



Neighbors and Strangers

I am about to get a new neighbor. This past week, a ‘For Sale’ sign went up across the street from our house. Mary Ann had lived in this house her entire married life, raised her four children there, and stayed well into her nineties, long after her husband had passed away. She knew everything about our street: who had lived there, married there, and died there—and everyone knew Mary Ann, appreciating the attention she would show them. She always kept current on the new neighbors who moved in. Mary Ann would often sit out on her front porch and watch the world of our neighborhood. “I love it here,” she told me on one of our last visits together. In her retirement years, when it got cold, Mary Ann would go to Florida or visit her children living in New Mexico. We could always count on her return home to our street, though. When she was away, my family was charged with removing fallen twigs on her lawn, taking trash cans to and from the curb as needed, and looking after the little blue car she left behind in the driveway.

As I watched her grown children getting the house ready for sale, I tried to imagine their early years. They grew up on this street, toddlers learning to walk and ride bikes, adolescents attending school (where their mother taught). So much time had passed, but so much life was lived there. I sense the sacredness of a whole lifetime of experience in that space. And I have to admit that I feel a part of it, somehow. We did, after all, spend time with Mary Ann when she was home, and had caretaker duties in the absent months, keeping in touch regularly.

A part of me still keeps waiting for Mary Ann’s return home. The reality is, though, that the next arrival will be someone else—strangers to me. I imagine what these new neighbors will be like—a young family with children...with pets? Will they be friendly? Will they be fun?

How will I welcome my new neighbors? Will I let go of the familiarity of the past, ready to receive and embrace new relationships and experiences? Changes aren’t always easy, or predictable. They may hold challenges or offer pleasant surprises. Either way, Jesus was clear about his expectation concerning our approach to the stranger. No matter what, I am aiming to be a blessing!

Those of us who have been in the faith awhile can become too comfortable in our routine and our circles of friends. New acquaintances need our welcome, new generations need the life and faith experience we can bring. This quarter, as you engage God’s Word, listen for his voice. Keep your eye out for someone new to your community, for someone younger than you or different from you—someone you can bless. Be ready to experience something new. You have more to offer than you realize.

By Gail A. Martin
President
Scripture Union USA