

It's True: We All Stink

This morning I sidled up to a tall magazine table at the auto mechanic. The electronic ding-dong of the sensor mounted in the doorway signaled the entrance of customers, keeping me from fully concentrating on the reading material unfolded in my lap.

The last addition to the waiting room was a middle-aged woman, hard-pressed, it seemed, but friendly; daughter in tow. Seeing me pull my phone from my purse was her cue to divulge a collection of details surrounding the iPhone she had gotten her son for Christmas. She dramatized the shock she felt when opening the first bill and detailed how it compared to her *pre-iPhone* bill.

I tried to smile and concentrate on her story because she so clearly just wanted a set of listening ears and a kind face.

But in the middle of this conversation, I became acutely aware of a distinct "habit-based smell" wafting my way that was masked by some sort of fruity spray. This combination was distracting at best and overwhelming at worst, a situation I blame completely on my overactive nose.

I felt like I was in an old hotel room at the Super 8. It was hard to breathe.

We all stink

As I climbed into my vehicle to head home, I realized that when it comes down to it, we all stink. And we all try our best to cover it up.

Our sin is own "habit-based smell" and every time we strive to do better, go-it alone, buckle down, or get a grip on our failings, the more it's like squirting cheap perfume on rotting flesh. As Martin Luther penned so long ago in *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*,

Did we in our own strength confide
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.

None of our own attempts can do *anything* to present us as fragrant offerings. Not one.

But Jesus... (don't you just love those words? It means the story is changing...)

Jesus, in his great love, washes us, cleans us whiter than snow. He saved us "not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." (Titus 3:5). This mercy enables

us to live a life for Christ, the perfect example of fragrant offering (Eph. 5:2).

If you're tired of endless striving and beating the wind in futility; if doing your best leaves you still coming up short, perhaps it's time to stop trying to cover your stink on your own.

Reach out to the One who has already covered it all.

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. --Isa 61:10a