

Chapter Two

DEATH

IN WHICH...

- We consider various presentations of the “good news”
- Elwood becomes troubled by the Corpse Flower
- We reflect on the ubiquitous problem of death

Different Ways to Share Good News:



_____ *

Hebrews 2:15

John 4:29

Romans 7:15-20


_____ *

Ephesians 2:10

Acts 17:24-29

_____ *

Hebrews 11:13-16

 Elwood, as the leading horticulturalist on

the *Spheres* team, was given the honor of exclusively caring for their prized exhibit—the *Amorphophallus titanium*, better known as the “Corpse Flower,” and managing the details around its public viewing. This unique flower, native to Sumatra, Indonesia, takes seven years to bloom, and when it does, it heats up to 98 degrees and releases a pungent odor that smells like rotting flesh (thus its cryptic name!) in order to attract flies and carrion beetles as pollinators. After blooming the plant will produce a fruit (if pollinated) and then return to dormancy for four to five years before blooming again.

September 2025 was the projected date for the first blooming of the Corpse Flower. Visitor tickets were already sold out and there was a buzz in the air as the rare phenomenon approached. Elwood daily tended to the plant’s needs in preparation. Small fans were placed around the flower to manage the anticipated rotten smell so as to not overwhelm the audiences.

The tight leaves began to open late on Sunday, September 14, and Elwood was called to come down to *The Spheres* by one of his associates. He arrived late in the evening. Besides a couple of the security staff, Elwood was the only one left in the building. It was remarkable that the long-awaited opening was going to be an overnight private performance. The opening of the bloom typically takes four hours, and then the bloom stays open only 24 to 36 hours before collapsing. All of the bloom-event special ticket holders had been text-notified to show up the next day for viewing, but tonight Elwood was the Corpse Flower’s captive audience.

At 11:30PM the *spathe*, (the petal-like structure surrounding the *spadix* (a dense cluster of tiny flowers arranged on an elongated central stem)) began to loosen and shrivel around the base. Around 12:30AM the petals unfurled quickly, their maroon-blood interior skin contrasting garishly with their pale-green coats, and revealed the yellowish fleshy stem within. Immediately the pungent stench began to waft up and out of the plant, calling out seductively for flies and beetles.

Elwood sat mesmerized at this once-in-a-lifetime performance. And in the dark stillness of the glass-domed building, bright stars twinkling overhead (despite the sheen of the city lights around), Elwood's thoughts grew troubled. He was still unsettled by the child's question if the plants in *The Spheres* were happy, which had triggered all sorts of deeper questions about what makes life good. His brief forage into the Bible had suggested an idea of a God making everything good, followed by a story of humans introducing death into the system. He had dismissed the idea immediately as too much melodrama, but as he sat staring at the Corpse Flower, drawn by the beauty, repulsed by the smell, he began to feel a sense of despair. A flower waits seven years to bloom, only to collapse into dormancy in 36 hours? So little time to breathe in the light! And there was nothing he could do, with all of his horticultural knowledge and wizardry, to change any of it. He began to think of himself as a corpse flower. Maybe he would live 80 years? Maybe he would be hit by a car in the morning? All four of his grandparents had passed away in the last five years, and he had attended each of their funeral services. He had medicated his sorrow at each service by agreeing with platitudes that "they were in a better

place” and that he “would see them again one day,” but he didn’t rationally believe it. But neither could he follow the implications of what he knew he believed: that they were simply gone forever. Annihilated. Non-existence. Every time the idea of non-existence approached his consciousness his whole being rebelled. Non-existence makes a joke of temporary meaningful existence, he would often think to himself.

Elwood sat there into the night feeling more and more trapped. Death was a reality that surrounded him like the night wrapping the dome. And no matter how he might stoically frame the idea, the stink of the despair persisted. Elwood looked at his watch. Five more hours until the doors opened and the curious visitors would be warmly greeted by the stench of death.



HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE “DEATH”?

A large, light blue rounded rectangle with a thin white border, intended for a response to the question above.



THE BIBLE'S STORY OF DEATH

The story of Adam and Eve: **Genesis 2:7,17; 3:1-19**

The story of all humans: **Romans 5:12**

The story of the whole cosmos: **Romans 8:20-22**



NAMING THE INSTINCTIVE PROBLEM OF DEATH

In _____

In _____

In _____

In _____

*“And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”*

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