

Gifted?... or Having Gifts?

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There is an important difference between being gifted and having gifts. God gives each one of us gifts, some more than others, and we are responsible for using our gifts to the best of our ability. This is taught very plainly in the Parable of the Talents. However, some people not only have gifts given to them, but also they are gifted. What does this mean?

Putting a label on giftedness is like trying to describe beauty. Based on a variety of knowledge, we recognize beauty but can't define it concretely. So it is with giftedness. I will set forth some facts and conclusions about being gifted and you will be better equipped to recognize a gifted child.

The following is a list of characteristics that are frequently evident in the gifted:

- Displays a great curiosity about things, situations, or events.
- Is interested in a wide variety of things.
- Learns rapidly, easily, and efficiently.
- Walked and/or talked earlier than most children.

— Has a large vocabulary for his age.

— Shows an early interest in reading and words.

— Frequently reads before he enters school.

— Retains information without much rote or drill.

— Has a good memory.

— Makes collections of things that are advanced for his age.

— Uses a lot of common sense and practical knowledge.

— Reasons things out, thinks clearly, recognizes relationships.

— Knows many things of which other children are unaware.

— Can read books that are one or two years above age.

— Performs difficult mental tasks.

— Demonstrates intellectual curiosity.

— Shows perseverance and the capacity for self direction.

— Has long attention span for things of interest.

— Wants to learn.

An excellent memory is the most prevalent sign of giftedness.

Some early signs to watch for are:

— Unusual alertness, watching

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and listening intently.

- Eyes focusing on an object for a longer period of time than is true of other children.

- Walking before first birthday.

- Ambidextrous for some period of time.

- Use more complex sentence structure.

- Develop a larger vocabulary.

- Show an early interest in books.

- Express themselves better than other children.

- Avid interest in reading prior to school age — many have taught themselves.

- Unbounded curiosity.

Although not all gifted children will exhibit the same characteristics, if a child exhibits some of these early signs, giftedness may be indicated.

The single most distinguishing feature is the *way* they learn. They need far less details and fewer repeated instructions. They are and must be very active in the learning process. They easily learn that the process is the *path*, not the *goal* of learning.

To teach them we must understand their characteristics which they bring to learning. The following is a brief list of some of their learning characteristics:

- Learn faster, deeper.

- Insatiable appetites.

- See whole pictures — not parts.

- Divergent thinkers — bring facts together.

- Vary in interest.

- See patterns.

- Seem to learn effortlessly.

- Problem solvers.

- Need a facilitator.

Gifted students bring a deeper perspective to the same projects. We must deal with the nature of their intelligence rather than the level of their intelligence.

With their unusual characteristics also come unique problems. We assume that they are independent learners. **THEY ARE NOT!** They are very interested in learning, but they are not independent, they need guidance. Studies have shown that gifted students left unchallenged, become average students in a short period of time. They don't *remain* average if someone finds the key to teach them differently. They spend the majority of their time in the regular classroom so it is important that instructional adaptations be made in the regular education program for the unique instructional needs of the gifted. Intelligence is not static; it is capable of both increasing and decreasing.

Another problem that we come across when teaching them is that because the gifted child can often solve problems at the abstract level, he may lose some of the values that work could develop. Consequently, the gifted child

needs to learn that the knowing and the doing are two different things. He needs to make himself go through the process so that when he encounters a problem too hard even for him he will know the steps to take to arrive at a solution.

Research has shown us that twenty percent of any school population needs special education. Ten percent are slow learners or students with special problems and they are taught differently than the average. Ten percent are students with high I.Q.'s and yet their education, for the most part, is the same as the average. Working below their potential in a regular classroom

deteriorates their above average abilities.

Christian educators must make sure that the gifted children in their classes are developing all of their God-given academic talents rather than coasting through an unchallenging school curriculum.

Being gifted affects both the children who are gifted and those around them. Gifted students must learn through experience that the reason God has given them additional gifts is that they may build up the body of Christ. Christian educators must help their students see that all of life is service to God, and that in everything they do they must give their *best* to the Master. ■□■