



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

On Loving Self Unconditionally

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Insofar as I can tell, the capacity to love unconditionally is the product of a sequence of believing and accepting when it comes to unconditional loving.

1. The first step in that sequence has to do with what I believe about God, and how God relates to me. Put in briefest form, I believe that God does love unconditionally, that God loves me unconditionally, and I accept the validity and implication of being loved that way.

As I understand it, loving unconditionally means that the love flows from the lover to the beloved without it being dependent in any way on any response or behavior of the beloved. It is not earned. It is not a reward. It is not a product of the relationship or of anything else. It is an expression of who the one who loves is, of the values and characteristics of that one, and a regard for the beloved. That kind of loving, as I understand it, is indicative of the lover's belief concerning the real, present, and future potential and worth of the beloved. The love is never withheld. Nor is it ever partial.

In a world marked by conditionality, earning, and reward and punishment, the full implication of unconditionally in loving is difficult to grasp.

2. If I allow myself to believe that God does indeed love me unconditionally, I am then freed to have as my goal and to move toward loving myself unconditionally. Given a lifetime of conditioning to the contrary, I am painfully aware of the fact that I may well never achieve that level of total self-acceptance that is involved in loving myself unconditionally.

It appears that a common belief is that, if one loves unconditionally, there are no standards of behavior or achievement involved. In a sense, that is true. Unconditional self-love says to me that I see, and recognize, and accept my intrinsic value and worth as unconditionality a given, and that I value myself accordingly. In the degree to which I love myself with that kind of unconditionality, I make that self-love and self-acceptance the basis and reason for what I do and what I try to become. To the degree that I get caught up in conditionality, and all that prior point of view, I try to function in order to become lovable, or I disclaim and discredit myself. I feel guilty. I feel self-rejecting. I tend toward seeing myself as no good and not valuable. I become increasingly anxious and afraid – especially afraid about whether or not I will be accepted and cared about by others. Anger, and hostility, and frustration tend to affect and influence both what I say and what I do. I feel unhappy with myself. I react negatively to those around me. I generally feel and tend to become less productive and less valuable.

If I totally accept my intrinsic worth and value in the kind of unconditional loving that is already God's love for me, my perspective on my behavior and my outlook in life changes. I can recognize the constructiveness or destructiveness of what I do and say. I can more effectively evaluate my motives as well as my behavior. I can consistently see the potential for growth and development. I can focus toward my becoming what I have

the potential to be. I can have satisfaction and fulfillment, and bring some degree of satisfaction and fulfillment to others.

3. The question is raised, “How do I know whether or not I love myself unconditionally? Is it really a possibility?”

The ideal of loving self unconditionally is, indeed, an ideal. It is an image and a goal that I hold before me constantly, and toward which I direct my becoming and my being. In this lifetime, I do not expect to become truly and totally unconditional in my self-love, or in my love for others. I do intend to keep that ideal and goal before me, and to shape my life toward reaching that goal. Loving unconditionally means that I do not castigate or condemn myself when I have functioned in some other way. Rather, I learn from functioning, and I re-focus my goal toward the unconditional loving.

I know that I am loving myself unconditionally when I recognize that I have shifted my perspective, or my frame of reference, so that I see what I say and do as a product and not as a means to become something or somebody.

4. This points to the whole issue of motive. “Why do I do what I do? Why do I say what I say?” If it is for the purpose of achieving a level of goodness or perfection that lets me say I now deserve to be loved, then I have functioned seeking a product. If it is because I know that, by the Grace of God, I am loved and can love myself, then I function to express who I have accepted that I am. In the degree that I love myself unconditionally, I have the resources to love another unconditionally.

5. Statements about believing and deciding seem overly simple. “How can I know that I am making progress in loving myself unconditionally?”

Because of my belief system, the capacity to love myself unconditionally is mine by the Grace of God. It is a given. I am confronted again by the age-old and basic question, “Will I be God’s person in relation with Him, or will I stand away from the relationship and be independent of it, trying to be my own God?”

I make a decision. I look at what I know and understand about who God is, and about who I am by the Grace of God, and I tell myself, “It’s true. God loves me unconditionally. I can love myself unconditionally. In the midst of all my prior conditioning, I can set that goal for myself. I can begin to revise my attitudes, and my reactions, and my actions to express what I have decided to believe. I can decide to stake my life on it being true. Then I live as if it is true. I act as if it is true. I speak as if it is true. I listen and interact with others as if it is true. “

I may not be able to see the evidence that it is happening until I have moved on down the road away and then look back.

It is important for me to realize and understand that loving myself unconditionally does not mean that I achieve a level of perfection in thought, and word, and behavior. If,

indeed, I set such a standard, what I have done is to shift back to conditional loving. I have said to myself, “I am not love-worthy—not until I achieve some standard of goodness or perfection.”

I want to love myself unconditionally. I want to love God. I want to love other persons the same way. I want my life to reflect that belief and that faith. I want my motives to give expression to that faith and that loving.

By the Grace of God, I am loved unconditionally and I can love myself unconditionally, and I can love others unconditionally. I cannot do it alone. The Grace of God in me gives me the strength and the resource. The Spirit of God in me makes it possible. My faith and my believing make it possible. I can pray with others, “I believe, help my unbelief.” So I go about my life and recognize that I make mistakes. Sometimes I am halting and stumbling. Sometimes I am very unlovely. Sometimes I judge and condemn myself. Sometimes I disclaim my value. Sometimes I think that it is not possible for me to be loved or for me to love myself. In the good times and in the bad times, I try to focus my attention on the fact that this kind of loving is an act of will – a decision made.

I decide to love myself, no matter what. I am inspired by the decision and that faith to work steadily toward expressing in my life that I am thus loved, and that I do love myself.