Transcript and Discussion Questions

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How Quakerism Began

Transcript

Quakerism started as part of the English Civil war period, 1640s. There were a variety of movements during the civil war period that were seeking address some of the disparities in English Societies: ecclesiastical, political, economic. Some of those groups were Diggers, Levellers, Muggletonians, 5th Monarchists, Seekers groups. Some that were trying to seek reform within the church (the Puritans), some who had given up on the Church as a dead corpse and left and started their own chapels or conventicles, and Quakerism emerged out of that chaotic social, political, religious time.

George Fox was one of the leaders of that movement but he wasn’t alone in that. He has become a major figure in understanding the origins of Quakerism.

He became tired of what he saw as hypocrisy in the church of his youth and about the age of 19 he left the church and started wandering about seeking a direct spiritual experience that spoke to his condition and he didn’t find it in any of the outward forms, didn’t find it in any of the the clergy of the time, didn’t find it in other authorities.

In 1647 he had an experience in which he heard a voice telling him, “there is One, even Christ Jesus who can speak to thy condition.”

“And when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.”

Which, in contemporary expressions would probably be: what he was seeking outside of himself as authority, he found available to himself within.

He then started sharing that message: that what you’re seeking outside of yourself is available inside of yourself, and you can turn to that inward teacher, that prophet, priest, redeemer, lord within and be led into salvation and truth.

Quakerism spread from the initial insights of Fox and others who came out of this gumbo of seeking reform in the church of England in the 1640s and 50s initially by word of mouth. They would share their experience. Fox, for example, would go about the countryside sharing his understanding of the fact that Christ had come to teach the people directly, to direct them inwardly to God, to Christ their teacher and priest.

Sometimes he would speak to larger gatherings, but it wasn’t until about 1652 that there were larger numbers of people who came to hear his message. Those folk then shared the message with others. Pretty soon they started going out two by two, sharing the gospel message and people came into convincement.

By the time Fox died in 1691 there were some 50,000 Quakers so in 40 or 50 years it spread, much of that coming out of that social milieu of protest and the seeking of reform and it really
was one by one by one.

Discussion Questions

1. The Quaker religion arose in the midst of demands to address disparities in society—economic, religious, political. What pressing issues today energize our spiritual movements?

2. George Fox left the church of his youth at age 19 because he was looking for a spiritual experience that “spoke to his condition” and didn’t find it in church—not in the ritual, not in the clergy, not in the church authorities. He realized that what he was seeking outside himself could be found within, in a direct experience with what he called “the Christ within,” what Quakers sometimes also call “the Inner Light.” Have you experienced a connection “within” that made your heart “leap with joy” like Fox?

3. Spiritual and religious messages used to spread by word of mouth, one by one, two by two, or occasionally when a charismatic speaker could gather a curious crowd. How can spiritual messages spread today?
The Faithfulness Lecture

Transcript

For me faithfulness is a very key element of Quakerism, perhaps the key element of Quakerism. And the hard part about faithfulness is it actually takes courage. We wouldn’t talk about it unless it took some work.

There’s many stories in my life about encountering that struggle to be faithful. There was a big one pretty early in my religious life. I had been worshiping regularly in a meeting for maybe 3 or 4 years and I had been married about a year before and I went to someone else’s wedding and it was a big wedding.

(In a Quaker Wedding, those present are invited to stand and speak if they feel led. This is called “spoken ministry.”)

The other thing you should know is that I had given spoken ministry before but I believe I had never given ministry in song. At this wedding I had this little nudge to sing the song that had been sung at our wedding, and I thought, “Nah, I just have an association between weddings and that song. Ok.”

And the nudge came back and I said, “I’m not going to stand up in front of all these people and sing that song!”

And then the nudge came back again and I said, “I do not know all the words to that song!”

But my husband was sitting next to me and I knew he had memorized all the words to that song.

So it came back again. And finally I had to give myself a lecture and I have since named this. It is: “The Faithfulness Lecture.” And the faithfulness lecture goes something like this:

“So you believe in this religion or not? If you do, it does not matter whether you will be on tune, whether you get the words right, whether people will hear you, whether they approve of this message. If you are supposed to give this message, give it.”

And really, I knew I was supposed to give the message. I had all those signs: it came back and back and back, I was having this quaking feeling. I was supposed to give this message.

So I leaned over and I got the words from my husband and I stood up and I screwed my eyes tight and I grabbed the bench in front of me and I sang the song. And, as so often happens when there’s singing ministry, a few other people sang with me so there was this wonderful sense of support.

But I have had many occasions since when I have had that nudge to speak or act and especially in meeting for worship when I’m feeling kind of resistant but it’s really clear I’m
supposed to give, sometimes I just say to myself, “The Faithfulness Lecture” and that’s all I need. I screw up my eyes closed and I stand up and I do what I’m supposed to do.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the most daunting leadings that you’ve gotten? What was your reaction to receiving a nudge that would take some courage?
2. When Traci felt a nudge to give singing ministry at a large wedding, she gives three excuses before finally giving in and standing up to sing. What are some excuses that you come up with when you are feeling resistant to the leadings of the Spirit?
3. Traci has come up with “The Faithfulness Lecture” as a way to build up her courage when she is feeling resistant to a nudge from the Spirit. What are some tools that you have developed or could develop as a reminder to “live up to the Light that thou hast?”
Student Activism as Prophetic Ministry

Transcript

I think the places where young people often get tripped up is around their own fear and their own inadequacy and so often what I tried to do was to be a mirror so that they could actually see themselves more authentically and to try to help them to develop skills so that they could listen more deeply internally instead of the voices of their peers or their parents or so on and so forth.

Mostly I always see myself as this cheerleader: “You can. Yay!” The little Quaker cheerleader.

My name is Trayce Peterson. I live here in Richmond, Indiana. I just finished working at Earlham College, 15 years at the College. I attend Clear Creek Friends Meeting and College Meeting for Worship here on Earlham’s campus.

One of the things that Quaker education does for young people is it enlivens their spirit and helps them to cultivate their own voices.

There is a kind of bravery that, when you’re 18 to 26, that you have. You’re just fierce. That’s really exciting to walk along with young people during this period. It’s very exciting.

If we think about the founder of Quakerism, George Fox was a twenty-something year old person. He was a young man, and he had a prophetic voice and he had something important to say to the society in which he was raised and that nurtured him. A movement was started as a result of his faithfulness to that.

Really the student organizing is that prophetic voice saying, “look at what you are saying and what your literature says about justice and peace, equality, and then what are you doing? Are those two lining up?”

Conflict isn’t necessarily a bad thing, because it brings to light deeply held values. Part of the work always is trying to speak the truth in love but speak the truth and then engage in that messiness. Because it isn’t neat. And recognize that even in that frustration that good things can emerge from that and often do.

