


Life is not a race

By Rita Buettner

You may have thought by now you'd be married. Or own your house. Or have a  child. Or two.

You set those milestones on your mental checklist, but the pieces just aren't falling into place. Meanwhile, the people around you seem to hit them so easily.

It can be easy to feel discouraged and left behind.

I have felt that way many times. I remember going to weddings and wondering whether I would ever be married. After I met and married my husband, I remember how it seemed that all the couples around us gave birth, sometimes for the third or fourth time - and we still waited to become parents. When we decided to adopt, we watched other families who were matched with their children ahead of us.

Life doesn't always seem fair. And God's timing often doesn't match ours.

But life is also not a race. And many of the dreams you have along the way ultimately become reality eventually, or a different dream comes true.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding," Proverbs says. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

That sounds so simple. Still, it can be difficult to be patient, wondering what the future holds - especially when you feel called to a particular vocation. And it is so easy to look at others and see them realizing the dreams you have in their own lives and feeling that you are left behind.

Earlier this summer, in my work for Loyola University Maryland, I had the opportunity to meet some incoming first-year students when they came to visit campus with their parents. I suddenly realized that I am old enough to be the parent of a college freshman. It took my breath away to imagine sending a child off to college - what a significant moment in the life of a family, yet a moment so far off in my future. But if I had had my way, it wouldn't be.

On my imaginary timeline, I would have met my husband in college, we would have started our family soon afterward, and we would be sending children to college soon ourselves.

Instead, I met an amazing man years later than I expected. Our children didn't arrive when we thought they would - in fact, we traveled twice to China to adopt our sons - so today we are the parents of a 6-year-old and an 8-year-old.

So instead of helping my child pack for college, I spend my evenings tripping over little plastic Army soldiers on my dining room floor and my mornings trying to persuade the young men we are raising to stop playing games with their animal vitamins and eat their breakfast.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

It's much easier for me to look back into the past and see what God had in mind than it was to look forward to the time when I felt a bit at sea. I remember sitting with my friend Father Thomas Pietrantonio, a Capuchin Franciscan who lived in Wilmington, Del., and talking to him about how confused I was that my life wasn't falling into place the way I had thought it would.

In his quiet, patient way, Father Tom explained that we think of time in one way, but for God the concept of time is so different. He can see the whole continuum, and he doesn't hear a ticking clock the way you do when you are waiting for the next chapter in your life to begin.

Life is certainly a journey, but it's not a race. I'm on my path, and you're on yours. And we will reach the finish line in our own time. Let's hope we can find the strength, the patience, and the courage to wait and prepare for whatever that next stage in our life will require.

As St. Thérèse of Lisieux said, "May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be."

Read more commentary [here](#).