

**Group Study on Genetic and pre-natal screening**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

The thought of having a child with a disability or disease can be incredibly distressing. Will our child have a good quality of life? How will we cope? This was not a part of our plan!

Advances in medical technology have given scientists and doctors an increased ability to predict whether a child is likely to be born with a disability or disease.

During pregnancy, women are routinely offered blood tests and ultrasounds to determine the likelihood of a child being born with chromosomal abnormalities such as Down’s Syndrome. An overwhelming majority of unborn children diagnosed with such abnormalities are aborted. This is the case even though diagnoses are by no means perfect.

IVF clinics also offer a service called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis which involves testing embryos in vitro for genetic disorders, discarding those that carry a defective gene, and setting aside “healthy” embryos for possible future transfer into the mother’s uterus.

Christians need not fear pre-natal testing during pregnancy if doing so will help doctors to monitor the health of the mother and baby and offer any possible treatments along the way; plan for any special post-natal care that may be required; and enable the parents to prepare for the reality of having a child with special needs.

But how should Christians view the option of pregnancy termination or embryo destruction as a response to genetic screening?

Genetic screening resulting in termination of pregnancy or embryo destruction gives us the sense that we are “in control”. But are we really? Parents may go to all lengths to prevent a child with a disability or disease from being born. However, we don’t know what life will bring for our children. Humans are never immune from suffering, and we cannot predict or control what suffering our children will face. We need to surrender our desire to be in control. God calls us to love and trust him above all things. He is the author of life, not us.

Scripture reminds us that all human life is a gift from God, and something that is valuable in and of itself (Genesis 1: 26-27). This is in contrast with the view that new life is simply a ‘product’ or ‘object’ which has value because it fits in with our idea of what is desired or accepted. Christ calls us to love with a radical, self-sacrificial love. He invites us to come to Him for rest when we are feeling weary and burdened by the task (Matthew 11:28).

There is a great opportunity for the Christian community to rally around families who are preparing to welcome a child with a disability or disease. We can help by delighting in the life that has been given, walking alongside them in their journey, and loving them through the challenges and the many (often unexpected) joys.

*Discussion questions*

* Is having a disability or a disease a reason to give up on life? Why or why not?
* Our culture seems to suggest that we all have the right to a perfect life. Do you agree with this statement? Does raising a child with a disability challenge that assumption?
* Many unborn babies who have been identified with possible Down’s syndrome have been terminated. Why do you think this is the case?
* How would you prepare yourself to having a child with severe disabilities?
* If life is a gift (Gen 1:26-27), why do we sometimes treat it as a burden?
* How can you assist those you know who are struggling with a child with disabilities? Is it your Christian responsibility to help?

*Close with prayer*

*Further resources*

* ‘A World Without Down’s syndrome’, BBC Documentary 2016 by actress Sally Phillips, available to view for free on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8audGmlFc4>
* Book: ‘Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics’ by Melinda Tankard Reist (2006). The book may be purchased through the author’s website <http://melindatankardreist.com/products-page/books/defiant-birth/>
* Article: ‘A Christian Perspective on Prenatal Screening and Diagnosis in Australia’ by Christian Medical Dental Fellowship of Australia Inc (2015). This paper is available for free download: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283084249_A_Christian_Perspective_on_Prenatal_Screening_and_Diagnosis_in_Australia>