

## 1 \* The Hedge People

We have a large front yard surrounded by a tall cypress hedge. Let me clarify that—it's a hedge to everyone except Art. When Art looks out into our yard, he sees the hedge not as a hedge but as a group of people. The trunks of the hedge look like legs to his failing eyesight, and in his mind there's a large group of people out there. I call them "the hedge people."

The hedge people seem to draw Art. Having been a pastor who started fledgling churches, Art sees any group of people as a potential congregation.

The first time he spotted the hedge people, he whispered in awe, “There’s a small part of a million people out there. Do you think any of them play the piano?”

“Not a one,” I answered, quite sure I was being truthful.

Sometimes Art stands on the front steps and preaches to the hedge people. On other occasions he goes out to talk to them personally. I have watched him march determinedly down the sidewalk, only to arrive at the hedge and look around, bewildered. Where did they go? All those people were just here, and now not a one is in sight.

Not long ago, Art had the notion that he was a delegate at the Brethren National Conference. He searched frantically for pen and paper. He needed to hurry because he did not want to miss the missionary reports. After I had equipped him with the necessary supplies, he headed out to join the hedge people for the session. It was not long before he came back in the house, discouraged. He could not find the meeting.

“Oh, I heard that the missionary reports will be at 5 P.M.—you have time to take a nap,” I suggested.

He was relieved that there was time to rest with such a demanding schedule. “I’m getting old, you know,” he confided.

There are times the hedge people get hungry and need to be fed. One day Art searched long and hard for Leah Belle, his deceased wife. She was hiding out. That woman—trying to get out of work when there were so many hungry people to feed!

By noon, Art himself was getting hungry. He gazed out the window and exclaimed, “There are at least seventy-five people out

there, and they've been standing in line for hours. Not one of them has gotten a plate. I'm not getting in that line."

"Why don't you come back here in the kitchen? I'll give you a plate right now," I offered.

He happily sat down at the breakfast nook. What a lucky break! He could eat right away without standing in line with the hedge people.

One chilly morning Art was on a mission. He was insistent that the hedge people needed to come inside. They were getting cold, and he was worried about them.

"They need to get out of that 'outfit'"—his all-purpose, generic word for any noun that eluded him—"and come in where it's warm," he said.

He stood on the front step, calling and waving them in.

*Harmless activity*, I thought and went back to the office to get some work done.

Pretty soon Art found me. He needed my help.

"Why?" I asked.

"Us," he replied.

"Us?"

"Yes, I thought if we did it together, they'd find it more interesting."

"I have about ten more minutes of work, and then I can come," I told him, hoping that in the meantime he would forget.

Undaunted, Art hurried off to try again. In a flash he returned. "They won't come for a guy, but they'd come running for a girl," he said hopefully.

I went out to the front porch with Art at my side and called in a stage whisper, "Come in! Come in!"

Art was sure that my location and technique were not adequate for the task. We had to get closer, call louder, and make

swooping motions with our arms. Taking me by the hand, he tromped determinedly to the middle of the front lawn and demonstrated how to do it.

Then he looked at me expectantly. It was time for me to join in. So there we stood, in the middle of the front yard, waving our arms and loudly beckoning the hedge people to take refuge from the cold.

My mind was racing. *Could the neighbors see us through the hedge? No doubt they could hear us! What in the world would they think?*

At best, they would think that we were doing some morning calisthenics. At worst, they would be sadly shaking their heads and saying, "It's been too much for her. She's lost her mind."

Oblivious to my discomfort, Art was in high spirits. It's a lonely task ministering to hedge people. But today he had help!

We called loud and long, "Come in! Come in! It's cold! Come in!"

In spite of our enthusiastic gesturing and calling, those hedge people were impossible to convince. Finally I stopped and looked at Art. "They're not coming. Why don't we go inside and have a cup of coffee? We can regroup and try again later."

Dementia was on my side. Somewhere in that cup of coffee, Art forgot all about the hedge people shivering in the cold. I had a little more trouble putting them out of my mind. It's one thing to be a casual observer of Art's ministry to the hedge people, but it was another thing altogether to become an active participant.

### **Caregiver's Prayer**

*Dear God, I accept this job of caregiving as your will for me right now. Help me think of the past with thankfulness rather than a sense of loss. Give me peace and joy as I accept today for what it is, and protect me from longing for what it might have been.*

## **Just Between Caregivers**

### **The Call to Caregiving**

During my lifetime, one of the most important lessons I've learned is that God's will is not just something great that we aspire to do for Him, but rather it is taking whatever job God places in our hands, whether large or small, and doing it for His glory.

Caregiving is a job never aspired to and rarely trained for—one of those unexpected jobs placed in our hands by God to carry out for His glory.