

A Good and Perfect Gift: Faith, Expectations, and a Little Girl Named Penny

Questions for Discussion

Over the course of the narrative, Amy Julia's understanding of the nature of perfection changes. How did she originally understand perfection, and how does Penny's life change that concept? How do you think our culture thinks about "the perfect life" or "perfect children"?

What needed to happen for Amy Julia to be able to receive Penny as a gift?

Have there been times in your life when your expectations weren't met? How did you adjust your desires and expectations to match your new reality?

Amy Julia and Peter decide to have Penny baptized even though at one point Amy Julia had been opposed to infant baptism. Why does she change her mind?

Amy Julia and the other women with children with Down syndrome share their stories surrounding prenatal testing. What problems exist because of prenatal testing? Is there anything good that comes of it?

On page 167, Amy Julia shares a journal entry about her hopes and fears. What is she most afraid of? How are those fears addressed?

In the beginning of the story, Amy Julia and Peter talk about how they would take away Penny's extra 21st chromosome if they could. By the middle of the narrative, they aren't sure any longer. What do you think they would say now? Why? Having read this story, how would you answer this question?

Amy Julia writes about accepting the limitations that come with Down syndrome. She also writes about the "soft bigotry of low expectations." How do these parents both accept Penny for who she is and push her to overcome expectations at the same time?

Amy Julia struggles throughout the book to understand why Penny has Down syndrome. Does she ever understand it?

Have there been times in your life when you have wanted to know "why" something happened? How have you handled it?