I think it’s critical to the institution and I know there are naysayers that say that there are professional people who are trained to address whatever the issues are and students have only part of the story, but I think it’s so valuable and so important because if we are to try to live up to our aspirations, then we have to speak the truth.

That’s not going to get squelched here at Earlham. It will, like weeds, grow up through the crevasses. It’s not going to get silenced. In fact, it’s one of the unique things about this College.
Discussion Questions

1. Trayce says that a place where young people often get tripped up is around their own fear and inadequacy, so she tries to be a cheerleader. What is a time in your life when someone helped you develop that internal voice that allowed you to see yourself and your power more clearly? How might you be that “cheerleader” for someone else?

2. In the video, Trayce points out that the founder of Quakerism was a young man with a prophetic message. Where do you see people in this age group bringing prophetic messages to their home communities today? How can we make ourselves open to hearing these messages?

3. Trayce holds up that conflict can be useful because it brings to light deeply held values. What are some deeply held values that you’ve seen illuminated by conflict, and how do you speak the truth with love and then engage in the messiness?
Quaker Silence

Transcript

Paul Baker
Silence is the ground out of which worship comes.

Guli Fager
As someone who talks a lot and isn’t nervous about talking, I think it’s good for me to shut up sometimes.

Settling

Breeze Richardson
I think it’s hard to describe what settling into the silence feels like or its purpose necessarily but I think the silence is important because it gives you an opportunity to center.

Monica Walters-Field
What the silence does it is leaves the space for the sound, the whisper, even the noise of the Spirit. It leaves a space for the other to come in.

Jim Rose
The silence is to me the quieting of the “daily mind”.

A.M. Fink
The silence is where we meet the mystery without the distraction of words or the trappings of entertainment.

Jim Cavener
And you center and you let Spirit do what she may.

Harry Tunis
Desmond Tutu says we have to give up all hope for a better past, and that can take a few moments to do.

Jim Rose
It’s drawing back from the past, drawing back from the future, and trying to be present and in the moment and to listen to what your heart is saying. It’s easier for me to do in an atmosphere of silence.

Christine Snyder
So that we can rid ourselves of the distractions, so that we can open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing the word of God.
“Expectant” Listening

Paul Buckley
Silence is a tool. It’s only a tool. It’s a way that Quakers have of shutting out all of the distractions, all of the things that bubble up in our minds that get in the way of hearing that still small voice of God speaking to us, telling us what it is that God hopes for us and desires for us.

Monica Walters-Field
It just reminds us that we can listen.

George Rubin
It gives you a chance to find within yourself that light that can lead your life.

Jim Rose
It is not a void. It is full of expectation and that awaiting of the messages of the heart is richly rewarded if you’re attentive.

Community Engagement with God

Breeze Richardson
We do that corporately and I think there is a lot of importance in doing that together, and it’s different when you do it together.

Dana Kester-McCabe
If it were silent meditation at home, it wouldn’t be the same invitation. In silent worship, I get to sing and play my spiritual instrument with my friends.

Guli Fager
The discipline of sitting in silence for me is about listening to the way that God speaks through other people. But I think that I feel more challenged and enriched when other people offer messages in meeting because you don’t get to argue or respond. That’s my natural state, always wanting to have a discussion with someone.

It’s not just the silence, it is what we’re doing in meeting for worship. You have to listen to the way that God is speaking through other people, and you may not like it. And to me that’s a really good discipline.

Paul Baker
In silence we meet with the holy spirit and we engage corporately in a conversation and it’s a community that shares this engagement with God.
Discussion Questions

1. A.M. Fink says that the silence is “where we meet the mystery without the distraction of words or the trappings of entertainment.” What do you think he means by “the distraction of words” and “trappings of entertainment”? What does it mean to “meet the mystery?”

2. Guli identifies that the most challenging aspect of waiting worship for her is listening to the way that God speaks through other people without arguing or responding. What do you find most challenging and enriching about waiting worship?

3. Desmond Tutu says, “there can be no forgiveness without giving up all hope for a better past”. What do you think this means and how does it relate to waiting worship?
Why Are Quakers Pacifists?

Transcript

Fox said that we do not war with outward weapons. Our understanding of Jesus is he will not ask us to do outward weapons. We don’t understand a holy Spirit that one minute says “be peaceful” and the next minute, “Go out and kill a lot of people.” We don’t understand that kind of Spirit. The Spirit we experience is one that is consistent and wants us to not war with outward weapons.

I’m George Lakey, Philadelphia Quaker.

A Paradigm Change

We’re going through a paradigm change right now. It’s something that I didn’t know if I would ever live to see because the paradigm that says, “when push comes to shove, you have to use violence,” is so tough and it’s been around for tens of thousands of years. It seems as obvious as the paradigm once was that the Earth was flat. Everybody knows the Earth is flat, right? Well, not any longer.

But that’s how toughly in-built the paradigm is that violence is what needs to be used when we’re going to really exert power and do humanitarian interventions or anything we want to do. “When it’s tough we have to use violence.” But that’s shifting now.

Quakers and Nonviolent Struggle

(“The Lamb’s War”)

Quakers understood it 350 years ago because it was what they felt naturally you do when the spirit is in you saying, “love people and do what’s right. Set up the conditions under which it is easier to do right and stop oppressing each other.” The practical dimension of Quakers was expressed through nonviolent struggle.

Struggle, mind you. Not everyone responds in that way. Some people say “spirituality means I should avoid struggle.” But for Early Quakers, the Spirit wanted us to go out and do struggle. And so Quakers would pick fights.

Quakers would go into churches for example, and after a preacher had preached something that they felt like was really wrong, they would stand up and contradict the preacher even though that meant that it was pretty likely that they would be grabbed by the parishioners nearby and dragged out of the church and beaten up just outside the church. But they would
do that, that’s an example of nonviolent struggle.

It’s because, “yes we make war with inward weapons”, and they even called themselves people who were struggling for the Lamb’s war. They were fighting the Lamb’s war. So this was a warrior outfit, these 17th century Quakers, who were fighting with nonviolent means.

The End of Violence?

There’s a new scholarly book ["Why Civil Resistance Works" by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan] that the hardboiled political scientists who wrote it are getting enormous credit for. It describes in ways that political scientists and hardboiled realists, governance people, are taking deeply seriously because the book describes over 300 struggles in which regime change has been the issue: overthrowing governments or getting out from under an empire or stopping an occupation—big stuff. In this book, they prove that the movements that chose nonviolent means were twice as effective as the movements that chose violent means.

To anyone who is pragmatic of mind, this is news. This is extremely important. So it’s not only seeing the Egyptians overthrow Mubarak, or seeing the Tunisians overthrow their dictator or the other kinds of recent experiences that we’ve seen, but it’s also the scholarship—which is important in terms of idea formation—is beginning to catch up with this idea of nonviolent struggle.

