



A Helping Hand

Spring showers were playing tag with spring sunshine. One day brought rain; the next dawned warm and bright, to the delight of all growing things, plants and children alike.

At one edge of the Petersons' yard, a bushy laurel hedge reached higher than Greg's head, higher than Seth's head, and even higher than Dad's head. Now, with spring's warm wet weather, new growth shot out and up from the bushes like long green arms clutching at the bench and swing set that the hedge usually sheltered.

Every spring, the entire family (except Becca) would set aside a day to tackle the big job of cutting and clearing away the unwanted growth before it

took over the yard. If you have bushes or trees to prune at your house, you know what a big job it can be!

Dad had just finished clipping the branches and leaves, and now it was the children's turn. They were each **assigned** a section in which all the leaves and branches were to be raked up, put in the wagon, and hauled to the burning pile in the backyard.

“OK, crew, let's get the show on the road. Seth, you're the oldest, so you can take the longest section,” Dad instructed. “Meg, you are responsible for the next biggest section, and Greg, you have the smallest area. If we all do our parts, we'll be done by lunchtime.”

But Greg didn't want a part! He could almost smell the sunshine; it made him long to roll down the grassy hill and sail through the spring air on the rope swing under the maple tree. Only yesterday, he had figured out how to wrap his legs around the rough rope and swing high over the barbs on the wire fence. That was much more fun than raking leaves.

Instead of piling the laurel in his section, Greg

began to **sulk** and drag the scuffed toes of his boots through the fallen clumps.

“C’mon, Greg, I already have the wagon full. You can use the rake while I dump the load, and you will be done before you know it,” encouraged Seth several minutes later.

“See? I don’t even need the rake!” offered Meg cheerfully. “I can just scoop the leaves up in my arms. Anyway, if you don’t get going, you might not get lunch.”

A few minutes later, Seth returned with the wagon, which Meg immediately set about filling.

Greg was riding the rake like a horse, but had yet to make one pile of leaves.

“Here, Greg. Let me help you with the raking. It goes so quickly when we work together.” With quick strokes, Seth began drawing the laurel twigs and branches in Greg’s section into piles. Greg climbed on top of the split-rail fence beside the hedge and began to swing his legs back and forth, banging them loudly against the rails while he sang a cowboy song that he had just made up.

“Now, it’s your turn, Greg. I need to get back to



my section if I'm going to finish in time for lunch.”

While Meg and Seth **toiled**, Greg played hide and seek in the hedge.

Some time later, Mother appeared to check their work and call the children in for lunch.

“I see that you are done, Seth, and so is Meg. That’s good, because Becca is setting out the napkins and silverware, and lunch is ready. Thank you for all your hard work. We wouldn’t be much of a family if we didn’t all help each other, would we?” Mother’s voice was grateful. “You may go to the house and wash up for lunch.

“What happened to your section, Greg?” Mother

now noticed that Greg, on his hands and knees amid the twigs and leaves, had found a ketchup bottle somewhere and was filling it with slugs. “Why are you playing with slugs,” she **shuddered**, “instead of doing your part?”

“It’s toooooo hard,” Greg complained. “Look! There are pet slugs under the hedge and b’sides, I want to play on the rope swing.”

“Well, lunch and rope swings are only for those who have finished their chores. If you had spent as much time on your work as you did collecting slugs, you would be done by now. You may have lunch only when your work is finished.”

Then Mother followed Seth and Meg into the house.

Of course, Greg was not at all happy with the turn of events. His stomach was starting to gurgle, and he didn’t like having to do chores all by himself. It didn’t seem fair.

Wait! Greg thought, isn’t God always with us? Doesn’t He help us when no one else can or will? Greg would ask God to rake the leaves for him, and then he could go eat his lunch!

“Dear Jesus, I’m starving. Please can you rake my leaves for me? I wanna go in the house, now. Aaaa–MEN.”

