

5 Things I Love About Rural Ministry

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I've spent my entire 14-year ministry in a rural context. While it's been a true blessing, it wasn't my plan.

As I was finishing seminary, my mind was set on planting an urban church. I attended a church-planting conference, read all the literature, and prepared myself as best as I could. But in the providence of God, my plans never materialized.

Looking back, I'm glad they didn't. I was pretty wet behind the ears and probably would've failed at church planting. After a few years of pastoral ministry, I realized I didn't fit the mold of a typical church planter, much less an urban one. Rural ministry, on the other hand, suits me just fine.

What do I love so much about ministry in a small place? At least five things.

1. The People

No matter what context you're in—rural, urban, or anywhere in between—if you don't love people, pastoral ministry isn't for you. If God calls you to the pastorate, he'll give you a special love for the people among whom you minister.

There's a dear lady in our church who loves making our family corn pone. We never ask her for corn pone; she makes it just because she wants to. In this small way she's a blessing to us, and I could tell a million more stories about folks like her.

2. The Pace

Some rural churches are a hive of activity, but I'd say most operate at a slower pace than our urban counterparts. Rural churches tend to be more *seasonal*. Case in point: I've learned not to crowd our church calendar during hunting season because everyone hunts.

There've been times I've wanted to put the pedal to the metal in moving along a particular project or ministry. But on multiple occasions the Lord has seemed to say, "Be patient." And sure enough, in due time those projects have come to fruition with very little effort on my part.

Even though it drives some pastors nuts, I've come to embrace the slower pace typical of rural ministry.

3. The Space

I've always enjoyed traveling to big cities—looking up and seeing enormous skyscrapers, taking in all the sights and sounds. I don't see that changing. But one of the things I love about rural living is the space. Our family often goes on walks in the fields and woods around our home. Likewise, I have plenty of room to get out of the church office and stretch my legs.

God's creation is marvelous ([Ps. 19:1](#))! By and large, rural living enables you to enjoy creation in a way urban living does not. When I need to pray and clear my mind, there's nothing better than going on a hike (and there's no shortage of trails around here).

4. The Family Vibe

If you have a young family, I'm not sure there's a better place to raise kids than in the country. Rural areas generally offer more affordable housing than urban living, as well as many unique amenities.

When we moved to Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, we rented a farmhouse for the first year and a half. One day, our landlord asked if we wanted some laying hens. I was surprised he wanted to give them up for free, and my wife and I decided to take them. Now we Stegemens are chicken people (and we've since added a rooster to the mix). Our kids love it. Rural living has a way of surprising you.

5. The Community Vibe

There's a sense of community pride in small places. People love their community and aren't afraid to invest in it. The community I previously served had an annual event the Sunday after Thanksgiving called "Light the Night." The organizers put a lot of work into it, and they even invited me to speak on a couple of occasions. I viewed this as an open door for the word ([Col. 4:3](#)) and did my best to preach Christ. Such events packed the city calendar a half-century ago. They're a rarity now.

Rural ministry offers opportunities you won't find elsewhere. I noticed our local newspaper, the *Lewistown Sentinel*, was inviting pastors to submit articles for their weekend edition. I jumped at the opportunity and began contributing an article monthly. I can't tell you how many people have expressed their appreciation. I'm grateful for this open door for the gospel ([Col. 4:3](#)) that enables me to minister to the community at large.

We've had many neighbors over the years who have been kind, hospitable, and downright neighborly. We've tried to be that to them as well, and to point them to the hope we have in Christ ([1 Pet. 3:15](#)).

It's Ministry

At the end of the day, rural ministry is ministry. No matter where folks live, they need the Lord ([Rom. 10:13](#)), and it's an immense privilege to shepherd his people anywhere.

Personally, I'm thankful he placed us out in the sticks.

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<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-rural-ministry/>