

Stinking Blessings

The Uncommon Scents of Christ

March 8, 2026



Today we're putting ourselves into God's stories so He can speak to us through 'em!



So, **do you think cigar smoke smells good or bad?** It's very subjective, isn't it? How about cigarettes? Mom used to call me her little stinker. I even had a mug. And it was a term of endearment. I think. Well, previously on the dysfunctional drama of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Abraham gives teenage Ishmael's firstborn rights to his baby brother Isaac. Which leads Ishmael and his gold-earring Ishmaelite-offspring to live in hostility to the offspring of Isaac and his son, Jacob. Which provides Jacob's sons an opportunity to get rid of their father's favorite, Joseph, once and for all. Because, after throwing little Joe into a literal holding tank ...

[They] saw **and smelled** a caravan of [Midianite] Ishmaelites coming ... **cuz** Their camels were loaded with **pungent** spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. – Genesis 37:25 NIV

Fatefully, shortly before Joseph was taken down, trade relations opened up to the Semitic region of these Midianite merchants – as depicted in this tomb painting of a Semitic caravan from their time. But **why do you think the Lord included their fragrant inventory?** Cuz it's such a big part of the story! For one, it tells us they were headed to the royal city (where Potiphar works); because, **these extremely potent and expensive raw ingredients were diluted to make intense fragrances** for the rich and royal men and women of Egypt. The ladies even mixed 'em with wax and wore it on their head – so it would slowly melt during the day. Don't act like you wouldn't. Some of these ingredients, found in King Tut's 3,000-year-old tomb, still had an odor! So, we also know what they smelled like. So:

[When the] **sickeningly-sweet** merchants came by, [Joseph's] brothers ... [sold him] to the Ishmaelites, who took him **down** to Egypt. – Genesis 37:28 NIV

Because, at 17, as the self-centered, insensitive, boastful, 11th-born son of twelve, **little Joe with his very big head needed to be taken down.** So, the brothers dipped his robe in blood and deceive their dad that little Joe was dead.

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar – Genesis 37:36 NIV

And, like that 2-year white space between chapters 40 and 41, **there's a 30-day, 400-mile, slave-march in that one word: "Meanwhile".** When, as Psalm 105 adds:

They shackled **some versions say hurt** his feet with chains – Psalm 105:18 NAB

30 days. 400 miles. On foot. Tied between camels. Ankle cuffs digging in, in the meanwhile. That's the Peace Arch to Eugene, Oregon, in the meanwhile. And this is just the beginning of how **God is meticulously transforming Joseph**. His story begins (like most of ours) with a teenager **ignorantly assuming the meaning of God-given dreams**, and then **arrogantly interacting without God-given love**. He came on way too strong, poured it on way too thick, till **God's sweet promises made his brothers sick**. Like being in a car with an over-cologned kid going to his first prom! Now, for 30 days and 400 miles he staggers and gags on the sickeningly-sweet, nauseating stench. Sobbing. Praying. Begging. And retching. And plotting. "I'll kill 'em!" And regretting. "Why'd I act like that?" You see, he's already growing. Just a bit. But it's a start. Hang in there Joe.

"Remember that I *commanded* you to be strong and brave." [That's the plan; so] Don't be afraid, because the Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go. – Joshua 1:9 NCV

"So don't worry, because I am with you. Don't be afraid, because I *am* your God. [And I have a plan; and] I will make you strong" [cuz that's what we're doing] – Isaiah 41:10 NCV

"And [as Jesus confirms and promises us] I will be with you always" – Matthew 28:20 NCV

[Therefore] Even though I [will] walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will [do my best to] fear no evil, for You are with me [and that's the plan] – Psalm 23:4 ESV

[Cuz] God, You have tested us; [and] You have purified us like silver. – Psalm 66:10 NCV

[Yes, but] The refining pot is for silver ... the Lord tests the hearts. – Proverbs 17:3 NKJ

