

The Truth About Children With Disabilities

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Our third child was born with a rare genetic disorder called Williams Syndrome. She lacks about twenty genes on chromosome 7, causing physical and mental disabilities. Life is now different, as those of you who have a child (or children) with special needs know well. Hospital visits have multiplied. Sleepless hours in the middle of the night with a child in seeming pain are normal. The future seems so unpredictable.

Though our lives have been altered significantly, we are not despairing. We anticipate many more challenges, but we have found Scripture to be especially precious to us recently. God has much to say about our daughter's life, strengthening us for the long haul. If you are a parent of a disabled child, we hope these truths will encourage and inspire you:



1. Children with disabilities should be respected as God's image-bearers.

This does not mean that we should rejoice in their disabilities. They are present because of Adam's sin. Realities like suffering, sickness, broken relationships, disabilities, and death are part of the curse that God decreed. We have *all* been affected by the fall. Disability is a more visible form of the essential brokenness that is a reality for everybody. The appropriate reaction to our child's diagnosis, then, like our response to every other consequence of the fall, should be sadness, because it's a result of original sin against God.

The child God has given you is a unique creation of God made in His image (Ps. 139:13-14; Gen. 1:26-27). Every person is "like" God to one degree or another (we have been given responsibility over creation, we have complex emotions and relationships, we reason and create, etc.). Though sin has marred our likeness to God, the image of God in man has not been erased (cf. Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Therefore, *every* child deserves our love, care, respect, and honor. They are valuable gifts from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). Rejoice in their lives!

2. Children with disabilities need the Savior more than good health.

All children, even those with severe disabilities, are born "in Adam," not "in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22). They are sinners like the rest of us. We can be optimistic that God will save those who were born without the mental capacity to express faith, but the Bible actually does not spell this out as clearly as you might think. Our desire, though, is not to address that issue. Our primary concern is to say that every child is born in sin and needs the

Savior. Though our children's disabilities make them "different" in certain ways, they are just like every other child in this most fundamental need.

We will and should spend large amounts of time with hospital visits, treatments, therapy sessions, and doing research about the disability. God tells us to "do good to all people" (Gal. 6:10). But if we are not careful, we may act and potentially start believing that healing from a disability (or at least a level of improvement) is the ultimate good we can bring about in the child's life. Instead, we should realize that even if they are cured, they will still die one day, and after that face judgment (Heb. 9:27).

Jesus modeled for us how to care for those with disabilities. He caused the paralytic to walk, but he first forgave him of his sins (Mark 2:1-12). He made the blind man see, and later He sought him out and gave him spiritual sight (John 9). Jesus said, "I came that they may have life" (John 10:10). Remember His example. Temporal needs must be addressed, but reconciliation with God is far more important than relief from a disability.

3. God brings children with disabilities into this world for good purposes.

God may use the disability to show a child that he is a dependent creature living in a fallen world. God might then open the child's eyes to the reality of sin and his need for a Savior. Why would God do it this way? We don't know, but He is good and always does what is right (Ps. 34:8). We would rather God use a disability to save our child than have a child with perfect health who spends eternity in Hell.

What about parents? In Romans 8:28, Paul writes, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." That is a hope-giving verse for believing parents. God could eliminate a child's disability in an instant (Ps. 135:6; Is. 45:6-7). If it remains (or even worsens), God has not failed. He is at work for His glory and our good. He is surely causing us to trust Him more. Or, He has plans to introduce us to people at the hospital(s) who are suffering without hope, that we might point them to the great Hope. He may even awaken us to our sinful neglect of the rejected of this world.

God may have hundreds, if not thousands, of good purposes in bringing a single child with a disability into this world. We can sing with confidence, "His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower."¹

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¹ From William Cowper's hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."