

What Are the Needs and Opportunities Around Me?

Let me get this out into the open... The neighborhood in which my wife and I live has caused a seasonal sore spot over the years. However, it's not its location, the neighbors, or their demeanor that has caused this nagging agitation. On the contrary. We chose this home and its location more than twenty years ago because of its proximity to the church, its reputation for offering an excellent elementary school, and its quaint charm. We have very much enjoyed the neighborhood cookouts, the holiday decorations, and the many sidewalk conversations. So, what's the problem you ask?

The issue springs from the grass being greener on the other side - literally. Maybe it's simply my imagination, but everybody else's lawn up and down our street simply looks a little bit greener and thicker than ours. Our lawn consists of brown patches, soft and marshy areas, and clumpy weeds that choke out the grass that would otherwise be present. The roots of our three trees have created an undulating landscape that is filled with nodules and bumps. Don't even get me started on what it's like to mow the lawn! I am sure my little push-mower has taken a beating over the years, but there is no way a riding-mower would survive our yard!

While this may sound quite ridiculous and funny, the truth is that when it comes to serving the Lord and one another, the grass often appears to be greener on the other side (of the street). It is not uncommon for us to look at the opportunities and influence that others have been given and feel just a little bit slighted.

There are two common ways that we respond to this slight, neither of which foster a humble servant's heart:

First, we are convinced that if we simply learn more and work longer or harder, the tangible, visible, and more importantly, substantial results that we desire will ensue. If this is your perspective, remember the words of the Apostle Paul: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). We are simply to walk in "good works" (service) which God has prepared for us in advance. We have no capacity to improve on what God has already established.

Second, if we deem our service to be insignificant or unimpressive, we will likely neglect to do it altogether. From our perspective, if the result doesn't meet our expectations, the service isn't worth doing. We want our ministry to count - to make a difference! However, God's Word indicates that "Whatever you do, work heartily, as

for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col 3:23-24).

Apparently, every service - no matter how small - matters if done for the Lord.

So, how can we find joy in serving in our part of the neighborhood, as we tend to our yard? Consider doing the little things. Serve in ways that are, for all intents and purposes, unnoticed. Weed your lawn, by checking your motivation. And grow where you are planted, by seizing the opportunities right around you. Most importantly, never forget to fix your eyes on the sovereign Gardener. His lavish love (1 Jn 4:19), sacrificial service (Mk 10:45), and perfect forgiveness (Eph 4:32) must be the constant motivation as we put into practice the one-anothers.

1 Peter 4:8-11 (ESV) - “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace... in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”