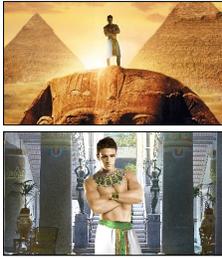
[Cuz] As slaves of Christ, [you gotta] do the will of God with all your heart. – Ephesians 6:6 NLT



Think about it. **To build faith, we gotta go through trials that test our faith**. And those low points by definition are disagreeable. So, we say, "Why?" And God says, "If I tell you, it defeats the purpose." "So basically, You want us to suffer." "No. I want you to grow. You're the one that demands the suffering." "That's because I'm fine with not growing." "My point exactly." So, if we regard ourselves as followers and servants of Christ, then regardless of our circumstances:

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. – 1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV

Especially when tested. Ever notice how **certain smells bring up powerful memories and emotions**? Odors encode themselves as pleasing or repulsive based on experience. That's why some people love the smell of doghouse; and others enjoy the aroma of a gas station; and still others the bouquet of the tideflats. While you might find all three quite repulsive. When I was in 3rd grade, my dad was severely burned (in the wrecking yard) requiring extensive skin grafts. And Mom drove him to the emergency room with my sister and me in the car. 35 years later. Waikiki. Luau. Roast pig. I passed. Cuz it smelled like Pops! And **this living nightmare is encoding Joseph with distinct scents common among Egypt's royal and wealthy**. And remember how God used a rooster to encode Peter's denial of Jesus? Thereafter, Peter got a daily wakeup call, refining him by reminding him that God's mercies are new every morning!



But in just *13 short years*, Joseph will have a *stratospheric rise* in power and prestige to *god-like status*! So how do you keep such *superstardom* from going to his head? **Encode humility and humanity and gratitude to God.** It only takes *three ingredients* to create a *lifelong trigger* that'll accompany every dignitary he'll meet, and every *gala* he'll attend. Cuz **he can't shake the scents of his sin, enslavement, and miraculous deliverance.** And the *grateful devotion* he owes to the Lord above *all the rank and reeking* of Egypt!

"Such people are *smoke* in My nostrils, [says the Lord] a *fire* that keeps burning [like a *luau-pig-reminder*] all day." – Isaiah 65:5 NIV

Therefore be *imitators* of God as *dear children*. And walk [through the valley] in *love*, as ... an *offering* and a *sacrifice* to God for a *sweet-smelling aroma*. – Ephesians 5:1-2 NKJ

[Because] Our lives are a *Christ-like fragrance* rising up to God. But ... to those who are *perishing*, we are a *dreadful smell* ... But to those who are being saved, we are a *life-giving perfume*. – 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 NLT

So, **when life stinks, we should ask: What are You encoding in me?** Because, like Joseph, **we're being refined and strengthened to appreciate blessings and resist temptations.**



It'll sure *help* him resist the *seduction* of *sexy Mrs. P.* if she *perfumes* herself with *enslavement*! Because, when *little Joe* was *taken down*, everything was suddenly *going south*! But you know what? **We know Joseph's destination.** And we know what Joseph only knew in *hindsight*. **We know his future in detail.** And *that* gives us *super-vision* to see some *incredible sights* that he'll pass by, in his *misery*, in the *meanwhile*. And **that should encourage, and inspire, and empower us to look beyond our own chains and pains,** when *our family* is *torn apart*, or we feel *shackled* or *doomed* and *taken down*. Cuz several *landmarks*, along his way, *survive* to this day. The most *obvious* being the *lush Nile River* and the gorgeous *land* of *Goshen* that will be *given* to his *family* as a *gift* from *Pharaoh*. These are the *lights* along the Nile flowing through *Goshen* into the *Mediterranean*, right *next door* to the *Promised Land*. But first, *this* is where God will **grow them into a nation.** And then **allow the Egyptians to enslave them.** And then **send Moses to deliver them.** Cuz, *that's all part* of the *master plan*!