It’s just believing that the Earth was flat. You can’t really hold it against people for believing that the Earth was flat. At a certain time in history, everybody knows that the Earth was flat. And at this time in history, most people just know that violence is the only way to do things when it’s tough. However, the excitement for me is there have been sufficient breakthroughs so that now an opening may exist. And maybe some adventurous person watching this will decide to open themselves to new possibilities.

Discussion Questions

1. George says that, “the paradigm that says ‘when push comes to shove, you have to use violence’ is so tough,” but that it is changing. How have you experienced the prevalence of our belief in the myth of useful violence? Have you experienced this paradigm as one that is shifting?

2. “For Early Quakers, the Spirit wanted us to go out and do struggle.” George gives the example of Early Friends who would stand up and confront a preacher in a 17th century church despite the consequences. In what ways is the Spirit calling Quakers to struggle today? In what ways will we bear the consequences of our being faithful to
3. George describes nonviolent resistance as exciting news for “anyone who is pragmatic of mind.” Do you agree with him that nonviolent resistance is more effective than violent resistance? How so?
“Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit, from thy own thoughts. Then thou wilt feel the principle of God, to turn thy mind to the Lord God. Whereby thou wilt receive God’s strength and love from whence life comes.”

I’d had an intense prayer experience at Pendle Hill where I clearly got the message that I had a role to play in spreading knowledge of the Quaker faith because it’s so little-known. The message was, “you have a role to play” and that it’s important right now, that the Quaker faith has important things for the world.

“Whereby thou wilt receive God’s strength to allay all blustering storms and tempest”

My name is Paulette Meier and I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, and we’re here at my meeting house, Community Friends Meeting in Cincinnati.

I was the artist in residence at the Quaker retreat center outside of Philadelphia, at Pendle Hill, where I had a chance to delve more deeply into the Early Quaker history and writings. The next year I went back to Philadelphia and was sojourning among Friends. It was challenging. I wanted to get my children’s music out there and wanted to learn more about Quaker history and be in Philadelphia in the “Quaker Mecca” but it was challenging for me and my spirits sank a lot, struggling with some isolation feelings even there.

So one day I picked up this quote from George Fox and said “I need to internalize this message” and the only way I know to memorize things is to put them to song, so I just ended up singing it.

“Art thou in the darkness? Mind it not, for if thou dost it will feed thee more, but stand still and act not and wait in patience.”

I was really struck by the wisdom in these texts and how relevant they are today.

Timeless Quaker Wisdom in Plainsong is a collection of 21 Quaker Quotations that I happened to put to melody. After I’d compiled this collection of quotations, I realized that there was a group of 4 themes in them and they seemed to relate to what I see as the process of Quaker spiritual practice.

**Centering**

“Ye have no time but this present time. Yet have no time but this present time”

The first one is all about centering and entering into the stillness. Rex Ambler, this theologian
from England said—in a class I took at Pendle Hill—that Fox didn’t tell people what to believe. He was very unusual at the time in that. He told people what to do. It was directives about being still and letting go of thoughts and letting go of preoccupations and centering. So that’s the first theme: how to get there.

Experience

“When we should see the great creator stare us in the face.”

Early Quakers talked so frequently about entering into the Kingdom of Heaven within. They took that quote from Jesus, “the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” When one arrives at that deep, centered place, one experiences deep peace, deep healing, restoration into the image of the divine, and love—the eternal Christ spirit, which is love. That’s the second theme.

Community

“Our life is tenderness and bearing with each other and forgiving one another.”

That meeting in silence together fostered a tenderness for each other. Like the Early Christians I think experienced this indwelling of Spirit and this deep connection with each other that seemed to bring home this awareness that there’s that of God in everyone. It’s so much easier to love when one is living in that awareness.

Outward Witness

“May we look upon our treasure and try to discover whether the seeds of war are nourished by these our possessions.”

I think a lot of religious traditions may invite one into this centered space of refreshment and everything, but I think the thing that I loved about Quaker faith is that one can be centered but experience promptings of the Spirit to undertake action in the world and to witness to truth in the world.

I think this theme of outward witness is really so important to Quaker spiritual practice and listening for where and how we are to do that outer witness in the world is really important.

“We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity. It is our desire that others feet may walk in the same. We do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions”
Discussion Questions

1. Rex Ambler inspired Paulette when he said that George Fox “didn’t tell people what to believe… he told people what to do.” What do you think Rex means by this? What feels useful about this approach?

2. When Paulette found herself facing challenging times, she developed the spiritual practice of putting early Quaker quotes to melody. She says, “the only way I know to memorize things is to put them to song, so I just ended up singing it.” Do you have a personal practice that connects you with the roots of your faith tradition and affirms your journey in times of challenge? Could you develop one?

3. Paulette says that she had an intense prayer experience in which she was given the message that she has an important role to play in spreading knowledge of the Quaker Faith, which she says is “important for the world.” Do you agree? How so? Have you ever received such a message yourself?
Being Gay in Kenya

Transcript

I'm looking for a new family honestly, because my family has disregarded me. They did a ceremony in the African context of when you are gay or you commit suicide, they perform a certain ritual that people don’t want to associate themselves with you. To me, they performed it. They burned my clothes. They destroyed my things. They have sold my commercial plots in town. Some of the things I have bought. They have sold my things, meaning they don’t want to associate themselves with me.

I don’t have family in Kenya. I don’t have support in Kenya. I don’t have friends in Kenya.

Being Gay in Kenya

The law of Kenya is against homosexuality. If you are gay and found having sex with a person of the same gender you are jailed for 14 years. People need to understand, you know, what we mean by sexual preference and sexual orientation. I think that is the big thing that Africans are struggling with. So if they come to the fullness of understanding what is sexual preference and what is sexual orientation I think they can distinguish that and not demonize people and I think it is just homophobic, you know.

Being brought from where—I just don’t know because people say it is a Western thing, but honestly speaking it’s not a Western thing because I have done research and I found out that in the African context we have some terms that they used to refer to people of the same sex having sex—and so it is something buried down that they don’t want to bring it up. And yet it is there.

Coming Out

When I came out, close friends of mine heard about my coming out and they demonized it. They started calling me—that I am evil, I am possessed—and they treat me as someone who is suffering from mental illness.

“Praying for God to lift this curse”

I can say that what Paul says, “a thorn in the flesh,” something that disturbed me for many years and so I wanted this thing to come out. But it didn’t come out. It is something that I have grown up with my entire life. The first time that I discovered that I was gay it was far away in high school. I was being attracted to men sexually—those who dress well and they look nice.
It was just me.

I would go to people to ask, “I have these feelings about my sexual desires. How am I going to do it?” Most of the time people advised me to pray and fast because they were telling me that it is a demon. And so I believed maybe, you know, people who are heterosexual and they engage themselves into gay sex: it is an abomination. It is a curse.