Greg waited. He scratched a bug bite on his arm and waited some more. But the only thing that happened was that Dad came out of the house and headed toward the laurel.

“Greg, I see that you still are not done,” rumbled Dad, “and I want to know why.”

“Daddy, it’s not my fault. It takes toooo long. B’sides, I asked God to help me, but He didn’t. I don’t know where He is. Maybe God went away, ’cause all the leaves are still there,” Greg pointed.

Dad squatted down in front of Greg. “Son, God



is not a make-believe Santa Claus. We don't send Him a wish list of what we want and then expect to get everything that's on it like some sort of crazy magic. Anyway, God *did* give you some help, but you didn't take it."

"No, Daddy," Greg shook his head, "I didn't see any help."

"That's because you were thinking about yourself and not of others. Remember when Seth tried to help you? Help doesn't mean doing it *all* for you, it means *helping* while you try hard, too.

"And God helped you in another way. Look at your hands."

Greg looked doubtfully at his hands. "I don't see anything."

"Well, you should see two perfectly good, healthy hands," Dad said. "And who gave them to you? If you ever need a helping hand, the first place you should look is at the end of your own arm.

"You see, Greg, God would not be helping us by doing all of our work for us. He would be harming us by doing that! No, the work that we do is really a gift: to help us, to help others, and to glorify God.

“In a way, all of our work is really for the Lord.” Dad saw that Greg had poked a stick into the ketchup bottle and was now stirring the unfortunate slugs. Perhaps what he had said was too hard for Greg to understand.

Dad tried again. “I know you are still young, but I think you can understand this. Think of little Celia down the road. Do you remember when she was just starting to walk, and she often fell down?”

Greg nodded and felt his own scabby knees through his pants. “Bump, bump, skin your kneebones.”

“If her daddy and mommy had never let her try to walk,” Dad continued, “but instead carried her everywhere so she wouldn’t need to work at walking, do you know what would have happened?”

“She wouldn’t fall down,” Greg said, “and skin her kneebones!”

“But something much worse would happen. If Celia hadn’t worked hard at walking and falling and getting up, she would never have learned to walk at all!” Dad hoped that Greg was getting the idea. “It

would be very hard for her to be a grown-up who couldn't walk, don't you think?"

"A lady is too big to sit in a stroller," Greg pondered. "Maybe she could ride in a wheelbarrow?"

Dad rubbed his head and tried one more time. "You still want to learn to ride a bike, don't you?"

Greg's brown eyes sparkled as he did a little dance with the rake, nearly poking Dad in the eye.

"I wanna ride like Meg and Seth!"

"Are you sure? If it sounds like too much work, we could just ask Seth and Meg to push you around on the bike instead."

"Oh, no, Daddy. That's not fun. I wanna ride a bike all by myself. I can do it, I know I can... if I try."

Greg looked at the rake in his hands and at the laurel branches, as if seeing them for the first time. "And I can clean these up, too, Daddy. I'm sorry I was pokey."

"I'm glad Jesus gave me two hands, so I can rake, and ride a bike, and do things all by myself. It's not fun to have somebody else do it all 'stead of me. B'sides, they won't. I already asked. Meg said if I want slugs, I hafta pick them up myself."



“[St. Paul] instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should he eat.”
—2 *Thess.* 3:10

“Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord...”
—*Col.* 3:23

New Vocabulary

assigned a job: given a job

sulk: pout

toiled: worked

shuddered: shook in disgust

Questions

1. Why did Greg have to do his raking “all by himself”?
2. Seth helped Greg by raking part of the leaves for him. What key word did Seth use that tells the best way for a family to work?
3. Mother said, “We wouldn’t be much of a family if we didn’t all” do what?
4. Dad said that work is a gift given for three different reasons. Name the three reasons.
5. If God doesn’t do exactly what we want, does it mean that He’s not there? Why do you think that God doesn’t always give us what we want?