

Introduction:

When I was in high school in Northeast Arkansas, I was very active in the local community theater. I've been an elf, Peter Pan, Tommy Djalas in "The Music Man," an extra in "My Fair Lady," a would-be robber/kidnapper in "The Savage Dilemma." When the local chapter of the NAACP decided to have a play as a fundraiser, they chose a musical named "Purlie." The character list included only two white characters—an old plantation owner and his son. As you can imagine, the NAACP chapter in a small northeastern Arkansas wasn't overrun with white members. So, the director asked if I would take the part. I was super excited. It was the first time (actually the only time) anyone had actually come to me asking me to be in a play and hand-picking me for a part. Of course I was going to do it. However, she explained that I still had to at least audition. On the night of the auditions, I arrived at the local school auditorium and walked in to discover I was the only white person in the room. My first thought was, "Awesome! This means I'll get the part." But my second thought was, "What do all these people think of me? Will they like me? Will they accept me? Will I just be the token white guy?" As you can imagine, this was the only time this had ever happened to me. Sure, I'd been in the room lots of times when there was a single black person and never thought a thing about it. But now that the tables had turned, I was freaked out. I didn't fit in and I knew it. The rest of the story is, I got the part, I met new people, we became friends, the show was great especially considering that only a couple of us had ever been in a theatrical production before. It was a wonderful experience. And something I still remember 25 years later.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were the only person like you in the group or one of the few people like you in a large group? Until you've experienced it, trust me, you don't understand. But as we learned this morning, almost all of us have something that we feel makes us stand out. We mentioned a social experiment in this morning's lesson where 10 people were involved in an interview. Before entering, a dot was placed on each person's face. After the interview, they all complained that the interviewer kept staring at their dot. The funny thing was that 5 of them had been given a clear dot that couldn't be seen. Yet all of them complained. This highlights that we are all very sensitive about what makes us stand out—whether it be race, gender, height, weight, education, class, or even a birthmark. We struggle when we are different and we also often struggle with people who are different.

This morning we started talking about what we can do to overcome "dotism" or whatever kind of "-ism" might plague us. We want to overcome with a new kind of "-ism"—Gracism. Though the points of this lesson are prompted by a book in my library by David Anderson of this same title ([Gracism](#)), the outline is really found in **I Corinthians 12:22-26**. In our previous lesson, we discovered three keys to pursuing Gracism. 1) Greater Honor: "I will lift you up." 2) Greater Modesty: "I will cover you." 3) No Division: "I will stand with you." In this lesson, let's examine the three remaining characteristics of Gracism.

Discussion:

I. Same Care—"I will consider you" (**I Corinthians 12:25b**).

- A. A man was walking down the street one day when he was accosted by robbers. They robbed him. Beat him. Left him moaning for help on the sidewalk. Sometime later, an elder for the local church of Christ was walking the same street. He saw the man, but his clothes looked ragged, he was moaning about needing help (probably wanting a handout), and he looked scarred up (probably had some kind of disease). The elder looked around, saw no one was looking, crossed the street and looked the other way. Sometime later, the preacher from the same congregation passed by. He saw the man and realized he was hurt. He heard him say, "I've been robbed." Realizing the robbers might be nearby, the preacher picked up his step and hurried by saying a little prayer that God would protect him from thieves. A few moments later a Muslim came down the street and saw the man. He stopped. Took out his own clean handkerchief to wipe up the blood. Tore part of his shirt off to dress the wounds. Picked the man up and carried him multiple blocks to a nearby clinic. He waited until the man was carried back by the nurses and promised them he would be back to check on the man, letting them know that if the man had no insurance, he would pay for it.
- B. You didn't really like that story very much, did you? How can the Muslim be the good guy? The way you felt when you heard that is exactly how the Jews felt when they heard the story of the good Samaritan in **Luke 10:29-37**. If Jesus spoke of this between Samaritans and Jews, how much more ought we to show this same kind of care for others today, especially those who are Christians even if they are of a different race, class, or

background? How much more should we do good for all people, especially those of the household of faith (**Galatians 6:10**).

- C. We should offer this kind of consideration in physical need. But also emotional and mental need. Far too often we joke around with people insensitively, not even thinking about how our words might impact those around us. We use a pejorative phrase, a negative nickname, or laughingly comment about a stereotype and we think it is just funny. “I was just joking,” we say, but our joke insensitively ran roughshod over those we should be offering care to. This isn’t just about race. What about the common way of making fun of people when they mess up by calling them a retard. My cousin suffers from mental retardation. She snuck out of her crib at age two and fell in a pool. It caused years of guilt and emotional suffering for our grandparents, struggle for her immediate family, and difficulties that she has faced throughout her life. Her limitations are not her fault. And I personally don’t think she and those like her should be the butt of your jokes about the stupid screw ups you and your friends make. Or one I recently heard, calling someone an Autard, mixing the word for Autism and retard together. Some of my best friends have children who live with autism. They have their struggles, but they are also incredibly gifted people in other ways. Should they be the standard of your jokes to make fun of people who mess up and do something stupid? Oh, I know we fear the political correctness police who want to take these points to an extreme. Perhaps others shouldn’t be so sensitive about these things. But we should definitely be more sensitive. After all, don’t we want folks to be sensitive to us about the issues that matter to us?