So I was praying God to lift this curse away from me.

Reconciling

So it has been so difficult for me to reconcile my faith, to reconcile my culture, and my sexual orientation. People refer me to books like Leviticus: “It is wrong for people to be together, have sex with the same gender,” and then they quote so much what Paul said. But you know, they don’t look into the culture of that time. The context and the content.

Why did Paul say this? Why did the writer of Leviticus write this? They take the scriptures literally the way it is and they want to apply it. Maybe it was that time, it is not this time.

Can’t Go Home

So right now I am operating as a refugee. Not on student status, but student vis-a-vis refugee. So I can’t assure you I will be going home right now, but I do love my country and I want to go back and support my country. But I have no means of going back because of the fear that I have for my life. Sort of like, I have shifted my minds to be here and to look for the Quaker organization and work with the Quaker church to support me and to be there.

*Hakuna Mungu kama wewe*

Discussion Questions

1. Justimore spent much of his earlier life fasting and praying for “God to lift this curse” of homosexuality from him before he went through a journey of reconciling his culture, his faith, and his sexual orientation. Have you experienced this kind of dissonance in parts of your self? How do we go through that process of reconciliation?

2. With regards to the biblical arguments against homosexuality, Justimore says that we need to look at the context under which certain passages were written. How do you experience the Bible? Does it provide a way to lead our lives? What is the value of
knowing the context in which it was written?

3. In part 2, Justimore says, “I am here to sacrifice my life and my gift that God has given me to bless my community.” What does this attitude impress upon you? What gifts has God given you to bless your community?
Quakers and Women in Ministry

Transcript

Carole Spencer
Quaker women have a voice. They have a history, they have a voice, they have the support of all of Quaker tradition in promoting the equality of women and promoting the ministry of women.

Women in Ministry

Ashley Wilcox
If we look at Jesus’s message, he spoke to women. He had women speaking on his behalf. That is a very ancient Christian tradition. I think Quakerism has shown that God is calling women to ministry—vocal ministry and public ministry—in ways that are Spirit-filled, and this has been happening for centuries.

Marcelle Martin
In my life, I began to have really powerful spiritual experiences and I wanted to understand them better, and so I looked in the Bible and I looked in history books to find out about other people who’d had similar experiences, and most of the accounts that I found were of men.

Carole Spencer
I think that the Quaker message—particularly to the wider church (if you think about the whole Catholic church, they still don’t ordain women)—I think Quakers do have a larger role to play if they want to be a movement within the broader Christian movement.

Equality

Michael Birkel
The Quaker testimony on equality began in worship, and it began with the experience that women were called by the Spirit of God to speak in the ministry.

Marcelle Martin
In the middle of the 17th century—1650s—there was a whole community of people who understood that women were the spiritual equals of men and they could be equally empowered by the Spirit to give a prophetic message and to be ministers as men were.

Carole Spencer
It was a lay movement. It was a movement where both men and women, young and old, rich and poor—all, if they were led by the spirit, filled with the spirit, they could be preachers.
Marcelle Martin
It was not just a singular woman here, and it wasn’t just a woman who was sent into a convent. It was a whole community of women living in the world who were understood to be empowered by God with a message.

Carole Spencer
They loved to quote that verse in Acts that says that both your men and your women shall prophesy. Everyone will prophesy with the spirit. They loved to quote that. They were bringing in this new movement, this kingdom of God that was going to change things and women were a part of it.

Women’s Liberation Movement

Michael Birkel
Some people feel that this was perhaps the most threatening of early Quaker ideas to their contemporaries and the one that got Quakers most in trouble because once you open the door to women’s equality before the spirit of God in worship it opens other doors to women’s equality in other dimensions of life.

Carole Spencer
The early Quaker women had their own business meetings, separate meetings. It sounds kind of sexist, but actually it was really good for women because they could do their own thing and they could learn how to be leaders and how to organize and how to run committees and how to run meetings. So by the 19th century when there actually was a women’s movement of political change—Quakers didn’t change the political structure, but when there actually was this movement towards reform and women’s suffrage—Quakers were the backbone of that movement because they knew how to organize and lead and get things done.

So Quakerism opened a huge door for women and we can be really thankful that the male Quakers actually defended women’s doing of this. They actually defend them publicly in their speaking and in their writings.

Ministry Today

Ashley Wilcox
I feel like part of my ministry has been embodied as a young woman and I give messages about that sometimes—about how difficult it has been for me to see my body as a whole because in our culture women’s bodies are dissected and you only see little bits of it and so to see my body and spirit as one piece is a big deal for me and I think for a lot of women.
More Work to Do

Ashley Wilcox
Women are equal in ministry in Friends but are not given a similar voice in our culture at large—and hear messages from the day that they’re born that they should be quiet, shouldn’t speak. I feel like Friends need to do more to encourage women to find their voices, find their authentic voices and share their ministry even if it looks different from what we’ve seen as traditional ministry.

Discussion Questions

1. Michael Birkel says that the “Quaker testimony on equality began in worship, and it began with the experience that women were called by the Spirit of God to speak in the ministry.” What is your experience of women being called by the Spirit of God?
2. “To see my body and spirit as one piece is a big deal for me and I think for a lot of women.” What does Ashley mean by this? How does Quaker practice encourage us to see women as whole selves?
3. Carole Spencer says that early Quaker women had a separate business meeting from the men, which sounds sexist but actually empowered women. How do you think this worked? Have you experienced a productive separation of genders?
4. “Women are equal in ministry in Friends but are not given a similar voice in our culture at large—and hear messages from the day that they’re born that they should be quiet, shouldn’t speak.” How can Friends do more to support women in finding their authentic voices? How might their ministries look different from what we experiences as “traditional” ministry?
How Quakers Read the Bible

Transcript

A lot of Quakers don’t. I actually asked this question of a dozen/fifteen different Quakers from across the spectrum: from evangelical Quaker pastors to a woman who describes herself as a lesbian-feminist bible believing Christian, activists and people who are more theologically based. I asked them exactly that question: how do Quakers read the Bible?

The result is a book. Gotta plug the book.

<The Quaker Bible Reader>

Each one of them gave a very different answer to the question on some level, but if you looked at all the essays that they produced—as a whole—you find that there is really an answer to that question, how do Quakers read the bible, and that is: Quakers read the Bible under the immediate direction of the holy Spirit.

We may be scholars. We may know a lot about exegesis and the history of biblical criticism or we may not. But in each of the answers that I got—from Evangelical to Liberal—it was very clear that the real way that you understand what the Bible has to say to you as a Quaker, as an individual, is to let the words be illuminated. Let that inward Light light up the text that you’re looking at. Let the holy Spirit speak to you, and to listen for that voice of God underneath the words.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your experience of reading the Bible?
2. What does Paul mean when he says directs us to, “Let that inward Light light up the text that you’re looking at”?
3. In what instances have you experienced the voice of God being illuminated underneath the words of scripture?
I Am Always At Quaker Meeting for Worship

Transcript

1st Corinthians 3:16—Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells within you? Do you not know? Do you not know?

