

Living the Contradiction

If you walked into my **church** today, most likely you will feel uncomfortable. We have a large sanctuary that sits around 300 people, but we have only 30 people in the pews. It feels a little empty.

I can't let go.

We know how our church looks from the outside, and we know what people think looking in, because we have wrestled with the same thought ourselves.

Is this church dead?

Are we making a difference?

Are we getting anywhere?

Are people finding hope, healing, friendship, grace?

What are we doing here?

We've felt discouraged. We've felt lonely. We've felt helpless.

And I've felt like walking away, leaving it all behind and having a fresh start. I've looked at our church as a pile of dead bones. But then **God** reminded me that He gives life, and He can breathe life back into a pile of bones.

A few months ago, I killed the dead bones with a little rock. I thought about the **bitterness**, the **broken relationships**, the hurt, the manipulation, the **loneliness** of the church, my own **doubt**, my **unbelief**, my sin—the dead bones.

And I threw that rock as hard as I could, a symbol of killing the giant that has been keeping God from breathing life into this place.

Then two weeks ago, I attended the Breathe Christian Writer's

Conference. The keynote speaker, Latayne Scott, talked about faith in a way I'd never heard before. She said there are three stages of faith: the promise, the contradiction and the fulfillment.

The Promise: Stage One

God called us here. He reminded me of the dead bones and how He can breathe life back into this place.

The Contradiction: Stage Two

Looking from the outside, it doesn't look like we have a thriving church. Some are concerned about the finances of our church. Some might look at the number of new visitors (or lack of visitors) and think we should give up.

The Fulfillment: Stage Three

And I wonder, How many times have I heard the call or received the promise yet have turned away during the contradiction stage? Have I not seen the promise fulfilled because I've let the contradiction overwhelm me? How many times have I given up during the contradiction?

But not this time. This time, I'm holding on.

I am holding on to that contradiction, because I know what comes next. I want to see God's promise fulfilled. I want to see life breathed into the bones.

I am holding on really tight, and I might even have to close my eyes sometimes just to hold on, because living the contradiction is hard, discouraging, and to this world it might seem foolishness not to let go.

I can't let go. I'm living the contradiction, but I'm holding on to see the fulfillment of the promise.

I want to watch God breathe life back into this church. I want to be a part of it.

Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog at . Ellen is a pastor's wife and 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 in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone and Mamapedia among others.