



Things have smells—some good, some bad—but they always leave an impression. One thing I've noticed is that some people have unique "smells," not like middle school BO, but the subtle ways someone's presence feels familiar or different. For example, when you go to a friend's house, it doesn't smell bad—it just smells different from your own home. Over time, you start associating that smell with that person or family. It becomes part of who they are.

Paul uses this same idea in our text. He talks about the "aroma" of Christ, the unique presence and influence Christians carry. Living an unfiltered faith creates a smell, or an impact, that the world notices. Sometimes it's pleasing, sometimes it's offensive, but it should always point back to Jesus.

Icebreaker

What's one of your favorite smells?

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12–17.

Get It

- 1. Why did Paul go to Troas, and why was his Spirit not at rest (vv. 12–13)?**
- 2. Who does Paul credit for his triumphs (v. 14)?**
- 3. What two contrasting groups of people experience Paul's aroma, and what is the eternal result for each (vv. 15–16)?**
- 4. How does Paul contrast his ministry approach with that of many (v. 17)?**
- 5. What four qualities does Paul attribute to his own ministry that distinguish it from the false teachers' (v. 17)?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: The Show Must Go ON

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12–13.

You've probably heard the saying, "The show must go on." It's common in show business and it means that no matter what happens, no matter what goes wrong, the work still has to be done. It doesn't promise that everything will go perfectly; it just promises that it will happen. We see this mindset in sports, classrooms, and many areas of life: even when things feel stressful, the task still needs to be completed. And in those moments, there's no denying that anxiety is present.

Paul experienced something similar. He planned to meet Titus at Troas, but when Titus didn't show up, Paul felt deep anxiety. And yet, instead of giving in to despair, Paul paused to point out something crucial: even in the middle of intense hardship, his ministry was sustained—not by his own strength, but by the gospel and the Spirit's power and comfort.

Throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul repeatedly emphasizes perseverance. He says things like, "We do not lose heart" and "We are always of good courage." Even though he faced suffering, fear, and uncertainty, he didn't give up. He relied on God to carry him through, showing us that faith is not about a life without struggles—it's about continuing faithfully when the struggles come.

The takeaway for us is this: life will bring anxiety, delays, and disappointments. But God's Spirit gives us the courage and strength to keep going. Our "show" may not be perfect, but God's power ensures that it continues and that His purposes are accomplished through us.

- 6. Paul was worried about Titus (v.13), but he also trusted God (v.14). How can you feel nervous or worried about something but still trust that God is in control?**
- 7. Think of one thing in your life that makes you anxious—maybe a test, a game, or a fight with a friend. How can you try to focus this week on thanking God that He is guiding you and helping you through it, like Paul talks about in verse 14?**
- 8. Paul didn't give up on what God called him to do, even when things didn't go as planned. What are some ways you can keep doing the right thing at school, at home, or with friends, even when it's tough or doesn't go your way?**

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Parade of Victory

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14–16.

Parades are fun. Homecoming parades, the corn boil parade, even the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; they're all about celebration. Floats, music, waving to the crowd, sharing joy. But nothing compares to the kind of parade that comes after a real victory. I remember when the Chicago Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup in 2010, 2013, and 2015, those celebrations were incredible. And when the Chicago Cubs finally won the World Series in 2016, the victory parade was historic, especially because people had waited 108 years for that moment. And yes, I'm still holding out for the day Chicago has a Bears Super Bowl parade.... One day.

Paul uses a similar image in 2 Corinthians 2:14 when he says God "leads us in triumphal procession." In Roman times, a general would parade through the streets after a military victory, showing off captives and spoils. It was a display of power and conquest. But here's the twist: Paul sees himself and his companions as the captives, not of enemies, but of Christ's victory.

Here's the crazy part about following Jesus: sometimes it feels like we're "losing," but really, we're winning. Giving your struggles, your mistakes, and even yourself to God isn't a loss, it's a victory. All the stuff that used to hold you back, your fears, your weaknesses, your sin, can now be part of something amazing, showing God's power and grace.

Think of it like this: what used to make you feel trapped or ashamed can now be used by God to help others see Him. Your hard moments, your failures, even the times you mess up, aren't the end, they're part of God's big victory parade. And just like fans cheer at a championship parade, God celebrates every time you surrender your life to Him.

9. What's one area in your life where you feel like you're "losing" or struggling right now? How could God use that situation for His glory?

10. Paul talks about being part of God's "triumphal procession." How does it feel to think that your mistakes, weaknesses, or fears could actually show God's power to others?

11. Think about a time you messed up or failed at something. How could surrendering that situation to God turn it into a victory instead of a loss?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Trend-Setting or Trend-Chasing?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:17.

Nothing is cooler than when there's a new trend going around online or at school and it's just fun to be part of it. There's a moment when something is so cool you have to join in. You're in on the joke, and it feels like you belong.

But nothing is worse than when a teacher shows up and starts trying to be part of the trend. They walk into class and say something like, "Go ahead and '67' in your textbooks," and you can tell they think they've cracked the code on being cool. But instead, they've actually made it worse.

Maybe it's funny for a second. Maybe it's just terrible altogether. Honestly, even me talking about it right now makes me feel like an unc.

But why does it feel so awkward when someone does this? It's because we know the teacher, or the parent, isn't sincere. They're usually just trying to get a quick laugh or prove they're not out of touch, and it comes across as forced.

That uncomfortable feeling we get when something sincere turns fake? Paul cared deeply about that same difference—but on a much more serious level. He understood that the gospel is not something you perform, market, or bend just to win approval.

Paul makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 2:17. He rejected the approach of those who "peddle" the Word of God—people who dilute, distort, or manipulate the truth for personal gain. We need to keep watch over this in our own lives. Just because someone is in the Christian space, uses Bible verses in their bio, or seems to be doing the right thing doesn't mean we know where they truly are with God. Is their message authentic to the truth?

Paul never watered down the message, chased popular opinion, or tried to make the gospel more appealing. His ministry was marked by faithfulness, not trend-chasing.

12. How would you explain the difference between a ministry that "sells" God's Word for personal gain and one that speaks honestly, as if from God? What are the signs to watch for in someone who is "selling" the message?

13. Why do you serve God? Are there ways we might serve Him for our own benefit instead of His? What can you do to make sure your words and actions are sincere, like they come from God (v. 17)?

14. If Paul's life and message are like the "smell of Christ," what kind of "smell" do your habits, words, and priorities give off to people around you? Does it show who you really represent?
 15. Using v. 17 as a guide, how will you judge the next Christian book, sermon, reel, or podcast you listen to? How can you tell if the person is faithfully sharing God's Word or just "selling" it?
 16. How can we help each other make sure we speak "as from God" with honesty, purity, and faithfulness, rather than just giving our own opinions or following popular trends?

This study was written by Ethan Wentzlaff, based on the adult study written by the VBC Pastoral Team.