GIFTED to do so.** Some of you are great decorators. We need your help in keeping our foyers and bathrooms fresh and bright looking. Help us see what we need to see. I am amazed by many of the people who already help us to do that. Our Hernando campus is created from scratch each week by people who care deeply about environments, AND IT SHOWS! It is stunning how much needs to be done each week there, but the real wonder is the ATTENTION TO DETAIL that our volunteer leaders show. I am so grateful for that. Thank you all for working so hard to make our environments irresistible week after week.

Some of you may think that the preacher’s message is the most important thing that they experience when they are here, but that is simply NOT TRUE. Instead, they are listening to many messages (“Smelling many smells”) that they notice long before they hear me preach out of the bible. Parents who bring their kids in for the first time are worried about how their children are being taken care of, and they are noticing the “not so little” things like, “Do they have a SAFE check-in system?” “Is this the ONLY worker that will be in here with my son,” and “Did they CLEAN this room this week?”

An environment of hospitality may seem like it comes naturally, but it takes a LOT OF WORK. We have to be PREPARED for those who will show up. When you invite someone to your home, you WORK HARD TO GET YOUR HOME READY. You CLEAN HOUSE! [Our experience before GROUP at the Sayger Home.] I believe that CHC must be the same way. Please work with us to keep our environments clean and UNCLUTTERED. Those members who do this are demonstrating that CHC is their house and that they have a healthy sense of ownership here. A hospitable environment is also a SAFE environment. We go to great care to have a SECURITY TEAM that roams these halls and parking lots in order to keep us safe while we worship and learn together. We have also invested a significant amount of money into a CHECK-IN SYSTEM for our CHILDREN so that they are safe and secure while their parents are in our worship center. As a member of CHC, you might have been ok with leaving your kids in our children's areas without a check-in system in place because you ALREADY KNEW the people who were watching your kids. But we must remember, OUR GUESTS DO NOT KNOW the people who are watching their precious ones. We must give them every reason to relax while they are here, and this is FIRST ON THE LIST of important environments that we must create.

I could go on and on about areas of need like our worship ministry, or the help that we need for our set up and tear down teams in Hernando, or the extra workers that we need for our children and student ministries, but you get the point. All of these environments require volunteers who are willing to give their best effort and attention to helping create attractive environments here. Are you willing to do that? The task is huge, but the REWARD is awesome! I love the way that Jesus said it to Paul when he called him to follow. I think it fits us as well. **Acts 26:16-18 NLT**

16 Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. 17 And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles 18 to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.

We need servants and witnesses who SMELL GOOD at CHC so that we can spread the fragrance of Christ all over this county! How do you smell?

Let's pray.