

Fragrant Love

[Jesus said,] “She has poured perfume on my feet” (Luke 7:46).

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Song: “My Jesus, I Love Thee”

My birthday package had arrived! As I ripped off the tape and unfolded the flaps of the box, a beautiful scent wafted into the air. Nestled inside—among the books and other presents—was a scented candle. My friend had taken such thoughtful care with every gift she’d chosen. I could feel her love for me as I slowly unwrapped each item . . . all as the candle’s aroma filled the air. When Simon the Pharisee objected to the notorious woman’s acts of love and worship toward Jesus, all Simon could smell was the stench of her sinfulness. But as her aromatic gift filled the room, Jesus cherished her love for Him.

Sometimes when I approach the Lord, I wonder if all He will smell is the stench of my sin—and then wrinkle His nose and turn His face from me. But when I recall how Jesus received the sinful woman’s act of repentant adoration, I know that when I approach Him with humble and sincere love, He welcomes me. In His grace, the stench of my sin is never greater than the fragrance of my love for Him.

Father, thank You for receiving me with open arms, welcoming my love for You. Help me to come to You even when I feel unworthy. In Jesus’ name, amen.

April 10–16. **Rachel Schmoyer** lives in Pennsylvania in an old house she is fixing up with the help of her husband and four kids. She is an office assistant for a church-planting organization.

Hope Hiding in Flower Seeds

When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else (1 Corinthians 15:37).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:27-31, 35-44

Song: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

The wildflower mix is one my favorite packets of seeds to plant in the spring. I rip open the paper envelope, spill the mix of seeds into my hand, and thumb through the pile on my palm. Some are perfectly round and tan. Others are conical with wispy featherlike ends. Others look like chocolate sprinkles. Still others are light gray and so brittle, it's hard to imagine that anything can grow from them. These dull-hued seeds give no hint of the burst of color that my garden will experience. As I sprinkle them around and press them into the damp earth, I'm filled with the hope and wonder inherent in the mystery of gardening.

God has not given us a lot of exact details about our resurrection bodies. In this passage, however, we get a teaser. Our resurrection bodies will have more splendor than our current bodies, just like a plant has more splendor than its seed.

Although the body I have now is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), God the Creator has, in His love, given me wondrous hope through my Savior, Jesus Christ. He has a resurrection body planned for me, and in it I will dwell with Him for all eternity.

Father, thank You for the wonder and surprise that awaits us through our resurrection bodies. In Jesus' name, amen.

Glorious Change

The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:45-58

Song: “I Would Be Like Jesus”

Certain insects go through what scientists call “incomplete metamorphosis.” Cockroaches, praying mantises, and grasshoppers, for example, all go through this type of change. Once they hatch out of an egg, they look like a smaller version of their adult selves. As they grow bigger, they shed their exoskeleton to make room for a bigger body. The incomplete metamorphosis is not drastic from one stage to the next, but the change is consistent, step-by-step, until the final stage is reached.

Change is a hallmark of the Christian life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our love grows one step at a time, and we become more like Christ. As I move from one day to the next—or even from one year to the next—I may not feel as if I’ve changed much. But as the Holy Spirit works within me, I can be sure that I *am* changing, emerging from what I once was into what I am becoming in Christ.

There is another kind of change we can look forward to as believers. The day is coming when these perishable physical bodies will be put aside for good, and we will be clothed with imperishable spiritual bodies. Decline, decay, and the sting of death will be no more, and we will live eternally!

Father, I rejoice in Your transforming power at work in my life. Thank You, too, for the promise of a spiritual body that will never die. In Jesus’ name, amen.

You Are Welcome

[David said to God,] I, by your great love, can come into your house (Psalm 5:7).

Scripture: Psalm 5

Song: “We Have Come into This House”

It's not easy to arrange a visit to the White House. Well before the desired visit date, citizens must submit a request to their representative in Congress. Then there are no guarantees. Spaces for these self-guided tours are only available certain days and hours, and the spaces fill up quickly. Even if a time is secured, a tour may be canceled without warning if it interferes with official business. But even if circumstances aligned and you *did* end up touring the White House, there would be no cordial visit with the President or First Family. Since they didn't invite you, they wouldn't even know you were there. You would be a nameless face in yet another group of strangers allowed to wander the White House halls that day.

