



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

The Magic of Believing – Part I

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W. Burney Overton

“MAGIC” may not be the right word. “POWER” may be the better one. But the power of believing is so great that the result is like magic.

It is so great that it appears, sometimes, to defy reason and logic. I have read about African witch doctors and their power. The people over whom they exercise control believe so completely in them that whatever they say becomes reality to them. When the witch doctor visits a sick person, treats him, and tells him he is going to get well, he generally does. However, if he tells the patient he is going to die, he generally does.

Maybe the same thing is true with doctors today. While the modern practice of medicine is light years away from the practice of witch doctors, it strikes me that what the patient believes has a profound effect on the outcome of treatment in this present time.

For instance, I develop a nagging head cold. My sinuses are plugged. My head hurts. My body aches. My throat is sore. I cough and sneeze incessantly. I feel sick all over. All I want is relief from this miserable cold.

I don't like to go to the doctor unless I really need to, so I opt for self-treatment. I take aspirin. I gargle every hour on the hour. I irrigate my nasal passages with saline solution. I drink lots of fluids. I even stay home from work and sleep a lot – or watch TV. Nothing helps. I don't get any better.

Finally, after about a week of this, I decide that I am sick enough to justify going to the doctor. So, off I go.

He tells me, “You have a severe head cold and a bad throat infection.” I know that, but already I feel some relief. Somebody who is supposed to know has confirmed that I'm really sick. My trip to the doctor was justified. He will treat me, and I will get well. Doctors are wonderful. They really know how to cure people of their illnesses.

The doctor writes a prescription for some pills to relieve the discomfort. He directs me to stay home a few days and get lots of rest, gargle at least four times a day with hot salt water, continue to irrigate my nasal passages with saline solution, and drink plenty of fluids.

“You'll feel much better in a few days,” he says as I leave the office.

And he is right on all counts. I do everything he tells me to do, and I feel better the very next day. I can swallow without pain. I can breathe through my nose most of the time. The achiness is about gone. And, sure enough, in a few days, the cold is gone. The doctor is a good doctor. He cured my cold.

Did the doctor cure my cold? Or did I get well after I saw him because I believed he could cure me? After all, he didn't tell me to do anything that I wasn't already doing. Was it the magic of believing?

Jesus has a good deal to say about things happening because people believe they will.

“Whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea’, and does not doubt it in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.” (Mark 11:23).

“All things are possible to him who believes.” (Mark 9:23).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do.” (John 14:12).

Is it believing that moves mountains and trees and does the work that Jesus did, or more? Or is believing the way in which a person taps into the power that moves mountains and trees and does the work that Jesus did, and more? Maybe believing is the switch that turns the power on. Maybe believing is the way that we can access the power of God, Himself, and use it in this life. Maybe the power has been available all along. Maybe we need to believe that it is to enable it to become usable.

How can I make use of the power?

How can I experience the magic?

Saying that the very power of God is available to me if I believe it is doesn't seem to answer my questions. What is the power of God? What is it that I am to believe?

The power of God is that of the creator who is the source of all being. It is total power. As the author of the Gospel of John said, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:3). Power. Source of Power. Light. Life. And “to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.” (John 1:12).

I am a child of God. Does that mean I have the power of God in me? I believe that it does.

What goes together for me is that God created human beings in His own image – loves them unconditionally – and provides them with all the resources needed to experience the full measure of health in body, mind and spirit. He intends for us to be fulfilled and happy in this life. He has supplied the means to overcome adversity, hardship, and incompleteness. His goal for us is that we grow toward our potential and know the joys of life here and now. To enable us to accomplish the goal, He has

provided us with a measure of His own power, and has instructed us over and over in the use of that power.

The key is in believing, and in what I choose to believe.

I can't tell myself that I believe something, and have it make any difference, unless I really do. And what I say I believe may not be what I really believe.

I don't know who told the story first, but it goes something like this. The lady lived in a beautiful home built on the side of a mountain. The kitchen, which was lavishly equipped with all the newest appliances, was her favorite room in the house. The only problem was that the picture window over the sink faced the mountain. Often she thought, "If only the mountain weren't there, then my kitchen would be perfect."

