

## Time Spilled Out

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).*

I love perfume, not only for the pleasure of the fragrance, but also for its power. Seasons and milestones of my life are earmarked (or should I say nose-marked?) by a particular aroma; a random whiff in an elevator can revive buried memories and emotions long since forgotten. So when my husband asked, "What do you want for your birthday?" one year, I asked for my favorite 'parfum,' the culmination of science and art in liquid form.

Its very packaging was marvelous. The velveteen red box opened like an oyster bearing a precious pearl. Nestled in a bed of red satin laid the treasure—a small square flask. Its glass middle was shaped like a woman's figure harboring the liquid gold.

Although it was probably too fine for everyday use, I wore it to work anyway. The fragrance served as pleasant distraction from the mundane details of my job. But its heavenly fragrance couldn't dissolve my earthly responsibility to arrive at work on time. Too often I rushed.

During one such hurried morning, my hand carelessly knocked over the perfume bottle—without its stopper! Stunned, I froze and watched the liquid drip to the floor, slowly saturating a newspaper. Only a small bit remained in the bottle.

I realized that I probably now possessed the world's most expensive newspaper, saturated with costly fragrance. Although it seemed useless to cry over spilled perfume, I nonetheless refused to throw the paper away. Day after day, it lay on the floor, its heavenly aroma filling the room, reminding me of my mistake.

In the months ahead, however, that fragrant paper became much more to me than a source of frustration. As it became part of the landscape of the room, the sweet-smelling newsprint became symbolic—as if the spilled perfume had become a microcosm of my life. The perfume had been a precious gift, given to me with love, meant to enjoy, not to be squandered. Yet my carelessness trashed it. How similar it seemed as another precious gift—the days of my life. God bottled up an allotted number of them and gave them to me to use wisely. But how many days have I carelessly wasted?

The aroma of the newspaper became a daily reminder of God's gift of life. It became a symbol of precious time, of days as fleeting as vapor (or sprayed cologne). Like the spilled perfume, time seemed no longer to be an endless resource stretched out before me. Yet envisioning so it in my youth, I had allowed too many of my days to end up like the perfume on the floor—squandered.

The perfume that spilled out of the bottle had taught me a valuable lesson, but so did the remaining fragrance *in* the bottle. It served as a gentle warning against losing opportunities. If I hide away what remains of the precious fragrance, I'll never experience it to the fullest, or enjoy it as God intended. When I remain like the perfume closed up in its bottle, how can the fragrance of my life waft heavenward and please God?

Even so, hope isn't lost. Remaining still in the spilled bottle is enough liquid to savor; it cries out to me, "Don't lose hope. There's still some left!" As long as I wake up each day there's a chance to begin life afresh. Although I've made mistakes, God's mercies are new every morning. And just as the spilled fragrance greets me each morning, so does each day. But in contrast to the fragrance of perfume that will evaporate one day, the sweetness of God's forgiveness and hope remains forever.

So when the next birthday rolls around, what will I want? More than ever—perfume!

*By Mary Nixon*