By contrast, in His great love for us, God invites us to enjoy a place of fellowship with Him. Before Jesus' atonement, God made a way for His people to meet with Him by way of the tabernacle and then later in the temple. Now by the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence, God makes His home within every believer. Each of us who is in Christ is a tabernacle, a temple where God desires to draw near to us (1 Corinthians 6:19; Revelation 3:20).

God does not put barriers in the way of relationship with Him. Rather, He invites us with open arms into loving fellowship.

Father, I cherish the invitation I have to fellowship with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Good Grief

Though [God] brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone (Lamentations 3:32-33).

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21-36

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Dressed in his iconic yellow shirt with a black zigzag pattern, cartoon character Charlie Brown is portrayed as one who is easily discouraged and unsettled in life. Cartoonist Charles Schultz tapped into his own insecure side, and Charlie Brown’s perspective is a look at life through that lens. It was in a 1952 *Peanuts* strip that Charlie Brown uttered his first “Good grief!” This exclamation became his recurring lament, expressing his perplexity and frustration at life’s unfairness, adversities, and mysteries.

As I was reading the apparent contradictions in today’s selected verses, I felt a Charlie Brown–like response rise up: *Good grief! Does God bring grief or NOT bring grief?* But on closer examination there is an explanation. In His unfailing love, God’s deepest desire is to show compassion to His people. But in the wholeness of His character, God the Father must sometimes bring affliction for the sake of correcting or refining us—that is, for our good (Hebrews 12:4-11).

When I experience adversity, pain, or grief in my life, often my initial reaction is to call out to God and ask Him where He is. Yet even in the midst of my affliction, time and again He demonstrates His love for me—an outpouring of His compassionate heart.

Father, thank You for Your unfailing love. I will choose to trust Your compassionate heart even through hard times of affliction and grief. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Can't Keep It to Myself

You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent (Psalm 30:11-12).

Scripture: Psalm 30

Song: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

I met my first boyfriend the summer I worked at a Christian camp for kids. He was also on staff, and I was smitten. At the end of the summer when I returned home, I told everyone about him. I didn't quite realize how vocal I'd been . . . until our church youth-group leader put together a get-to-know-you game to kick off the school year. He created a bingo board with clues that described each person in our group. From these we had to figure out who was who. The clue for me was, "In case you didn't hear, I caught myself a man this summer." My first reaction was to be embarrassed, but that feeling quickly passed because the statement was true! And I'd not been able to keep the good news to myself.

Now 25 years later, that boyfriend is my husband. Though it makes our teenage children cringe, I still can't help telling how much I love him. King David loved the Lord with his whole heart. The Lord had rescued him from his enemies, had forgiven his sins, and had showered him with favor. How could he help but sing his praises to God?

What has God done that you want to tell about? Let your heart spill over in praises to Him.

Father, You have lifted me out of the depths! You have clothed me in joy! I will praise You and not be silent! In Jesus' name, amen.

Known by His Work

[The disciples] were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:6-7).

Scripture: John 21:1-14

Song: “Stranger on the Shore“

I am no art expert, but while walking through the Philadelphia Museum of Art with a friend, I was surprised at how many works I was able to classify because of their artists’ signature styles. There were several foggy paintings with the impression of pastel flowers surrounding the stillness of a blue-green pond. I recognized those as Monet. There was a bronzed statue of a young ballet dancer with a round face and skinny legs, standing at attention. I recognized that as the work of Degas. There were several small white canvases with black grid lines and several of the blocks in primary colors, red and blue, which I recognized as Mondrian.

John did not recognize Jesus at first, perhaps because Jesus was too far away or because the early morning was too dark. As soon as Jesus performed His work of filling the nets, however, John recognized the Lord! Jesus had performed this miracle for His followers before, demonstrating His love and provision.

Usually I go through life not paying attention to the details, but when I stop and pay attention to my blessings, I recognize the work of the Lord through His love and provision.

Father, I want to be attentive today, recognizing and acknowledging Your work of loving care and provision in my life. Thank You for loving me as You do. In Jesus’ name, amen.