



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

Seeds

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Today I planted some bean seeds in my garden. While I was doing it, I thought about my own life and made a connection between me and the seed.

The bean seed. I stopped planting and just looked at the one I held in my hand. It was an ordinary bean seed. Not much to look at. Not much use to anyone all by itself.

It was a little white seed with no marks on it to distinguish it from myriad thousands of other such seeds. Of course, there are many other kinds of bean seeds that are different in a variety of ways. Some are smaller. A lot of them are much larger. Some are flat. Others, plump and round. Some are black, or blue, or brown. Some are striped and others are spotted. Despite all the differences, each seed is recognized as a bean seed. And in each one is all the potential for all it can and will ever be.

I looked down the row I had just planted. As long as the seed was in my hand, or in the package, it was going to remain just a seed. Those that I planted were now in a different environment. They were in the moist soil, warmed by the sun. In that changed setting, things would begin to happen to start them toward becoming what they had the potential to be.

The picture unfolded in my mind. I could see the seed picking up moisture, swelling, breaking out of its covering. I watched the tiny plant within the seed, sending a stem up toward the light above the soil, and a root deeper into the moist darkness of the soil. It was growing. The potential in it was taking form and shape. I knew that, as time went by, the plant would grow, and blossom, and bear fruit. And its final fruit would be many more little white bean seeds, each already having within it all it could ever become. Then it would die.

I know, of course, that a variety of factors affect the seed to enable or prevent it from becoming all it can be.

If it is not planted, the seed has no chance ever to become the plant, and blossom, and fruit, and seed that it potentially is. Rainfall and sunshine affect its growth. Nutrients in the soil, or the lack of them, alter the growth pattern. Insects and plant diseases take their toll. The environment in which it sprouts and grows, as well as what is in the seed itself, determine whether or not the plant ever reaches maturity. Some do not. Some are cut off and trampled under foot. Some are scarred or twisted by wind, or hail, or even the awkward stroke of the hoe in the hands of the gardener. Some have only a few blossoms, and very little fruit. And some blossom profusely and bear much fruit.

If purpose can be described to a seed, each seed has as its purpose to unfold its potential and become the best producer of fruit it possible can. I see it as the main purpose of my life to be the best producer of fruit that I possibly can.

I am a seed, and a living organism, and a bearer of fruit. When I came into being, all my potential was already in me. I could add nothing else. I was, and am, subject to

my environment. My response to it is the determinant of the amount and quality of fruit I bear.

It appears that the bean seed has no control over its life. It simply responds to the stimulus of its environment and becomes whatever it becomes. I do have control over my life. I make decisions about how I respond to the stimulus of my environment. When bad things happened to me, I have options as to how I cope. I also have options when good things happen.

Like the bean seed, I have very little control over determining the setting in which my life begins. Nor can I do anything to alter the qualities and characteristics I bring into life. They are givens. I am like the bean seed in this regard.

I am not like the bean seed in certain ways. I am created in the image of God. The seed is not.

I feel a jarring within me as I write those words. Something is not correct about them. I see God in the seed, and in the plant. All of creation is of the Creator, so I can't really say that only human beings are in the image of God.

Nevertheless, I am different from the bean seed at this point. I am in the image of God in a way that the seed is not. I make decisions. The seed does not. I am responsible. The seed is not. I am affected and influenced by my environment, as the seed is. I have a great deal of control over how my environment affects me. The seed does not.

Seed that each of us is—the bean and I—we already have all our potential within us, and we share a common purpose to bear fruit in this life.

But I have vastly more potential than the bean seed in that I can make decisions and act on them in such a way as to bring more of my potential to fruition. I must also face the reality that I can make decisions and act on them in such a way as to prevent the fulfillment of my potential. I am responsible.

I am also awestruck when I think about the possibilities. I can become what God is. I hear Jesus' words, "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). To be as God is. To love unconditionally as God loves. To serve wisely and responsibly as God serves. I have that potential. It is my purpose and goal in life.

As I think about the potential, I do not delude myself. I don't expect to become all that I am capable of becoming. I expect to continue to strive and grow. One day I will complete my task. To use the imagery of the seed again, I have spouted and grown. I grow toward maturity. I respond some way to the various influences in my life. Some stunt my growth. Some enhance it. I blossom and bear fruit, and the fruit is the seed out of which new life comes.