

“Truly Gifted”

I ran across an article from the Korean Herald this week totally randomly. It was titled, “A Record IQ is just another talent.” The focus of the article was on 48-year-old Kim Ung-yon who according to the Guinness holds the world’s record for his 210 IQ. The article starts off by saying ‘the former whiz kid feels happy with ordinary life despite media expectations.’

Able to solve intricate math equations at age four Kim notes that the media belittles the fact that Kim chose to work in a business planning department rather than continuing at NASA or in some Government position or solving some of life’s mysteries. The media is quoted as labeling Kim as a “failed Genius.” Kim is noted to have worked for NASA at age 8 and worked there for 10 years. Kim says, “At that time, I led my life like a machine—I woke up, solved the daily assigned equation, ate, slept, and so forth. I really didn’t know what I was doing, and I was lonely and had no friends.” Upon his return to Korea the media made him feel “like a monkey at the zoo.” He was tired of the attention. Ironically, before he could get a job in Korea, he had to get his elementary, middle, and high school diplomas which he originally bypassed. He obviously passed the equivalency exams.

The article references another “gifted” child, 16-month-old Jonathon Rader, apparently able to play various musical instruments. The press has looked at this child with the same expectations of greatness. But Kim essentially asks, ‘what if Rader doesn’t want to pursue music long term?’ Of course, Kim whom the child is compared to is said by the Korean media to be a bad example for the youngster because Kim has chosen such an ordinary life. Doesn’t matter to Kim. Kim claims too much meaning is invested in the meaning of IQ. In short, gifted children are often cornered into meeting the expectations of those around them. It’s like an episode of the movie “Good Will Hunting.” IQ is not independent of one’s hopes and dreams.

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Giftedness is a true value. But what is giftedness and how should it be applied? Paul makes the point in Romans 12:4-8 to say we all have giftedness to offer. “⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

All gifts are in essence spiritual gifts especially since what we have is Spirit given. Paul’s list in Romans 12 is not an exhaustive list. Someone’s gift may also be math, or computers, or it may be an ability to comfort people or drawing cartoons for children’s books. The important clue though is vs 6 which reminds us that “Each of us has gifts according to the grace given us.” The current giftedness of my grandkids is just be a joy for grandparents to be around even as they don’t even realize how much joy their bring. You may be a joy to someone too. Or you may be just the right kind of help. The point is that grace is given to each of us something to share. We are in effect all gifted. And these gifts are spiritual.

What should our gifts be applied? First, the trouble with giftedness is that some gifts get more respect than others as if one gift supersedes the rest. The media calls Kim a “failed Genius.” If there is one thing we learn it is that a high IQ is not the end all be all. We all remember Solomon as the wisest man who ever lived (other than Jesus). He was so smart that he outsmarted his own faith in God. He didn’t use his wisdom for godly things but for selfish things. His failure to apply his wisdom in a godly fashion held spiritual consequences for himself and for the Israelite kingdom. So, I think Kim is on to something here. A gift is never independent. Solving math all day doesn’t resolve loneliness or a need for friendship. Being great at one thing doesn’t separate itself from needing encouragement or friendships. I can’t imagine never going to school, not making friends, nor knowing the joy of a graduation ceremony. A life of just math sacrifices too many other necessary things in human life. I digress. The trouble of giftedness is not the gift but the perception of its value and then human nature that is so prone to see IQ as valuable but not something like peacemaking or gentleness.

1 Corinthians 12 Paul speaks of God's people as a body with many parts. The same Spirit distributes the gifts to God's people. Gifts are not meant to be in competition with other gifts but a complement to other gifts. For example, a gifted farmer may have expertise on growing crops but not without someone gifted in making tractors or someone gifted in refining fuel.

The gift of tongues was a big hit in the Corinthian church, thought to be really cool stuff. I've run into certain Christians who have told me that I am not even Christian because I can't speak in tongues. Now, we don't have time for a full conversation on tongues here but I always wonder why there is such a heavy emphasis on tongues and not on Galatians 5:22-23—"Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Gentleness is pretty important especially in the realm of being tactful. Why not be gifted in tact? Even among Christians it's easy to weigh one kind of gift as more valuable than another. Yet, if the Spirit gives us each spiritual gifts Paul's argument is that a hand cannot say to the foot I don't need you. The value of each gift is in how they complement other gifts. The body of Christ is only whole because of the variety of the Spirit's gifts. Each of us is a part of the body and therefore, have a giftedness given to us.

Each of us is gifted. Maybe it's not a record IQ. Maybe its an ability to cook or something seemingly ordinary. When one looks at Grace, where would we be if not for the variety of gifts that are employed in the service of God? Ministry exists because of Spiritual gifts given to each of us. May the Lord give us eyes to see and identify our gifts, to value of our gifts as gifts of the Spirit, and the wisdom to apply our gifts in a way that brings glory to Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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John 3:30