And not only would Joseph have *passed* the (still-standing) *Obelisk* of the city of *On* – the temple city of the sun god, *Ra*, but also the daughter of the High Priest, who's being prepared to be Joseph's wife, and the mother of *Manasseh* and *Ephraim*, two of the tribal nations of *Israel*. And as if that's not enough, *On* was one of the main national grain storage cities, that'll be under Joseph's sole authority, as he prepares seven years of grain for a seven-year famine. But you know what he's thinking as he's *passing* *On*? "What's *going on*?! Why is this *happening*?! Are you *there*?! Do You *care*?!" Cuz if you're *human*, and a *believer*, you well know: **when things go south our faith goes off and on.** "They're *bowing* to the *sun god, Ra* in there – in my *dream*, the *sun* was *bowing* to me!" Unbeknownst to him, **God is giving him a royal tour of all that he'll overcome.** But he can't see it. And *if he could* it'd *ruin* the *process* God is *superintending* that'll lead to him *overcoming*!

Geese are flying through a turquoise sky above green pastures and towering palms. And the irony is, this is the low point of his life – in the world’s largest oasis! Hang on, Joseph! Just trust God! Aw, he can’t hear me. But, can you? Cuz **it’s so hard to see what God’s doing in the midst of our misery.** “Why me? Wow that’s a lotta ducks! Don’t You care, God?! Gosh that’s great grazing land!”



The *Sphinx* was already 1,000 years old as Joseph passed by! That’s the postcard he sent home! Then they get to the royal city. And then into the marketplace. Different language. Different culture. Different gods. Men wear wigs and eyeliner and lipstick. And that guy sticks a snake in his mouth! Wait. What? **Joseph is lost and confused and absolutely powerless. And then he meets his polar opposite.** The head of Pharaoh’s elite and deadly palace guard. I picture Arnold in his prime ... with eyeliner. He’s a specimen of strength and ferocity. He oversees executions, and lives above the royal prison. (Gen 40:3) **He’s a seasoned, battle-proven military commander.** And as such he’s quick to assess, and acts decisively with alarmingly proficient skills in weaponry. Even his name has swagger. It means *He-whom-Ra-gives*; i.e. *God’s-gift*. And Jewish tradition says God’s-gift happened to be near the marketplace, and happened to catch a whiff of someone rich or royal in the slave market with robbers and killers and kidnapers. And, like an adrenaline charged freight train, thundered through vendors. Weapon drawn. Eyes flashing. Scanning to identify and possibly defend and secure ... who? I like to picture Joseph suddenly seeing a sea of people parting and pointing at him. And then this spine-chilling warrior charging! Gleaming metal! Snorting unintelligible words. Then voices hush. And **he sizes up little Joe. The kid’s not weak. But he’s not a threat.** Oddly, he looks healthy. Strong. Well fed. Well groomed. Well clothed, and well ...

Joseph was well-built and handsome [as well] – Genesis 39:6 NIV

“You look like a leettle me.” The kid looks regal. Dignified. Out of place. Sad. Angry. Sincere. Courageous. And he’s got a great set of pecs! “My name is Pot-tee-fuh, but they call me the Pot-tee-nate-uh.” Coins change hands. Shackles unshackle. Fetters unfetter. And it’s the only sound in the crowded market. **To be purchased by this guy was quite a get!** And a Hebrew no less!

And Potiphar, [God’s-gift] an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the [palace] guard, an Egyptian, [who, Scripture says, normally abhorred Hebrews. (Gen 43:32) But something about this one just ... smells right] bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. [To where the captain of Pharaoh’s palace guard didn’t just happen upon him. Because, as we’re finally reassured for the first time in the story] The Lord was with Joseph – Genesis 39:1 NKJ

Good to know. Cuz **if we hadn’t read ahead, we’d be wondering too.** So remember, when you’re feeling betrayed or rejected or desperate or hopeless, the Lord is with you too.

For we are to God the aroma of Christ ... the fragrance of life. – 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 NIV

And when Potiphar gestures to walk. And Joseph takes a step, the crowd parts and stares. And **it’s the first real respect he’s seen. Not for him. For the force behind him. Which is what God is trying to teach him.** And maybe he smiled. And maybe someone looked at this stinking teenage Hebrew (who’s blessed to belong to one of Egypt’s most powerful and respected and connected) and said, “Jackpot.”