



Writings of W. Burney Overton

Burney's Papers

1987 Series, Volume 7

How Can I Cope With Being Healed

January 18, 1988

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## HOW CAN I COPE WITH BEING HEALED

(Based on the story in John 5: 1-18)

My name is Jamael and I am of the house of David. I have lived in Jerusalem all my life but, until recently, had neither home nor family. In the past few months some amazing things have happened to me. I am a different person than I was, and, for the first time ever, I am glad to be alive.

I had been ill for thirty-eight years. For all practical purposes, I was helpless. I couldn't support myself. I couldn't be married nor take care of a family. I could hardly walk. All I could do was lie on my pallet by the Pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem with my alms cup in hand and beg for enough to barely stay alive.

It was no kind of life. A multitude of invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed – lay in the porticoes of the Pool, all begging and whining for alms. They were a disgusting sight. They were repulsive to me, and I was one of them.

Much as I hated being there, I had no other home. Nobody cared whether I lived or died. People gave me alms, not because they had any concern for me, but because they felt guilty when they saw me, and all the others, suffering there by the Pool.

Hopeless though my life seemed to be, there was still a spark of hope that, somehow, a miracle would take place – a miracle of healing wrought by the waters of the Pool.

I had seen the miracle occur for others. When the waters of the Pool were agitated – and nobody knew when that would be – the first one to step into the waters would be healed. I had seen others step into the water and come out whole. I envied them. I was angry with them. I cursed my fate that I could not be the first to the troubled waters and so be healed.

Oh, how I longed for healing.

Why did I have to be sick? What had I done to deserve such a fate? Why couldn't I be well and strong like those whose alms I begged? In my anger, I railed against God. I even cursed those who dropped alms in my cup and spat at their feet. If only I could get to the water first when it is troubled, I would be healed. Thirty-eight years of illness, and there was no one to put me into the Pool when the water was troubled.

“Do you want to be healed?” The words startled me, and I looked to see who had spoken. The man was a stranger to me, and by his plain clothes, I guessed that he was from Galilee.

“Do I want to be healed? What kind of a callused person are you to ask such a question of one in my condition?” I felt the anger rise like bile in my throat, but I could

not speak my thoughts for fear that the stranger would pass by and not even drop one coin into my cup.

Even so, the anger was ill concealed as I replied with fine irony, "I can't ever be first into the water when it is troubled. No one will help me. Somebody always gets there first and I can only crawl back to my pallet and wait for another time. It has been so long. I don't think I will ever be healed." I couldn't let him see how desperately I wanted to be healed, nor could I bring myself to answer his question. This peasant man from Galilee couldn't possibly do anything about my illness – unless he were willing to stay nearby until the waters of the Pool were agitated and take me into the water before anyone else got there.

I didn't understand why I had bothered to explain to this stranger. What could he care? From the looks of him, I couldn't expect much from him.

To my great surprise, the stranger lingered by my side. There was an air about him that I could not identify nor understand. Then, in a compelling and encouraging voice, he said to me, "If you want to be healed, rise, take up your pallet, and walk." It wasn't a command, nor a plea – just calm, forceful instructions that ignored that I had been ill for thirty-eight years and could not possibly walk just because he said to. He sounded as if he believed I could do as he said, just as though I had been doing it every day.

I didn't feel angry any more, but I didn't know what to do. Furtively I looked at him, and then at the crowd of invalids in the portico. No one was paying any attention. Apparently, no one else had heard his words. I hesitated a moment, and then, to my utter amazement I did what he said. I stood up, rolled my pallet and put it under my arm, and walked away from that place. The illness was gone. No sign of it remained.

I was all the way out into the street before I realized what I was doing. I was walking freely and easily. I was no longer ill. I was healed. I shouted for joy. I jumped and I ran. I tossed my pallet into the air and clutched it to me when it fell back into my arms. After thirty-eight years, I was well. I couldn't believe it. I felt as if I might burst with excitement and elation.

I paused and looked around me. The stranger who healed me was nowhere to be seen. In my excitement, I hadn't even thanked him for giving me my health. Now, I didn't know where to look for him. I didn't know if I would ever see him again. No matter. What really mattered was that I was well. I could walk. I could run. I could do all the things that healthy people could do.

I couldn't anticipate the problems I would have now that I was well.

Where would I go? I had no home but that little spot by the Pool. What would I do? Today was the Sabbath and there wasn't much I could do. With no destination in

mind, I tucked my pallet under my arm and, with purposeful strides, marched off down the street. I was well. I would deal with tomorrow when it came. Or so I thought.

I hadn't gone far when I was stopped by a group of Jewish religious leaders who, obviously, were severely displeased with me. One of them spoke to me sternly. "It is the Sabbath. Don't you know it is unlawful for you to carry your pallet on the Sabbath? You will have to pay the penalty."

"But," I replied, "I am only doing what the man who healed me told me to do." I hadn't expected this kind of experience. For all the years I was sick and a beggar, no one had held me responsible for keeping the law. I was frightened. I didn't know anything else to do but to blame the stranger for my predicament. Though I had longed for healing, I hadn't once thought about encountering this kind of complication, or any kind for that matter.