My statement is: I am always at Meeting for worship. How could I not be?

This Earth is the meeting place. This is the meeting place. And that which surrounds the Earth is worthy of worship. It’s worthy.

No matter where I stand, I am on holy ground. I’m always on holy ground, no matter where I am. So there’s that piece. How could I not be in worship no matter where I stand, when you look at the bigger picture. When you don’t get caught up in the minutiae.

But the other piece is—from Quaker concept—the other piece is a part of our testimony is that that of God dwells in everyone.

So I’m always at worship. I’m always given the opportunity to be in communion with God. I’m always in God’s presence.

I have a body tendency to bow often. My body does that naturally, and it does that because of the Quaker testimony that that of God dwells within everyone. And I believe that. That’s not words for me. That is visceral truth.

And so whenever I’m in the presence of most people, there is a part of me—sometimes it’ll be a small bow, sometimes its a big bow, depending on the conversation. But my body naturally does that. And I sometimes have to talk my body out of doing it because I know it might freak somebody out or make somebody uncomfortable so I’ll do a small unnoticeable bow—because I’ve heard God speak in the other person. I’ve heard God speak through them.

And sometimes I give myself and my body permission and I do bow and I do touch feet and I do say thank you, knowing that I’m telling God “thank you” for giving me the opportunity to hear.

So I’m always at Meeting for Worship. I’m always at worship. I know nothing other than being at worship, which is exciting. It’s an exciting way to live. And I have Quakers to thank for that, I mean really it has come from the concept that that of God dwells within everyone and to really take that seriously, to not have that just be words.

Yay Quakers!
Discussion Questions

1. O says that when she encounters the divine in another person, she has a tendency to bow, “because of the Quaker testimony that that of God dwells within everyone.” What body motion feels most natural to you when you encounter the divine?
2. What is a time that you have experienced the “visceral truth” that God dwells in everyone?
3. What would your life look like if you constantly recognized that you were standing on holy ground?
Why Quakers Don’t Take Communion

Transcript

There’s a phrase that goes through both the gospel of Luke and its sequel, the Book of the Acts, and that phrase is, “being filled with the Spirit.” “Filled with the Holy Spirit.”

There are moments in stories in that book where they say, “and so-and-so, being filled with the Spirit, goes off and does something wonderful.” And Early Quakers I think felt that they themselves were filled with that same Spirit. So it was really that experience. Some of it was structure and so forth—or lack thereof—but I think the fundamental thing was that experience of being filled and led by the Holy Spirit.

Early Quakers yearned for a revival of primitive Christianity because—in their experience—the life of the established church around them was one of form without substance. You could have a ritual, you could have a program, you could have a structure, but it could be there with no electricity running through the wires.

So imagine going to a church service. Ok, you’re supposed to say some prayers whether those prayers speak what you’re feeling at that moment or not. You’re supposed to recite a creed that contains someone else’s theological reflections that you may or may not agree with. You’re supposed to sing some hymns. You know, there’s the old joke, “why aren’t Quaker good at singing hymns?” “Because they’re always looking ahead to see whether or not they agree with the words.” Well that’s where that comes from.

You know, you can force someone in a sense—in that circumstance—to sing something that is dishonest for them. And then you listen to a sermon and a good puritan sermon has been crafted for days by the preacher who has given a lot of thought to it. But if it’s all up in your head but not in your heart—if it’s all in your book but it’s not led by an immediate sense of Divine presence, it’s form without substance.

The same thing for the sacraments—there was a lot of debate going on about communion and about baptism—what they ought to look like, how such rituals should be performed, what the theological and spiritual meaning of these experiences ought to be. If communion meant union with God, you can have the formal elements of communion but no real unity, no sense of union with God happening.

And so form without substance was their experience of the organized churches and they said, “we’re going to get together and let the Spirit guide us, and that may lead us in radical directions.” Like, even women ministering, which was shocking. Perhaps one of the most shocking parts of their message to those around them.
Discussion Questions

1. Have you felt that some church rituals—whether official or cultural—felt empty or wrong? If you have felt the Spirit, what rituals do work for you to tap into it?

2. It could be said that humans have a natural inclination to focus on form, even once the substance that form sought to achieve is missing. What would it look like for us to solely focus on the substance of being “filled by the Holy Spirit”? How might we set up a legacy of achieving that substance without becoming overly attached to forms?
Quakers and the Light

Transcript

A.J. Mendoza
My first couple times in trying to center down to unprogrammed worship was a struggle. Not being raised in it at all, being raised in the Pentecostal tradition, I came into this like, “Well, I’m supposed to be listening to the light… hmmm! And this isn’t working!”

What Do Quakers Mean By the Inner Light?

Marcelle Martin
Well, the Inner Light is also called by many different names by Quakers: the Inward Light, the Light of Christ, that of God within.

Michael Birkel
Early Friends got the expression from the first chapter of the gospel of John, where we find in verse 9 the phrase, “the true light, which enlightens everyone coming into the world.”

Max Carter
Early Friends understood that to be the Light of Jesus Christ. It was not a metaphor, but it was the real presence of Christ within.

Marcelle Martin
It was also called “the seed” because it represented something very small of God planted inside. The phrase “the seed” suggests that that small thing might not grow if you block it up, if you ignore it, if you have all these distractions.

Naomi Madaras
So it’s very much an energetic, alive thing. It’s not just this sort of light switch that flips on or off depending on whether you see it. It’s this force and a Spirit that we all get to share and get to experience together, hopefully, if we’re aware that it’s there. So it’s a process of being observant.

The Light That Guides Us

Keenan Lorenzato
I guess the way for me to speak about the Light that guides us is to think about what happens when we don’t have light to guide us. So we’re fumbling around in the dark, we’re humans, we don’t have night vision. We can’t see where we’re going.
Noah Baker Merrill
One of the quotations that has always spoken to me is the instructions of an early Quaker named James Naylor who talks about those times in our lives where we feel surrounded by confusion and darkness, by a spiritual sense of being lost or being in danger.

And he says, “Art thou in the darkness? Well mind it not, for if you mind it, it will feed thee more. [It will grow in you.] But stand still and act not and wait in patience until Light arises out of darkness to lead thee.”

And that has been my experience. That there is a power and a life that rises in those places of darkness in our lives if we can wait and open to it.

The Light That Illuminates

Michael Birkel
And so the Light is that presence of God that illuminates for us. It might show us a way forward. It might embrace us and welcome us into the inward life.

Marcelle Martin
It’s experienced as an inward kind of illumination that shows you things. It shows you—oftentimes first of all—what is not of the Light or what is blocking the Light.