One day, the lady was reading her Bible and came across the passage about faith as a grain of mustard seed being enough to move mountains. She said to herself, "Ah ha, I have found the answer to my problem. Tonight, when I say my prayers, I'll declare my faith and ask God to move the mountain. Surely my faith is equal to that of a mustard seed. When I come into my kitchen in the morning, the mountain will be gone and in its place will be a beautiful view."

That night she prayed as she had decided, and drifted off to sleep already picturing how it would look out her kitchen window with the mountain gone.

The next morning she arose early and hurried down to her kitchen, but nothing had changed. The mountain was still there. As she turned away from the window in deep disappointment, she could be heard to mutter under her breath, "Just as I thought. Just as I thought."

There wasn't any magic in her believing.

Not only does the story illustrate that what I tell myself I believe may not be what I believe, it also illustrates that I can't use the power to set aside natural cause and effect. It may be magic, but not the kind of magic that changes how God's creation functions. It does not mean that anything and everything can be accomplished just by my believing. I rather doubt that I can make a finger grow back after it has been severed from my hand. I don't know yet if my believing can reactivate my heart electrical impulse system that quit working adequately nearly fourteen years ago. I don't believe that anything short of death will stop me from getting older and wearing out.

This life isn't a forever life. It has limits. There are parameters, but I doubt that the parameters are as limited as we have made them. It appears to be the nature of human beings to search for ways to push the parameters back, even at great risk. We try all sorts of things—go in many directions—delve into the many facets of life—never satisfied with what we have learned or can do.

And believing opens the way. Nobody tried to build and fly an airplane until he believed it was possible. The project to walk on the moon wasn't implemented until somebody believed it could be done. No life-saving medicines were developed until somebody thought they could be. No surgery was undertaken unless there was hope that it would be successful. The power and the possibility were there all the time. It came to reality when somebody believed enough to try.

Believing keeps things from happening, too. The most obvious examples are the "I can'ts" of life. "I can't do this." "I can't do that." "I can't be different than I am." "I am sick. I can't be well." "Nobody loves me." If I am stuck in such a pattern of believing, my life reflects it in every way.

What it all adds up to for me is that God has created us for wholeness, even as He is whole. My over-all goal in this life is to move continually toward that wholeness. That doesn't mean to be free of difficulties, nor to be excluded from the possibility of adversity.

I may be sick unto death. I may have tragic things happen to me. I may have bitter experiences in human relations. I may make bad decisions and act in destructive ways. I may be ignorant of some of the truths that enrich life. I may be anxious and afraid and suspicious. I may get in the way of my own development toward the wholeness for which I am created, but I have the capacity no matter what happens.

God doesn't excuse me, and God doesn't stop loving me. Nor does God withhold His power from me. The potential for moving toward spiritual wholeness is always there. I think that is what Jesus meant when He said, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48).

As I understand it, spiritual wholeness means to be at one with God who is the source of my being. In the degree that I am whole, I discover that I have the capacity to cope constructively with whatever happens to me in my mind, or in my body, or in my life situation.

I am a creation in the image of God, who is the source of my being. I have within me the capacity to be perfect as my heavenly father is perfect. I can picture my being who God has created me to be. Allowing myself to picture me in that way seems to make a difference in how I function.

I can do what I set my mind to do. I can tap the resources of my body and mind for healing and health. I can love as God loves. I can cope constructively with the situations of my life. I can be sensitive to myself and to others, and express the godlikeness with which I am endowed. I can be influential in the lives of those around me in a positive way. I can move toward the healthy, whole person God intended me to be.

## THE MAGIC OF BELIEVING

All that I say about me is also true of you. You have the same capacity to believe and to be, that I have.

I have put in a warning. I can also believe and do all the opposite things. I can be sick, and miserable, and limited, and victimized. I can hate, and be angry, and do destructive things. Believing enables me to do these things, too.

It really makes a difference what I believe. It controls my life. Whether I use the word “magic” or “power”, the result is the same. It is the magic of believing.