

Who's Your Neighbor?

By: Cory Wittman

When I was five, my mom asked me what I wanted to be doing when I was 30 years old. Being the ambitious -- and apparently extroverted -- farm kid that I was, I told her quite decidedly that I wanted to live in a town where I had neighbors.

I'm sure in my 5-year-old reasoning I was simply drawn to the idea of a broader pool of playmates than my four older siblings who, awesome as they were, liked to drag me down the stairs in the bottom of a sleeping bag. But decades later, having come across neighbors in villages and cities around the world, I have come to better understand both the beauty and the weight of the term.

Having neighbors is a privilege. So is being one.

We know the Golden Rule. The Biblical mandate to "love your neighbor as yourself." But who are those neighbors we're called to love? For us farmers, are we off the hook until a neighboring farmer, a family friend, or maybe a fellow church-goer needs a helping hand?

The neighbors from whom I've learned the most, been challenged the most, and been blessed the most are the ones that look nothing like me. They're the ones that live a little further away, have different cards dealt them, or maybe have needs that make us feel a little uncomfortable.

It's the rough kid in town that came from a broken home and has dreams of college. His part-time fast food job isn't going to pay the bills, and you may not realize it but he's dying for a role model, some positive affirmation....and a job.

It's the outcast, the stranger, the sojourner; maybe the hooligan that shouldn't have been out mudding in the first place but got stuck. And now he needs a lesson in grace, and maybe a little time helping out on the rock picking crew.

Look a little further - or maybe not so far at all - and it's the refugee. The trafficking victim. The kid needing a foster home. The addict. It's easy (most of the time) to love the neighbors that look like us. It's comfortable. It's quickly rewarding. But tell me the last time you did something difficult and I'll tell you the last time you grew.

Seek out and love the neighbors that are hard to love. It'll grow them, and it'll grow you.