

## **"A Tale of Two Cities"**

This week I'd like to share with you two separate stories from two different places, decades apart, but with two different perspectives. Back in the late 90's my wife Vicki and I built our "forever" retirement home in Kidron, Ohio - right in the heart of Amish country. There was a barn down the hill from us with a dozen or so cows, and periodically, they would spread liquid cow manure on the field beside us,

Needless to say, the air around us could be quite rank at times! One of those days, I walked our dog down the hill, past the smelly field and beside the barn, and it was awful! Just across the street was a huge lilac bush, and as I neared it, the aroma it put off drew me closer to it. I actually pressed in as far as I could and realized that the fragrance of the lilacs blocked the stench that was just a few feet away!

I'm sure you know where I'm going with this - life as we know it quite often "stinks," for a variety of reasons. When we focus on whatever stinks in our lives, we can be overwhelmed by it, but if we press into the Lord, just as I pressed into the lilac bush, we are immersed in His Presence, then the words of this famous hymn make sense: *"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace"* Jesus is referred to allegorically as the "Rose of Sharon" in the SS - so press in and breathe in His fragrance!

My second story happened just the other day coming up the access driveway to my condo drive. Years ago, many beautiful shrubs, trees, and flowers were planted in various areas of our complex, and there's a row of them that line the path to my unit. There's one variety of shrub with beautiful cream colored flowers, and as I walked by them the other evening, I stopped to smell them, but was disappointed that something so beautiful had no noticeable fragrance.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14b-16 it says: *"Through our yielded lives he spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere we go. We have become the unmistakable aroma of the victory of the Anointed One to God —a perfume of life to those being saved and the odor of death to those who are perishing. The unbelievers smell a deadly stench that leads to death, but believers smell the life-giving aroma that leads to abundant life."*(TPT)

I fear that many of us who claim to be Christians are like those flowers I smelled - on the outside we look like perfect Christians, doing all the right things like going to church, reading our Bible, and even praying before our meals, but because we have not pressed more fully into His Presence, we don't have a fragrance that would attract and/or encourage others.

I can't speak for anyone else, but I want to be one who *"spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere we (I) go."* I want my life to be a reflection of God's glory, and of His love and grace and mercy! Lord, help us to let our lights shine into the darkness, and may we spread your sweet fragrance everywhere we go! Amen!