

When Life Turns Out Different Than You Expected

Did you ever think that you would be where you are right now? Are your circumstances what you expected them to be? Your marriage? Your children? Your career? Or is your life different than expected?

When I was a junior in high school, the associate pastor from our church joked with me once and said, "Ellen, maybe someday you will marry a pastor." To my parent's great embarrassment I laughed at his comment and assured him, "I will never marry a pastor. I don't want that kind of life, I want so much more. I want to have a successful job, money to travel the world, live in a nice house, drive new cars, and whatever else I fancy." The pastor was generous; he smiled right back and assured me, "You never know what the future holds." I was sure being a pastor's wife was not in my future.

It was with great shock I called one of my good friends when we were in college and said, "I really like this guy, he is amazing, goodness I like him so much I could marry him, wants to be a pastor!" He stole my heart, what can I say.

I married a pastor, and our lives are not what I expected, this life is beautiful. Although it is not easy being the "pastor's wife" I now look back and laugh at the silly teenager that cared so much about material things. We have traveled the world together on mission trips and in our journey to adopt our middle child. Money does not measure our success. And I happen to think our little house is pretty cute, comfortable, and most important, it is home.

I never imagined I would be the mother of a child with Down syndrome, or any special need for that matter. I would have been the first in the line of those that claim, "I could never

do it!” And I wrongfully believed the irrational idea that, “God only gives special children to special parents.”

I struggled with Nichole’s diagnosis of Down syndrome, but God changed me. No, he transformed me. The beautiful life of our daughter Nichole led us to adopt a little girl with cerebral palsy. Two kids with special needs? This is definitely not what I expected when I thought about being a mom. But I wouldn’t have it any other way. I love the gifts I have in each one of my girls. They are so different, so unique, so precious.

Oh how great were the plans I had envisioned for my future. I had the drive to pursue those passions, yet little by little, I changed. From career choices, investing time in projects, and learning about the things that really matter in life, I became a different me.

This life I live is different than I expected. A rich mosaic put together, piece by piece, creating something beyond what I ever envisioned. I am thankful that my plans were not to be. Thankful for this beautiful life God has given me. Oh, there is plenty of brokenness in me—selfishness, lack of discipline, jealousy—but I am learning to find beauty in the broken places of my life, allowing God to transform me and to guide me in this journey of life.

Ellen Stumbo *writes and speaks about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She’s passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. Ellen’s writing has appeared on Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, Mamapedia and the Huffington Post.*