

Down syndrome dangers

A new prenatal policy is the worst kind of social engineering

Every year we look forward to Doug volunteering at family retreats that we hold for disabled children and their moms and dads. He is young and athletic, a senior in college, handsome, articulate, and intelligent. The kids love him (and so do a few girl volunteers). When he first began volunteering, we assigned Doug to a little boy with Down syndrome. The two hit it off wonderfully. This energetic young man possessed a knack for relating to the boy; from that year onward, he always asked to be assigned to children with Down syndrome and their parents.



Recently Doug said, “Joni, when I get married, I hope that my wife and I will have a child with Down syndrome.” I was startled, but chalked it up to youthful idealism. Since then, I have come to see that Doug meant what he said. He observed a special joy in children and adults with Down syndrome, as well as a godliness that strengthened his faith. He could also tell these children blessed the lives of the moms and dads to whom he administered over the years.

I thought of Doug earlier this year when the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists began recommending broader prenatal testing for Down syndrome among younger pregnant women. Up until this year, they recommended that only older women who were pregnant be tested. But now, *all* mothers-to-be are routinely tested. The results? Over 90 percent of pregnant women who are given a Down syndrome diagnosis choose to have an abortion.

This breaks my heart. And it translates into a strange future for the kids Doug loves. It's going to be a lonely world for them — they will have far fewer friends with Down syndrome in the future. There are 5,500 children born with Down syndrome each year; they incur from mild to moderate mental retardation. These young people will now have fewer community programs, as well as reduced funds for medical research.

This is why there are growing numbers of parents crisscrossing the continent speaking to the blessings — even advantages — of raising a Down syndrome child. These parents are sharing their stories and explaining how a Down syndrome child can bless his siblings and draw a family closer together. They say that young women who are considering abortion don't understand, nor do they realize the benefits a Down syndrome baby brings to a family. Unfortunately, the only counsel these women are receiving from their obstetrician is often a brochure.

I am *deeply* concerned about this trend. Abortion is now used as a “disability prevention measure.” The effort to eliminate Down syndrome translates into the worst kind of social engineering: the annihilation of an entire group of people who are precious. Our alternative: Accept the love and the God-blessed joys of raising a child — a life — that God has given. Jesus says, “*Bless the little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*” Even children with Down syndrome.

A person with Down syndrome may never understand how to keep up with the Joneses or how to get over his head in debt. He or she may never be clever enough to sneak behind his spouse's back and look for an illicit affair (yes, men and women with Down syndrome do marry, and some of those marriages are honest-to-goodness models to neighbors and friends). They won't be cunning enough to know how to cheat, weave lies, or how to stab a friend in the back. People with Down syndrome may not have driver's licenses, but then again, neither do I — and I get around quite well for a quadriplegic.

That new ruling by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is a sad reflection of the growing premise in our society that a person is “better off dead than disabled.” Human beings are no longer being treated as people, but as *things* that can be dispensed with, altered, aborted, or euthanized. The medically fragile — whether the elderly, the unborn, or the children Doug serves — are left exposed and vulnerable in a society that has lost its moral bearings, its heart.