



Writings of W. Burney Overton

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You Are My Child

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W. Burney Overton

You are my child.

I am the source of your being.

You are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.

When I first saw you, I loved you with an everlasting love – a love that knew no boundaries.

I gave you life – your body – your stature – your abilities – your mind and heart – your whole being.

When you were born, you already had within you all that you could ever become.

I gave it to you. I left you free to develop and to grow, although I wanted to shape you in the way I dreamed of you being.

Though I left you free, I didn't leave you unattended. I didn't leave you without support. I didn't withdraw from you. I didn't refuse to instruct and guide and protect you. I did preserve for you your right and your freedom to confront your life – to decide about it – and to grow. I couldn't do otherwise if I truly loved you without any strings.

As I looked at you and loved you, I knew that I was responsible for you – especially during your formative years. I knew I must manage those responsibilities so you would always be free to become all you could be. I must be the kind of parent that enabled and encouraged you to be free and to be responsible for yourself.

I wanted you to become the ideal person I had in mind for you. I was well aware of your potential – your abilities – your resources. I could see you functioning as an adult being everything I wanted you to be.

I was tempted to use my powers to see that you became just who I had in mind for you to become – but I knew that would destroy you if I tried to. You can't be my puppet, nor a clone of me. You can be like me only to the extent that you choose to be. And then you aren't being like me. You are being yourself in the fullest sense.

I longed to be the perfect parent, but I feared I did not know how to be. Even though I made mistakes, I knew who I wanted to be to you – and how. Indeed, though you are now grown and on your own, I know the kind of parent I still want to be to you.

To the extent of my wisdom and experience, I set about to encourage you to be independent according to your age. I wanted you to be able to make decisions, and to be responsible for the outcome as you acted on them. Often I felt fearful and was tempted to hold you back and bind you in – for your own protection, of course – I told myself. But I knew that you could never walk if I did not allow the risk even though you might fall and possibly be hurt. I tried to exercise good judgment between necessary protection and the

risks that accompany exploration and learning. I really wanted your growth always to be toward full independence and responsibility. If I restrained you too much, I knew you would never make it. It was frightening for me, but the only way I could function since I loved you as I did.

So, as you grew, I tried to teach you, tell you, show you – and leave you free to experiment and try things out. Indeed, despite my fears, I encouraged you to do so.

I decided against giving you anything more than those teachings and examples. Oh, I was sorely tempted to offer you rewards if you did as I said and when you pleased me – and to promise you punishment if you did not. I wanted to keep you from making bad decisions and mistakes – at least what I saw as bad decisions and mistakes. I wanted to make sure you turned out as I wanted you to. Only – fortunately – I knew that such action on my part would be destructive to you in the long run.

I couldn't let you think and decide on the basis of promises I made, nor inducements I offered. I couldn't give and withhold my love in an attempt to control or manipulate you into doing what I prescribed for you. I couldn't threaten you with my disfavor nor my punishment – not if I really loved you. I couldn't even try to control you with my favor.

As you grew, I tried to help you see what would happen when you chose to live by my instructions, and when you did not. Helping you see what the consequences of your decisions and actions might be was/is a part of my responsibility to you since I love you as I do. It always will be.

You already had the resources – except the "how to" ones – to be a whole, complete person, experiencing the fruits of your being. It was part of my responsibility to teach you some of the "how to's", as well as to demonstrate them in my own living of those.

I wanted to participate fully in your growth. I wanted you to know the "how to" resources I had discovered and developed, and to have the freedom to use them or not. I wanted you to realize who you are – to know what potential you have – to be aware of what you could be – and to have as your goal to be that person. I know of no greater reward – for me or for you.

Since I wanted so much for you, I was tempted to tell you what your decisions and actions should be. I believed I knew. After all, I had been through it all. I was tempted to insist that you abide by my wisdom, telling myself it was for your well-being, and that I had both right and responsibility to intervene. I almost persuaded myself that I wouldn't be a good parent if I didn't, although I really knew better.

To have done so would have been to cripple you. I couldn't do that.

I was always with you to support you, to model for you, to instruct you. But I wanted you to learn your own values, even if they turned out to be the same as mine – or different. I wanted you to be proud of and pleased with yourself – to decide and to do for your own reasons, not to please me nor to avoid my displeasure.

