

Grace Notes – January 2005

"God's grace for everyday Living"

Becoming God's garbage man

By: Debora M. Coty

I can't believe it! There it is again — my Neighbor's trash, blowing onto my lawn for the umpteenth time, invading my space, becoming my eyesore.

For the last eight months, this problem has been a burr under my saddle...a worm in my salad...a bee at my picnic. With the regularity of a grandpa on grape nuts, each trash pick-up day I can count on bits and pieces of fallen refuse (from the garbage men sloppily emptying cans into their truck) finding its way into my yard.

Maybe it's just the way the wind blows. Perhaps it's the position of my house in the cul-de-

sac. I'm beginning to think it's the devil having a good chuckle about getting under my skin again. He's quite skilled at finding just the right nail to hammer in order to drive a wedge between me and my unsaved neighbors.

These are people who *must* see their loose trash lying beside their cans when they go out to retrieve them, but don't bend down and pick it up. One night, after a grease-stained pizza box had been languishing in the gutter all day, I shoved it back into their yard with my foot so there would be no doubt who "owned" the trash. The next morning, I saw their newspaper lying within two feet of the pizza box, but by the end of the day, the newspaper



was gone while the box was back in the cul-de-sac, heading toward my house.

I finally realized that gnashing my teeth and muttering under my breath was not the best way to witness to these people. It doesn't really speak well of God's love in your heart when you're tossing rotten apple cores over their fence.

My friend Elaine was having a similar problem with her neighbor, and in order to keep the peace, came to a very wise conclusion: *Sometimes you just have to be God's garbage man and deal with someone else's trash.*

So, is becoming God's garbage man a scriptural principle?

My answer was found in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as your self; I am the Lord" (NASB). Well, I guess that's pretty plain... even God's signature at the end, emphasizing his authority for issuing this directive (in case I missed it).

Okay, so how do I go about loving my neighbors on a day-today, trash-on-my-driveway oasis?

Changing my perspective seems to be first in line. If I can see them through God's eyes—through his filter of compassion — perhaps love will eventually follow. My heart did soften a smidge when I learned the husband is in chronic pain due to multiple back surgeries and the wife works two

jobs to make ends meet. Maybe that's why picking up garbage is not a priority for her and impossible for him.

The picture is becoming clearer now. God gave me a strong back and agile fingers so I can serve these needy people in a unique ministry—as their trash picker-upper. I can do that. I *want* to do it. In fact, I think I'll go out right now and remove that hamburger wrapper that's been tangled in their shrubbery for weeks.

And maybe I'll bake them an apple pie before I throw the cores over their fence.