Michael Birkel
The Light was not simply a cozy fire to warm ourselves with on a wintry day. The Light was a beacon and this beacon spread its light over all those aspects of ourselves that we might prefer to admit weren’t there. The Light reveals to us—among other things—our own capacity to do terrible things, to do great harm in this world. And so the Light was powerful but it was also terrifying.

Marcelle Martin
And then it shows you God’s truth or God’s way. What the Light is in its fullness, which is love and truth and peace and unity, justice, mercy, all of those wonderful attributes that we know come from God and then it shows you how God wants you to live, according to the Light, so that those qualities of God can be manifest in society.

Holding Someone in the Light

Charlotte Cloyd
Holding someone in the Light, for me, means that I’m directing my positive energy towards the person that is in need of support and love.
Trenor Colby
Last year my friend passed away and it was kind of difficult for me to share that with everybody here but I did and I received just a wonderful warm feeling from everybody. There was a lot less sense of pity than there was just, “I’m here for you.” Just kind of giving your energy towards somebody and being present. I think that’s when I was held in the Light the most, because I asked for that help from the community here.

A.J. Mendoza
And that is so freeing! There’s not an authority that I need to appeal to or try to seek from somebody else. It’s here and it’s there and it’s in all of us, together. Seeking my piece of that is incredible. But being in a community that is seeking that same thing: amazing. What a thing to sit down and do every week. It gets me so excited. The Light, goodness gracious….

Discussion Questions

1. Marcelle Martin says that there are many different names for the thing that Quakers now call “the inner Light”. There’s the “seed”, and the “Light of Christ” and “that of God within”. Which of these resonates most with your spiritual experience? Why?

2. Have you ever had a palpable sense that you were being held in the Light by your community? What were the circumstances? What did it feel like? What do you do when you say that you are “holding someone in the Light”?

3. Michael Birkel says, “The Light was a beacon and this beacon spread its light over all those aspects of ourselves that we might prefer to admit weren’t there.” Have you experienced this “terrifying” nature of the Light? What transformation has occurred in your life as a result?
How Quakers Make Decisions

Transcript

The way Quakers do business is a really significant part of our spirituality, our practice, our identity as Friends, and that isn’t always something that’s easy to understand upfront because I think for most Christians and most people in the world, a business meeting is sort of a tedious thing that has to be gotten through. In my understanding of Quaker spirituality and Quaker theology, a business meeting is an opportunity for sacramental encounter with God.

Sometimes people talk about how Friends make decisions by consensus. That’s a secular term that has some kind of meaning that people understand: ok, you’ve all agreed on something. But that isn’t the nature of our spiritual experience and our theological understanding of what we’re doing. We’re not looking for a place where we all agree, “alright, good enough, let’s just do that because nobody is objecting.” We are looking for obedience to the will of God.

And so we start from a really strong affirmation and presupposition that God has a will. God has a will for us as individuals. God has a will for us as a spiritual community in the Meeting, and God has a will for this world. And God wants to communicate God’s will. We don’t have to puzzle it out, it’s not that hard. You don’t have to have a PhD. to figure out the mind of God, because God by God’s nature is making that mind known to the community. All we have to do is get out of our own way.

And believe enough to be able to stick with it though all of the ways in which that process exposes our sins and weaknesses and failings to ourselves and to each other, the ways in which we can get ugly with each other. That’s a holy process. My experience has been that Friends actually really do stay in it; stick with it.

You can say, “well, God doesn’t care what color the carpet is in the fellowship hall. Why does that really matter? Why do we have to seek God’s will for color of the carpet? Let’s just choose the carpet.”

And maybe there’s a whole lot of other issues that get raised up around the carpet that we pick for the fellowship hall. Maybe different colors have different psychological meanings in peoples’ lives and you can get into color theory, or maybe there’s off-gassing from this brand, or maybe this company uses child labor in Pakistan. A carpet decision can raise all kinds of other stuff. And maybe God does care about the carpet, because certainly God cares about the child laborers in Pakistan and God cares about the toxic waste of the carpet manufacturing processes. And God cares about us as a community walking through that process together, the spiritual fruits that can come from seeking deep unity on the choice of a carpet. It’s not about the carpet, it’s about the transformation of the world through the choice of a carpet.
So yes, we say that each and every decision facing the Meeting is a holy and sacred and sacramental opportunity. There is no secular work.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard someone characterize the Quaker decision-making process as “consensus”? Do you correct them?

2. Eden Grace says, “We start from a really strong affirmation and presupposition that God has a will. God has a will for us as individuals. God has a will for us as a spiritual community in the Meeting, and God has a will for this world.” What do you think Eden mean by this? Do you share this belief? What does it mean for your life?

3. Eden uses the example of community discernment over the color of a carpet as an example of a decision that seems trivial but becomes transformational. Have you had an experience of coming together with a group of people to decide something trivial and emerging transformed?
Every Murder is Real

Transcript

I have five children. I have only one son: Emir. And Emir was murdered in 1997 when he was twenty years old.

After he was murdered, I was devastated. I didn’t want to live anymore. It was so painful I could not imagine living through that kind of pain and I did not want to live anymore.

The young man who murdered my son was only 19. Emir was 20, he was 19. When the jury came back with the sentence of “found guilty for 1st degree murder,” his mother screamed and cried and it sounded exactly like my scream and my cry when I found out my son was murdered.

The Beginning of a Ministry

I just felt a calling to tell my story. My daughters and I, we sponsored two major conferences on drug-related homicide. I knew that this was God because I could not stop. I had friends after I had my first conference that said, “Well, OK. This was great. But it’s kind of morbid. Why would you want to keep doing this? Let it go.” I was like, “Well, where is it going?” You know, “Let it go.”

So sometimes I would say, “You know, maybe they’re right. Maybe this should be it.” And then when I would say that, maybe a week or a month… I would get a call from someone—a friend or associate—and they would say, “I have a mother who’s lost their child. They’ve been murdered, can you talk to them?” “I have a Father whose daughter has been killed. Can you talk to them?”

And I said, “You know what? This is what God wants me to do. And if you don’t want to be my friend, so be it. You don’t have to be my friend.”

So that’s how it was for me. I lost some friends. Murder is scary for people.

The Hierarchy of Murder

There’s a hierarchy to murder. If you are white and affluent, your murder means something. You could have been a professional. You could have been an artist. You could have been the
President. So your life is really… “oh my God! You were murdered.”

But if you are a minority, of color, African American, Latino… then you must have caused your own murder. You were doing something. So that’s your fault.

And my answer was, “Every Murder is Real.” It's real pain. It's real suffering. It’s real loss. It does not matter. That person was human.

So that's why it's called Every Murder is Real. That is also the name of my son who was murdered when he was twenty years old. His name is Emir.