II. Suffer Together—“I will weep with you” (**I Corinthians 12:26a**).

- A. **Romans 12:15** says we must learn to weep with those who weep. **Galatians 5:15** shows the exact opposite of this. Racism, classism, sexism, and all those other isms bite and devour. Regrettably, all we are doing is consuming one another. Can we not see the awful state that all of these have put our entire world in? In this case everyone is suffering because they are causing it. The racist suffers by trying to put people with a different skin color in their place. The Gracist suffers by putting himself in someone else’s place.
- B. Like it or not, we live in a culture that is covered with the blood of these negative isms for generations. American Indians were herded onto reservations that continue to cause problems for them as a people. Black Africans were bought and sold as slaves, divided from families, treated cruelly, and then when freed their children and grandchildren still faced segregation. Asians were corralled into occupation camps during WWII. Arabs are looked at askance even if they are Christians because of 9/11. Sadly, we can look at those who complain about this treatment and try to force them to act like nothing really happened. We present our canned arguments about how it wasn’t us who personally did those things and it wasn’t really them who personally suffered them. All we are showing is our inability to weep with those who weep.
- C. At the same time, remember the story of the interviewees with the dots in our first lesson. Or rather the ones without the dots. How do you think the interviewer would feel when accused of treating them differently because of the dot when the interviewer didn’t see a dot? False accusations can abound and they cause a kind of suffering. David Anderson writes:

America finds itself at a time in history when the white male is becoming a minority figure. The white man has a dot of his own. Some whites may already feel as if they are targeted as racists and have been silenced on issues of social justice and excluded from the table of diversity...Many of my white male brothers do not want to be associated with racism, injustice or power. They are tired of being prejudged before they are even given a chance to speak.¹

- D. On either side of these difficult issues we must practice sensitivity. We must learn to put ourselves in others shoes, empathizing with them, seeing what has happened from their perspective so we can suffer with them when they suffer. Stephen Covey tells the story of a man who got on a subway with two children. The children were wild. Running up and down the aisles, running into people, shouting, being a general nuisance. It was causing a terrible disturbance. It was obvious to anyone that these kids were causing a problem. But the father just sat there, staring out the window, oblivious to the problems his kids were causing. One traveler finally had the courage to put the father in his place. “Sir, can you please get your kids under control. You’re letting them run wild and be a nuisance to everyone on this train.” Everyone around, though glad for this one brave soul who would speak his mind, were bracing for an explosion from the father. Surely someone who let his kids behave this way didn’t want anyone else telling him how to parent. However, the father looked up as if shaken out of some deep sleep. “What? Oh, I’m sorry. We just left the hospital. My wife, their mother just died. I guess I’m just not really sure how to handle it. I guess they aren’t either.” Suddenly things changed on that subway. This was a suffering man. He didn’t need to be put in his place. He needed others to spend

¹ David A. Anderson, 16-17.

some time in his place and suffer with him. Gracists do that with everyone no matter their background, color, gender, income, etc.

III. Rejoice Together—"I will celebrate with you" (**I Corinthians 12:26b**).

- A. No doubt, a lot of times we do well at weeping with those who weep. Someone has a family member die or someone enters the hospital and we are there to weep and help. But let that same someone get a promotion, especially if it was one we wanted, and we find it really hard to rejoice and celebrate with them. I can't help but think of John and Andrew in **Acts 12**. John's brother James was executed. Andrew's brother Peter was delivered. While John was weeping over the loss of his brother, he needed to also be able to rejoice and celebrate with Andrew over the deliverance of his. Gracists develop this ability to rejoice and celebrate with others. And they develop it even when someone receives the blessing they didn't. We are still called to rejoice with our brothers and sisters who are rejoicing when:
1. Someone has a baby, even though I'm barren or had a miscarriage.
 2. Someone gets a new car when I'm still in my old broken down clunker, or still walking.
 3. Someone gets a new job, and I'm still struggling in my old one or I'm unemployed.
 4. Someone gets a new house, and I'm still renting.
 5. Someone sells their house, and I'm still making two payments.
 6. Someone is complimented or honored for an achievement that I want to receive.
 7. Someone else gets the scholarship I was applying for.
- B. We need to learn to celebrate with folks of different backgrounds and cultures. That will definitely mean learning to celebrate things that may not matter that much to us. It is not a spiritual thing and I am not suggesting that what I'm about to use as an illustration should be brought into the church's worship or work. I'm also not talking about dealing with the political side of having what we call a bank holiday. But by way of illustration I know a lot of white people resent the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. These folks go out of their way to find things wrong with King. I have no doubt he was a sinner just like the rest of us. I'm sure you don't have to look too far to find mistakes that he made and sins he committed. But at the same time, for our black brothers and sisters, his work and leadership regarding civil rights is a shining beacon of hope. It changed their lives and place in our nation. To those who suffered under segregation and would still be suffering there without the leadership of men like King, he should be celebrated. Yet, many white people just don't understand and therefore resent and refuse to celebrate with their black brothers and sisters. But think of it this way. Could you imagine a British person that moved to America getting upset because we have President's Day, which celebrates George Washington as a founding father and leader of the Revolutionary army that helped us secure independence from Britain? We wouldn't necessarily expect them to celebrate with us, but would it bother us if they mocked us for doing it or if they tried to prove how bad George Washington really was or if they tried to keep us from celebrating? The issue here is not that we all need to celebrate these days. The issue is that when our brothers and sisters, no matter their skin color, their culture, their background have a cause to rejoice, the Gracist learns to celebrate with them.

Conclusion:

As we said in our first lesson, Gracism is a new way to look at others, whether they are similar to us or different. We put aside the isms that divide and put on the one that brings us together, allowing us to welcome each other, include each other, accept each other (**Romans 15:7**). Take these steps with people whether they have the same skin color, the same culture, the same background, the same income, the same education, the same kinds of clothes, or not and watch as this congregation becomes more like that early New Testament church and more like the kingdom as it will be in heaven.