You are now an adult. I look back over the years and know that I was not always as successful as your parent as I wanted to be. Somehow we missed communication from time to time. You would be moody and withdrawn. I would be frustrated and anxious. I would try – too hard – to get you to tell me what was the matter. You would insist that nothing was the matter. I knew that wasn't true, so I would push even harder. I was unreasonable. You responded in the only way you could to my pressure upon you. When I realized what I was doing, I was able to back off, and, in time, you were able to talk with me.

For a while, you seemed to believe you had to earn my love. You seemed to think I had certain expectations of you that you must meet. You decided that, when you did, I would reward you, and, when you didn't, I would punish you. You seemed to have decided that you were neither valued nor loved unless you lived up to those expectations. You appeared to have canceled yourself out as if your very being depended upon your functioning in some particular way.

I'm not sure what was going on with you. You tried so hard and were so hard on yourself. You didn't seem to like yourself very much. You acted nervous and afraid. Often you were sullen and defiant. You were angry so much of the time. You distanced from me and refused to talk with me about what was going on with you. It was a difficult time for both of us.

It would have been easy not to love you very much at that time. Only my love for you wasn't based on what you did and didn't do. It certainly wasn't based on your meeting a set of expectations, nor performing in some particular way. Insofar as I was concerned, you were always my beloved child. Nothing ever changed that. Nothing could.

Therefore, in that difficult time, I continued to love you. As much as I wanted you to feel differently and behave differently, I would not offer you a "carrot", nor promise some reward or punishment to try to get you to be some other way. You even came to me one day and said, "Look how well I have been doing in school. Isn't it time for you to be getting me that car I want." When I pointed out that I hadn't made any deals with you to reward you for doing well in school, you got upset and screamed, "You don't love me."

I could only assure you that my love for you was not something you could buy, and it certainly was not something tied to your behavior. I maintained some limits for your own protection and well being. When we could talk, I would offer some suggestions and instructions. I supported you in every way I knew. I didn't intend to do otherwise.

Sometimes you didn't think I was supporting you. I did not always give you what you asked for, nor bail you out of a difficult situation. Often, you wouldn't listen to my reasons. You just got angry and stormed away from me. You couldn't understand why I would say "No." to you when, from your point of view, I could so easily have given you what you wanted. You didn't see that I would be doing more harm than good.

When I saw you hurting, I was tempted to step in. A word or action of mine, I thought, would have made things easier for you. I had to ask myself what was the truly loving thing to do, and then I had to be willing to do that. I could never take your freedom and responsibility away from you.

I could – and did – support you. I was there with you through good times and bad. I assisted you in every way I could. I hurt with you. I laughed with you. I enjoyed your successes with you. I comforted you when you were less than successful. I walked with you through hard times. I tended you when you were sick or troubled. Sometimes, all I could do was to be present and to share whatever was going on.

The years have gone by. Our relationship is intact, and it always will be. Nothing you have ever done, nor could ever do, can break it – not from my side. There is no way you can make me love you more – nor less. I care about you. I want the very best for you. But I can't – and won't – impose my wisdom, nor judgments, nor decisions on you. I will continue to share them, for you have a right to know. Then you will do with them as you will.

I want you to know me as completely as you possibly can – and are willing to. I want you to know about my strengths, my weaknesses, my beliefs, my outlook – whatever you want to know. I want all of me to be available to you – how I see life – how I cope and why. But I will not impose upon you, nor require you to conform to my desires.

Since I love you so completely, I want only the best for you. I believe the best for you is for you to be free to be –to decide – to do – and to bear fruit. I want this for you, but I cannot provide it for you. You carry that responsibility.

You are my child. I am the source of your being. You are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. When I first saw you, I loved you with an everlasting love. I have lived with you, born with you, guided and instructed you, shared with you in all the experiences of your life. I have tried to provide for you and to equip you for your life. I have protected you when you could not protect yourself. I have been there with you when you were exploring into your unknowns. I have worried and wept, laughed and been joyous, held you close even when I had to let you be on your own.

You have grown to be the person you are. I can say nothing more important than that I love you – always and forever. I cannot give you more.

## YOU ARE MY CHILD

This that I have written is a portrait of Grace. It is an application of the meaning of unconditional love. I am God's child. Each of us is. God deals with me – and with each of us – as I have described.

I know of no greater gift.