Activism as Worship

The thing that I find really attractive about Quakerism is the fact that my activism, my work with E.M.I.R. is worship. Actually, one of my first gatherings, my workshop was “Spirit-led Activism”. That is what I find very attractive, because its not separate. You just don’t go to church on Sunday and pray and sing and do what you do and then the rest of the week, you’re a jerk. Or your work is separate and the way you act at work is not how you act in church.

And so that fact that all of it is meaningful and all of it is worship is what attracts me. When you talk about “holding people in the Light”, who wouldn’t go for that?

Even though it is difficult. Even the idea is revolutionary for me.

When I get up in the morning and get myself ready for the day, I say a prayer. “God is in me, through me and all around me." I go into the world giving love and receiving love and looking God in everyone. So when I do that—when I go out into the world and I’m not looking at your clothes and I’m not looking at your hair or what station in life are you—and I’m able to look people in their eyes and smile and greet them, and not be afraid of them… because a lot of what happens is fear. Fear of who we don’t know.

So if you can see the God—even though you might not actually see it—but it’s there.

Discussion Question

1. At the end of the video, Victoria says, “The thing that I find really attractive about Quakerism is the fact that my activism, my work with E.M.I.R., is worship.” What do you think she means by this? Have you done work that felt like worship?
The History of Quaker Plain Speech

Transcript

Quaker plain speaking originated in a desire to avoid anything that was associated with practices or beliefs that were un-Christian, that even indirectly honored pagan deities, and in the Quaker belief in the spiritual equality of all people and a desire to avoid practices which served to puff up human vanity and a feeling that some people—simply by birth or rank—were better than others.

The Calendar

First of all, the Quaker plain language or plain speech had its own version of the calendar.

Quakers were not unique, but they were probably most conspicuous in believing that it was improper for godly people—good Christians—to use the normal names of the days of the week and the months of the year, since they were largely originally intended to honor Pagan gods.

So for example, Monday was in honor of the moon god, Sunday in honor of the Sun God, so on and so forth and in the same way the months of the year honored pagan gods like Julius Caesar or Augustus or Maya, so the Quaker calendar used simple numbers. Thus, Sunday became “First Day” (the day on which Friends would go to Meeting), the months of the year in the same way became first month, second month, and so on.

“Thee” and “Thou”

The second element of Quaker plain speaking was the refusal to use the word “you” to a single person.

Under the rules of English grammar as they would have existed in the 1650s or 1660s, it was understood that proper usage was to use “thee” or “thou” to a single person and “you” to two or more people. The exception to that rule, however, was if a person were addressing a social superior: so, for example, if a common person is addressing a lord or a lady, it was unthinkable that that common person would “thee” or “thou” that social superior.

Friends had no use for those sorts of customary courtesies which they saw as elevating some people above others, and in the process very likely puffing up sinful human vanity. So when addressing a single person, they insisted—no matter what the social rank—that person be addressed as “thee” or “thou”, and that really, really, really annoyed the upper classes of 17th century England. They saw it as undermining the very foundations of the social order.
Refusal to Use Titles

The third aspect of Quaker speech or plain language was a refusal to use complimentary titles.

So good Friends would address all people by name, as “Thomas Hamm” or “William Penn” or “Margaret Fell”. Not as “Mr. Penn” or “Your Ladyship Margaret.”

Once again, that really, really annoyed the upper classes and if you wanted to get a Quaker into trouble, one surefire way you could do it was to haul the Quaker into court, on even the most spurious of charge, but because the Friend would refuse to address the judge as “your honor,” if nothing else you could get the Friend thrown into jail for contempt.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you know any Friends who still use “thee” and “thou”?
2. The Quaker practice of plain speech was a small change in behavior that caused radical consequences, and was led by our conviction of equality. What might be the modern day equivalent of behavioral shifts because of Quaker conviction?
#Quaker Problems

Transcript

Taylor Satterthwaite
If we were to awkward turtle, it would have to be like this.

Jonathan and Taylor
You don’t have arms! Get those arms out of there.

Taylor Satterthwaite
I’m Taylor Satterthwaite. I’m from Berea, Kentucky.

Miyoshi Gonzalez
I’m Miyoshi Gonzalez. I’m from Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Anna Schonwald
I’m Anna Schonwald. I’m from Barrington, New Hampshire.

Jonathan Birkel
I’m Jonathan Birkel. I’m from Richmond, Indiana.

Taylor Satterthwaite
We were all standing in line together for hot dogs

Jonathan Birkel
(or something)

Taylor Satterthwaite
…and this was at the start of our freshman year when it was still warm and you could eat hot dogs outside.

Something came up in conversation and we were talking about it and we all agreed that it was a Quaker problem.

So I found a picture of George Fox just by doing a google image search, and he was going <imitates Fox>. I figure he’s probably experiencing some kind of spiritual awakening or something. Within that night, between the three of us (I think Jonathan didn’t find out about it until a little while late) we came up with thirty to fifty of them.

Jonathan Birkel
It was kind of an amusing story. I actually found out about it the next morning. The previous Summer I had been on the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage and so we had a Facebook page for all the people who had been on that. One of my friends posted it on there, and I was like, “hmm! I should tell my friends here at Earlham about that!” It attests to the ridiculous speed at which
things spread through the internet.

*Taylor Satterthwaite*

You can upload an image and then anyone can add a caption. It was pretty simple. I don’t know, within the week or so, there were two hundred or three hundred or something.

*Jonathan Birkel*

The majority of them were within the first couple of weeks. It slowed down a little bit after that.

*Taylor Satterthwaite*

…and people from Britain were posting them and people from my own youth group were posting them, like, “hey, look at this!”

*Anna Schonwald*

History teachers believing that we don’t exist is a thing that happens! It happened to me.

*Jonathan Birkel*

It’s kind of a stereotypical Quaker problem.

*Miyoshi Gonzalez*

Except there was a couple of times when people’s teachers thought that Quakers only live in Philadelphia.

*Taylor Satterthwaite*

I know that one of the first ones that we actually made on the image was, “No, not like oatmeal!” Which is also a thing.

*Anna Schonwald*

Oh, I think there was one about sneezing in silence. There’s definitely one about falling asleep.

*Taylor Satterthwaite*

One of my favorites was, “Locks too shaggy!”

“Leather jacket way squeakier than leather britches.”

*Miyoshi Gonzalez*

There’s definitely a few about acronyms. Like, “went to Quaker college. Don’t know all of the acronyms.”

*Jonathan Birkel*

“Went to Quaker college, don’t know professors’ last names”

“Ran out of space on car for bumper stickers”

*Taylor Satterthwaite*

“Business Meeting minutes take hours”
How Quakers Can Transform the World

Transcript

Prophecy is about seeing the world as it is from a God’s eye perspective. It’s about looking at the world the way it is from the perspective of love and justice and the possibility that all things could be made new.

