

A Bright New Hope

Jeremiah 29:11

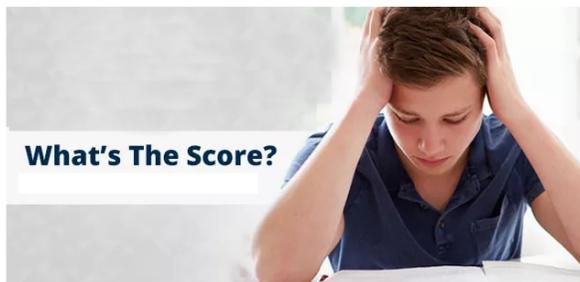
*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”*

I hated school. I loved study and learning but classrooms did not fit my learning style. Being ADD (attention deficit disorder) with a busy mind and loads of imagination much of my grade school years were wasted on daydreams, paper airplanes, spit wads, straight pin darts, and anything but listening to a teacher drone on and on. I really identify with Charles Schultz’s comic strip, *Peanuts*. He depicts Charlie Brown’s teacher with the sound of a trombone going, “Wah-wah, wah-wah, wah.” That’s about all I heard my teachers saying.

A fascinating thing happened in the sixth grade at Boyd elementary school. For the first time in my life I had a male teacher. That was rare. I believe it was God’s doing. Mr. McNew also attended our church. I remember one day while I was doodling pencil drawings, making spit wads, and basically ignoring the teacher, that all of sudden Mr. McNew threw a piece of chalk at me as he was lecturing. I saw it coming. I ducked and it missed me, but I got the point. I was supposed to be listening.

That year he announced that we were to have IQ testing. I dreaded that. I hated tests, and still do today. I freeze on exams. I remember taking the test and thinking this was pretty easy. It wasn’t asking a myriad of questions about science, math or English. It was different. It was more of a reasoning and logic test. It didn’t really feel like a test. It was more of an exercise. It was one of the original multiple choice tests where you answer by blacking in a circle with a special pencil. That was easy.

The surprise came weeks later when the results of the IQ tests came back. Mr. McNew announced that he was astounded by the results, and though he was not supposed to reveal students’ IQ, he said he thought it was important to do so for someone’s sake in that classroom. So, he proceeded to list the top three IQ scores in our class of 30. Top dog was John Campbell. Everyone knew he was the smartest kid in the class with straight A’s. Then, Trula Brooks, who was our neighbor and later became my girlfriend. Finally the



teacher said, "And now here is the surprise. The third smartest kid in this class is...Richard LaFountain, and he gave the IQ score. I was shocked. My friends were shocked. The whole class gasped audibly.

Mr. McNew asked me to stay after class to talk with him. I was terrified. He said, "Dick, I don't know if you understand what this score means. With a score like this you could be anything you want to be, even the President of the United States. You have the potential to be anything you set your mind to be and have any career you choose." Then he said he believed something was hindering me from achieving that potential and it had to do with my home life.

He made a special appointment with my parents to come in and talk to him. That night he showed them my IQ score and compared it to my D and C classroom work. He was very honest and blunt with them. Later they told me what he said. He believed that there was too much criticism and too little affirmation in our home. They needed to be aware of holding me back by not believing I could do anything I put my mind to do. He said Dick needed positive reinforcement, not more spankings, less criticism, and more love and understanding.

But God knew I needed a teacher to believe in me. Mr. McNew broke all the rules and I believe he played an important role in changing my life. Despite all of this encouragement and hope not much changed in my life. I can't remember there being any significant changes in our home. Things continued as they always had. I had very low self esteem. I really thought the IQ test was a fluke and somehow I guessed at the right answers. I continued to hate school, be an underachiever, and to feel insecure. I had an inferiority complex. In later years our pastor, a professional counselor, said, "All the LaFountain boys have inferiority complexes." Obviously God had a work to do in me.