

December 2010

Dear friends and family,

First of all, Sandra and I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful holiday season! I suspect you're like me and find it hard to believe that it's that time again. Just enjoy and make the most of it by enjoying the many blessings Christ came to share with us.

Around Thanksgiving Sandra and I were in a Cracker Barrel waiting to get a table. We were browsing around the bazillion trinkets they offer in the store and found a couple of small candles with fragrances we thought would be nice to burn during the holidays. We've used them a few times and thoroughly enjoy the aroma they provide for our home. As I was reading through the Bible just this week I came across this passage that made me think of those candles and their lovely fragrance.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Just as we enjoy many of the smells we will experience associated with the Christmas season - evergreens, a crackling fire in the fireplace, sweet goodies baking in the oven, nice candles - God Himself enjoys the way we smell!!! Why? Because we carry with us the fragrance of Jesus Christ. Does that not give you a sense of just how pleasing we are to Him because of our intimate relationship with Jesus? He even likes the way we smell, like a mother's nose can recognize the unique odor of her own child and bring warmth to her heart!

Jesus has done an amazing thing in giving us His abundant life and His sweet fragrance. He has made us acceptable to God. No, everything we say or do does not meet with God's approval. But we are His kids and therefore we are privileged to His loving gaze and His compassionate correction. We are not fatherless. In fact our Father is the best Dad possible. And we are His beloved children, pleasing to Him because we, too, smell like Jesus.

So when you're wondering how God feels about you or if you get down for some reason this Christmas season, think about this: You are a sweet smelling aroma to Father, even as Jesus is...believe it or not!

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2010 has been a different year for me (Blake). It has felt like a year of transition although I'm still involved in pretty much the same activities as last year. I'm realizing that having done counseling for so many years, I had gotten into the habit of depending on others to set my schedule for me. When I am not "busy," as in counseling, I often feel I'm being unproductive. This has bothered me for a while but I think I only figured it out this past year...duh. So I am trying to break out of that habit by using more of my non-counseling time to do writing. My board has encouraged me in this as well and Father affirmed it when one of our dear ministry friends committed to pay for someone to do copy editing for me!

I continue to do counseling in Huntsville and Madison through the relationships I have with Rivertree Church and Summit Crossing Community Church. And lately my counseling load has picked up some. I do enjoy sharing the teaching of the exchanged life with folks who are needing to hear about God's grace and freedom in Christ and watching them discover the confidence that comes from believing that Father truly loves them and made them His full-fledged siblings of their big brother Jesus Christ. We did two conferences this year and one Couple Communication group. I was also asked to speak at Covenant Presbyterian's family camp in May and to Rivertree's Disciple Now weekend and had a blast doing both.



One of the disappointments for us this year was not taking a mission team to Europe. It is unusual for us not to make at least one international trip a year. We are not sure about 2011 yet. It appears that Erin, Greg, Abigail and Hannah, our daughter, her husband and children (that's our grandkids!) who live in Poland will be coming to the states for an extended visit of several months. They plan to get some needed ministry training while here

and to raise support for the Kings Kids ministry they lead in Poland. There are so many good things to invest our resources in, but I'm hoping you will pray for them and trust that Father might give you an idea that might help them find more investors in their work.



After serving three years as chairman of the Association of Exchanged Life Ministries, I thought I was done with my service on the AELM board. To my surprise the board asked me to extend my board involvement and service as president of AELM! The office of president had never been filled before but is something the board had discussed. It is such an honor for me to have this role although I'm not quite sure all it will entail. Already I have represented the AELM at the memorial service for Anabel Gillham who passed away in November. Although I was blessed to be there for this celebration of the life of one our mentors, I'm hoping my future duties will not be so bittersweet.

In September, Rivertree Church (where I serve as an elder and where I have office space for counseling and writing) moved into its new facility! What an exciting time for us all to be able be our in our space and leave behind the weekly set-up and take-down that went with using the elementary school auditorium. A lot of our time and energy was invested in this in the weeks before and after the move. And we're still finding our way around in the beautiful new space learning how to maximize and steward this resource. Sandra is still working in the church office two days a week and is thoroughly blessed by her time there...and I think they are enjoying her, too!!



Our children, Parke and Meg and their families are doing great. We love getting together with them when we all can find the time. The opportunities we get to babysit with Parke's boys are always a blessing and the time we will have in the next couple of weeks with them all will be such fun. We pray that your holiday time with family will be a great blessing for you and them.



So, thank you for everything - prayers, support, encouragement, friendship and love!!

Smelling good in Christ!

Blake and Sandra