

# ONE-THING THINKING

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On Oct 30, 1959, the writer, John Griffin wrote in his journal, concerning a lunch meeting with two associates and three FBI agents. He was in preparation for his journey into the segregated south as a Negro. His doctor had recently administered the chemotherapy required to change Griffin's skin color from white to black. He notes in his journal an important question to his lunch companions,

*If asked who I was or what I was doing, I would just answer truthfully...Do you suppose they'll treat me as John Howard Griffin, regardless of my color—or will they treat me as some nameless Negro. Even though I am still the same man, I asked...*

*'You're not serious', one of them said. 'They're not going to ask you any questions. As soon as they see you, you'll be a Negro and that's all they'll ever want to know about you.'*

I call this seemingly common trait of human beings concerning other human beings 'one-thing thinking.' John Griffin left his doctor's office after the final visit. He wrote in his journal,

*As I left his office, he shook my hand and said gravely, 'Now you go into oblivion.'*

Griffin would soon discover that his FBI friends and his doctor were right. In 1959, no one wanted to know any more than his one-thing.



At my second church as pastor, there was a man who I could not quite figure out. I noticed him right away. His name is Henry (changed). He walked and talked in little jolts and jerks. He did the quick step. When Henry answered a question, he would often say, "Uh huh, uh huh, yep, yep."

I inquired of others, "What's the story behind Henry?" They replied, "It happened to Henry when he was a (over)

child. His mother brought him to this church thirty years ago. He has never been able to do anything. He never will.”

I asked him one day, “Henry, may I come see you?” He replied, “Uh huh, uh huh, yep, yep.” Henry’s marginal place was in a single rented room adjoined to a nursing home. When I arrived, I walked into a beautiful, neatly arranged room. His mother’s portrait hung perfectly centered over a precisely made bed. This is where Henry spent virtually all of his time, furnished only with a bed, one chair and an odd-looking device sitting atop a small dresser.

We sat on the edge of his bed. “Tell me about yourself, Henry.” After I finally understood that his mom died only a few years ago, he told me how much he loved her. “What’s that Henry,” I asked pointing at the strange device. “Organ,” he said.

On top of the dresser was a small antique organ, the kind with old radio tubes in it. I asked, “Can you play it?” Henry said, “Uh huh, uh huh, yep, yep—mom showed me.” He sat down and played a song taught to him by his mother.

The church was presently without an organist. “Henry, I have an idea,” I said, “Would you play your organ for us at church one Sunday?” He answered, “Uh huh, uh huh, yep, yep.” The next Sunday, Henry and I loaded his little organ into a van. We proceeded to the church. Once inside, we placed the little organ on a keyboard stand. A cordless microphone, laid inside, allowed the sound system to amplify the music. Henry sat near the front of the auditorium.

When time for the offertory music arrived, Henry rose from his seat and quick-stepped his way to the bench and sat down. There, during the offertory, a stunned congregation listened to wonderful organ music echoing in the high chambers of the sanctuary, music made by a man who they said, “has never been able to do anything. He never will.” I watched jaws drop all over the congregation. I asked him after the service, “Did you like that Henry?” “Uh huh, uh huh, yep, yep.”

Henry knew he could play the organ but the congregation never inquired. They learned an important lesson. As I went about the weekly duties of pastor, I heard from one parishioner after another, “We had no idea.” All they had known of Henry for thirty years was his one-thing.

What was Henry’s one-thing? Does it matter? While hitchhiking, John Howard Griffin met a remarkable man. Griffin said in his journal,

*“He was the first man I met of either color who did not confuse the popular image of the thing with the thing itself.”*

Who in your family, your church, your workplace, has one-thing for which they are known, a physical difference, a mental difference, perhaps a class or economic difference, different from the majority of the population? One-thing thinking concentrates on the obvious and deprives us of the deeper giftedness of truly unique people.