



Writings of W. Burney Overton

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The Temptation of the Quick Fix

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A quick fix? Why not? If there is a quick fix, why not? Who could possibly fault a person for taking advantage of a quick fix? Isn't that what life is all about – find the quickest fix possible and use it? Who wants to wait until later, if there can be gratification RIGHT NOW?

It seems to be characteristic of our time. If possible, make everything easy, and keep it that way. If there is a way to do it, avoid all unpleasantness. Get the gratification as quickly as it can be gotten, and just don't worry about the future. If it means setting aside long range goals, or consideration for other people, then set them aside. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" are the words we have heard over and over. And it is true. We may die before we achieve the fulfillment or satisfaction for which we have worked so hard. So why not go for the quick fix?

It is a temptation, isn't it? And there is tremendous pressure to yield to the temptation.

Everybody knows that life is supposed to be good – self-indulgent (although we carefully avoid admitting it) – with all the "goodies". And it is supposed to happen now if not sooner.

Go to the movies. Watch TV. Read the popular magazines and novels. Pay attention to the ads. Listen to the hawkers of the "American way", including, all too often, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, philosophers, and preachers. And then hear it in the conversations and advice and attitudes of many of those closest to you.

Get the latest appliances. Have the fanciest car. Live in the biggest house. Own the most up to date TV, VCR, stereo sound system – or anything else designed and advertised to make our life easier, more enjoyable, more trouble free.

Do whatever is indicated to avoid or escape the painful or difficult. Take all the latest medicines. Use the most powerful drugs. Get drunk. Take up the latest fads. Go on the currently most effective diet. Make use of the exercise program or machine that will, with least effort and time, keep you in perfect physical condition. Get out there and have fun. Have fun. Have fun!

The examples go on almost endlessly. The main objective seems to be to make everything easy and keep it that way – to get the gratification as quickly as possible, and just not worry about the future.

I watch and listen to our young people. The pleasure principle and the pursuit of the easy life seems to dominate so many of them. Get a job with the most pay and the least work. Have a car – a late model one, of course, and not a plain old ordinary one. Skip the education, or take the easiest courses. Settle for a C grade – just enough to get by. Make sure the prospective employer provides all the requisite fringe benefits. (It just occurs to me that many won't even know what the word "requisite" means.) Ask about pay and vacation time before inquiring about the requirements of the job, or the hours to be worked.

I see a lot of last-minute-ness among young people – among both young and old, for that matter. Setting goals, making plans, and preparing seem not to be important, especially if it might mean foregoing something that might be fun, or pleasure, or gratification, or all three -right now.

Everything seems to encourage us to yield to the temptation of the quick fix.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting that you seek pain and suffering and difficulty and trauma instead of freedom from these. Insofar as I can tell, there is no virtue in suffering in and of itself – nor in not suffering. Difficulties and hard times are not to be sought over freedom from them. It seems in order to try to avoid these, if the cost of avoiding is not too high.

The problem about the temptation of the quick fix is that it focuses on suffering and difficulty at all cost. It urges setting aside anything that might delay instant gratification, as if instant gratification were the end and objective of our living.

It gets into our belief systems.

I remember a teenage group in a congregation I served. At the meeting one Sunday night, they said, "Let's have a party." and I said, "I think that would be great."

We began to talk about when the party would be, what we would do, and who would do what, in preparation for it. At some point, I asked how many would be planning to attend the party. Not a single person would make the commitment to be present – not at that time.

I asked again, "Do you want to have a party?"

"Oh yes, we want to have a party."

"Why can't you tell me now whether or not you plan to attend it?"

Their answer astonished me, although I supposed I should have expected it. "We want to keep our options open. There might be something else that night that would be more fun to do."

They were quite upset with me when I told them we could not plan a party unless they expected to give it priority and be there. It seemed perfectly reasonable to them that we should schedule the party, do all the work necessary to prepare for it, and then, at the last moment, they would decide whether or not they would attend – depending on what their other options were.

Incidentally, they also wanted me and their parents to do all the preparing.

In contrast, I remember my Father's reactions at the time of Mother's death.

Understandably, he was quite upset. They had been married 63 years, and had courted two years before their marriage. It was a good marriage. They really loved each other. Her death was a staggering blow to Dad. The doctor and others with him at the time, wanted to give him a sedative to help him deal with his grief.

Dad refused to take any medication. He said he wanted to stay in touch with and aware of his feelings. He didn't want them dulled in any way. The years he had spent with Mother were precious to him. He wasn't about to take something to blunt the intensity of his grief now that she was gone. Instant gratification – instant relief – was not a goal for him.

There is another problem.

When our belief system reinforces the appropriateness of the quick fix, and it doesn't occur, the almost automatic reaction is one of anger, resentment and outrage.

It gets to be a vicious circle. The quick fix is what I have come to expect. My efforts in that direction are not successful. I am not immediately fixed. So, I feel angry, resentful and outraged. That hurts. I look for a quick fix for that problem. There isn't one, so I am angry, resentful and outraged all over again. And so the cycle goes.

Pursuit of instant gratification may work – or seem to work – for a while. The strong likelihood is that it won't work with any consistency. I am likely to become more and more dissatisfied, and to try to pursue, with ever increasing intensity, the quick fixes that keep on eluding me.

If not the quick fix, what is the alternative?

The alternative is to have a different set of values, long term goals, and to be willing to confront difficulty, struggle, and suffering, if need be, to keep growing toward these goals.

A different set of values? Yes. Something in the place of the belief that the aim in life is for everything to be easy, available, and instantly gratifying. Something like valuing peace and love, and satisfying and fulfilling relationships. Like setting a store by the fine brains and bodies God has given us, and striving to develop them to their full potential. Like accepting that every person is a beautiful child of God and deserving the opportunity to show the world that it is true. Like seeking and seeing the positives in whatever happens. Like knowing that there is much satisfaction and deep gratification in being a parry to the development and growth of another person over whatever period of time it may take.

Long term goals? Yes. Something in the place of the notion that instant gratification is where it is. Something like getting an education even if it means struggle and doing without some things – or postponing something that might be pleasurable in the moment. Like deciding to develop the qualities of body, mind, and spirit, and setting

up a plan to do it. Like determining to improve the quality of the relationships in home and family, and learning to do the things that enable that to happen. Like accepting responsibility for confronting some of the ills of our society, and initiating plans and programs to move toward resolving them. Like realizing the importance of loving self and others with the same unconditional love with which God loves us, and doing whatever is necessary to love that same way.

Confront difficulties, struggling, and suffering? Yes. Something in the place of always looking for the easy way. Something like maybe even being a little bit hungry in order to share with another who is hungry. Like being persistent in the face, of opposition, ridicule, or utter lack of support in an effort to accomplish the common good. Like going the second – and third – and even the fourth mile to provide care and support for another suffering person. Like bearing with people over a period of time while they struggle toward the goals they have set for their lives.

I don't mean for these suggestions to be exhaustive – only indicative.

It is worth the struggle to learn how to live as God intends, and to live that way. It is worth the effort to be observers of the life scene around us; to learn from it; and to put into practice what we learn. It is worth whatever it may take to become thoroughly acquainted with God and with ourselves, and then to proclaim to the world who we are and who God is.

The temptation of the quick fix! It is a temptation. I pray that I – and you – may successfully resist it, and put in its place my – and your – determination to set and seek the long term goals that, in the end, alone bring about any real gratification.