

A Surprising Lesson From a Child With a Disability

"When you say," my friend asked, "that God has worked in your life because of your kids with special needs, what exactly do you mean by that?"

"Yes, let me try to explain. ... I don't just *know* about the fruit of the Spirit, I get to *experience* them. It's like I was right there in the orchard, picking them and tasting them."

Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these" (NIV).

When my daughter was born with Down syndrome, I struggled to see God's good gift in my daughter. I was too concerned about how her diagnosis would limit our family. Little did I know that her diagnosis was indeed a gift in my life that God would use time and time again.

I used to think I loved well. I would have even claimed to love my family and first daughter (who is a typical child) unconditionally. My daughter's diagnosis challenged me in that area. I knew little about loving someone not for what they can or cannot do, but simply because they are. No strings attached, not based on performance or meeting my expectations. Pure love.

The older my daughter is, the more joy I experience as she celebrates everyday life. She doesn't hold back. She cheers over a bag of chips, she claps to cheer others or she jumps and runs to give her daddy hugs.

While parenting children with special needs can be difficult, I have peace about it. This is exactly where God wants me to

be, and I am OK with that.

Having kids with special needs quickly teaches you about patience. My two girls with special needs don't do things like their peers do. They take a little bit longer, and they do it in their own time.

Thanks to my daughter, kindness has become a more prevalent part of my life. I have a better understanding about what really matters in life, and it makes a difference with how I approach life.

It doesn't take long to be a part of the special-needs community to realize it is made up of remarkable people. There is so much goodness and acceptance in the special-needs community.

Just watch a parent with their child with special needs, and you see the faithfulness in the parent, the commitment to care for that child.

I have more compassion for all people because of my children with special needs. There is a gentleness in me that wasn't there before.

I exercise self-control often. Some people say rude things without realizing what they are saying. Sometimes I want to lash out and be angry because I am hurt. In those moments, it takes self-control to smile, to be gentle, kind and respond with love.

I've really been thinking about this lately, so I decided to look up the verse in different translations so I could take more time to meditate on the fruit of the Spirit the special-needs way. When I came to the version in The Message, I knew it was perfect for us special-needs parents—a perfect summary of how we do indeed get to taste the fruit:

“But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into

our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog. Ellen is a pastor's wife and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. She has been published by Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.*