The Jewish religious leaders didn't believe me. They didn't even recognize me as one of the invalids by the Pool, though I knew them and had many times received alms from them. All they saw was a sturdy, healthy man who was breaking the Sabbath law by carrying his pallet – a man who told a wild tale of having been healed by some stranger who happened to come by the Pool.

"So," they said, "a man you don't even know told you to carry your pallet on the Sabbath and, despite the Law, you obeyed him. Who is this man? Where is this man? Find him and point him out to us. Then we will believe you and excuse you this time. Bring him to us before the Sabbath is over."

All of a sudden, being healed wasn't so wonderful. I was in deep trouble and didn't know what to do. Still I was miraculously healed. I could at least go to the Temple and make a thank offering for that.

A thank offering! I didn't have anything with which to buy a sacrifice so that I could make a thank offering. And nobody was going to give alms to an obviously healthy man. Being well was more complicated than I thought – I didn't realize just how complicated.

I went to the Temple anyway. Maybe something would happen and I would still be able to make the thank offering. And maybe the Jews would forget about me.

As it turned out, the Jews did forget about me, or just weren't interested in me. They wanted Jesus, who, I learned, was the man who healed me. All they wanted was for me to point Jesus out to them so they could persecute him. They would say it was for healing on the Sabbath, but, I learned later, Jesus and his unorthodox ways and teachings had upset them greatly, and they were determined to quiet him at any cost.

Apparently, Jesus wasn't particularly concerned about the Jews. He was in the Temple when I got there. I had seen him and heard the crowd call him by name, so I now

knew who he was. I tried to avoid him for I did not want to report him to the Jews. I was not successful. He sought me out. "See," he said, "You are well now. Don't yield to the temptation to be sick again."

Why would Jesus tell me not to yield to the temptation to be sick again? I had longed to be well for so many years. Surely I would never feel any temptation to be sick again?

I didn't know it then, but, as it turned out, Jesus' warning was one that I would have to heed. Right then, my chief concern was to solve my problem with the Jews. I could no longer claim ignorance about who had healed me, so I went to them and told them that it was Jesus who had healed me. Telling them did solve my problem with them.

But it didn't solve my problems – not the ones that went with being well. I was dismayed. Because I was a well man, everybody expected me to earn my own living. After thirty-eight years of illness, I had no way of doing so. I had no skills and no experience. But now that I was well, I was expected to be responsible for myself, and even to be of help to those less fortunate.

People made fun of me when I was clumsy and inept at the work I tried to do. I was fired from job after job. They shoved me aside and cursed me when I tried to get a place in the line of men looking for work. When, in desperation, I, as a last resort, tried to beg some food and a place to sleep from a shop owner, he shouted obscenities and threatened to have me publicly whipped if I didn't move away from his shop.

As each day went by, I became more and more discouraged. I felt so desperate that I began to dream about my life by the Pool of Bethzatha. It was a miserable life, but not as miserable as this. There I at least had food to eat, and the warmth of the portico. Nobody expected anything of me. Nobody demanded that I take responsibilities I didn't know how to take. Maybe being sick and begging at the Pool wasn't as bad a life as I had thought.

The dreams persisted until one day I found myself standing at the Pool watching what was going on, and remembering how it had been for me. I saw other able-bodied men drop coins into the alms cups of the beggars and I had nothing to give them. I was almost as bad off as they. Maybe I was worse off. They could beg, and I could not. I didn't have a single coin in my pocket and didn't know where I would get my next meal.

In my misery, I sat down among the beggars. Then I lay down. No one paid any attention to me except a poor crippled man who grumbled when I crowded him a bit. I felt the first signs of my illness returning and right then it felt good.

I was about to drop off to sleep when I heard Jesus speaking to me, "You are well now. Don't yield to the temptation to be sick again." Jesus wasn't at the Pool this time, but his words rang in my mind. I knew now what he meant.

When I was desperate to be healed, Jesus had healed me. He had warned me. He was still with me to enable me to be well and stay well – all of me. That day, miserable and cold and hungry though I was, I decided to stay well. I decided to take on the responsibility that went with being well. I decided to take charge of my life and both find and make the opportunities I needed to be well and to stay well. I decided to start where I had to start, and to learn what I needed to learn, and to do what was necessary to do, and to use the gift of health that Jesus had given me.

This was the day when I was truly healed. My body was healed that Sabbath day at the Pool of Bethzatha when I had acted on Jesus' instructions. But this day at the Pool, I made the decision that meant I was healthy in every way.

I didn't have all my problems solved. I didn't even have a job, nor a permanent place to live. But I wasn't sick any more, and wouldn't ever be again – not that way. I would find a job. I would take my place in society. I would be a responsible and productive person. Instead of having to be helped and cared for, I would develop the ability to help and care for others. As I turned away from the Pool that day, the sun was shining within me. I was filled with gratitude and joy.

Though it has been hard, I have learned how to cope with being healed. I was no longer an invalid and no longer helpless. I could support myself – have a family – make a life for myself. I could even find ways to help other people less fortunate than I. Life was good and I would live it to the fullest.

"Do you want to be healed?"

"Yes, Lord, I want to be healed."

"Rise, take up your pallet, and walk."

I would. I could. And I did.