

How to be the Neighbor You Always Wanted

by Carol G. Stratton

As we dash around in our Errandmobile to ferry kids to their various activities, we often forget we live in a neighborhood. In our car, we create a world within our neighborhood. We meet friends from church at a coffee shop, have a pedicure at a local spa and shop for groceries shop several miles away. Are we ever at home?

Years ago, few families had second cars; women stayed at home a lot. Their world was smaller and more intimate. They knew every house on the block and the names of all the kids. They knew which children fought a lot and which were best friends. Fun moms would probably feed lunch to a good portion of those kids on a hot summer day.

It can be challenging to enter into the neighborhood life. If you work outside of the home, your time is scarce. If you homeschool, you might have every minute planned inside the house, teaching your little ones. New moms nurse babies and corral preschoolers, and count it as an accomplishment to get dinner on the table.

Here's a challenge for this year. Set a goal to turn your neighborhood on its ears as you serve them. Become the one who always has the cup of sugar when someone runs out and is knee deep in cookies, or the neighbor who drops by for a couple of seconds just to see if a young mom needs something at the grocery store. How about offering to remove the boxes for the newly-relocated family down the block? Could you be the neighbor who shares her extra fern plants to the neighbors across the street who built a new home? Even an offer to walk the dog for an overwhelmed woman opens doors for friendship.

Newcomers fresh from a relocation will relish your visit. Don't stay long but drop off a roster of the names and ages of the families on your street, and keep in frequent contact. What you can offer is a connection to the town. Be a GPS for local places and a sympathetic ear as they unpack and rearrange their new life.

You don't have to teach a weekly two hour Bible study or host a five course dinner party to be hospitable. Just show up occasionally with something in your hand. Call with kindness on your heart, ("I saw your kids out building a snowman; they looked so cute."). It's all about paying attention. You may be surprised how God cracks open the opportunities as you become the neighbor you always wanted.