The Possibility of Every Moment

We live in a world where hope is scarce and fragile and where – as a species, as a whole community of life—there’s this sense deep at the roots that something is wrong, that something about the balance of the world is changing.

There’s this low level anxiety that surrounds us and I think a huge part of that is that we have lost a sense of the sacredness of our journey here on this planet, and I think one of the gifts for me of my journey as a Friend is that I find tools for what has been called “sacramental living” – for recognizing that in every moment there’s the possibility for the in-breaking of something beyond us.

The Heart of the Prophetic Message

Taking the condition of the world and all of the suffering and all of the injustice and all of the joy and all of possibility, and all of the reality of global climate disruption and the massive inequality that we experience as human being, and also says, “but this is not all that’s possible. Something could be different.” Ultimately, I think that’s the heart of the prophetic message: “It could be different.”

A Way of Living that Makes it Real

I think prophetic service is not just a perspective. It’s not just a word we would say, or a vision we would lift up, but its a way of living that incarnates that – that makes that real in our lives, in our families, in our workplaces that says, “how do I live in a way that’s invitational? That invites people into that possibility that something could be different?” That this—that we see every day—is not all that could be possible, and that together in communities, we could be living into that. We could find that place together.

And it sounds grand and it sounds huge and it sounds impossible to achieve, but living in our daily lives in that way, open to the invitation, is something that we hope we’re inviting people into in Quaker Voluntary Service. And I hope that when people come into a Quaker Meeting

QuakerSpeak.com
that once in a while they experience that invitational living, where we’re seeing things as they are and also reaching for what could be together.

Discussion Questions

1. Noah says that the heart of the prophetic message is simply, “It could be different.” When have you most powerfully heard and experienced this prophetic message? What is a time that you have felt called to carry that message?

2. The connection between prophecy and service, Noah says, is that service has a way of making that change real in our lives. Have you experienced service in this way?
The Quaker Practice of Surrendering the Self-Will

Transcript

Today we live in a time of crisis, and a nearness really to catastrophe on the planet that threatens the survival of the human race and all of the other species on the planet. It’s a time of great crisis – more than we know, I believe. And also a time when God is calling us to great change.

How Will We Respond to the Crises of Our Time?

My name is Marcelle Martin. I’ve got a blog where I’m sharing what I’ve been learning from the first Quakers—the amazing discoveries they made and how people are living out that spiritual journey in our time.

I think that everything that we need in order to face the challenges and the crises in our time are within us, and we need to bring it out because every person on the planet has a piece of that, can do God’s work in helping to restore the planet and to make this a place where love and peace prevail. But we have to change our ways. It’s a time where great, great change is needed and needed quickly, and will draw forth from us potentials that really haven’t been seen except in extraordinary people in the past—and these are potentials that are part of everyone.

Desire and the Will of the Self

At the very beginning of the Quaker movement, they had a very strong understanding of God’s will for us and how to live being different from the normal human will, and they discovered—first of all—the amazing presence of the divine within themselves and within everyone and within the world, but then there’s—on the other hand—the will of the small individual self who feels afraid, and because of fear has greed, and of course has natural human desires, some of which become overpowering lusts—desires for comfort, for security, for social status, and when those desires are in control, that’s what they called the “self”. And so they understood that your self-will could not be in control—that this spiritual journey was about surrendering that identity, that will, for God’s will.

It’s a process by which the ego is no longer the master of your actions, or in control. There’s something larger that’s in control.
Quaker Practice: “Give Over Thine Own Willing”

And I think that's something that we learn every day. Every day we have opportunities to choose between our personal desires, our personal comfort, our personal security, and serving others. Bringing love to others. Bringing truth to others in ways that might not be comfortable to ourselves personally. Everybody has those opportunities every single day and we get practice in doing that every day.

One way that I get practice is that I’m a shy person, I’m an introvert. I prefer to spend my time reading and writing. Talking to people is often a challenge to me, and yet what I feel called to do involves teaching and talking and leading workshops and being a public personality, and so every time I do that, in a sense, I’m surrendering to this larger purpose.

“A Different Kind of People”

None of us can actually see how we’re going to solve the big problems. In fact, most people are spending a lot of energy denying the magnitude of the problems that we face in our time. So that’s the first challenge really: to face the crises of our time, and then to learn how to let God direct us in solving the problem and becoming a different kind of people—letting those potentials that are within us become manifest.

Discussion Questions

1. Marcelle points out that Early Friends made a distinction between the human will and ego and God's will for us. Do you agree with this distinction? What are the implications for us?

2. One example of a way that we might be called to lay down our own personal comfort for something greater is the process Marcelle describes of feeling called to do public speaking even though she is a shy person and an introvert. What is a way that you have been called outside of your comfort zone in order to be of service for a larger purpose?
Are Quakers Amish?

Transcript

Are Quakers Amish? That’s a question that almost everyone who goes to Guilford College (where we’re filming this today) gets. A number of my students will say when they find out they’re going to a Quaker College, “Will we have to ride a horse? Will we have to give up electricity? Will we have to wear gray?”

What I often tell my students is the main difference between the Quakers and the Amish is that the Amish drive their own buggy; Quakers drive others buggy.

Are Quakers Amish?

The real answer is that there’s a spiritual connection between the Quakers and the Amish. There’s no organic connection between the Quakers and the Amish.

The Amish grew out of the radical reformation, the anabaptist movements of the 1500’s and 1600’s, out of southern Germany, the Alsace area of France and Switzerland in response to the protestant reformation, and a desire to take those reforms further, to create the “true church” of adult, voluntary believers who accept the discipline of the church and associated themselves around the gospels especially and lived out the meaning of the gospels in plainness, in simplicity, in adult baptism, and pacifism, or what they would call “biblical nonresistance.”

The Quakers emerged out of the English Civil War period a century later. Similar desires to restore original Christianity—it was a restorationist movement too—but there’s no organic connection with what was happening on the continent.

How Quaker Used to Dress

The reason so many people make the mistake of equating the Quakers with the Amish is the Amish dress the way that Quakers used to. The Amish came into the American colonies in the early 1700’s on the invitation of William Penn and other Quakers to Pennsylvania for religious freedom. They came as German Peasant stock, dressing like German Bauern would dress, and they looked at their Quaker neighbors and saw them dressing in their broad brim hats and bonnets and plain clothes and said, “works for us.”
The Differences Between Quakers and Amish

But there are very significant differences between the Amish and the Quakers. The Amish, for example, believe in separation from a fallen world. A fundamental theological understanding is to be separate. “Come out from among them and be ye separate.”

Quakers have followed William Penn’s dictate of “loving the world with weaned affections,” to be “in the world but not of it,” so Quakers have not been as separate from the world.

The Amish have a theology that is still fairly Calvinist without the pre-destination. Quakers have a theology that is more open to the possibility of understanding one’s salvation in this life. The Amish will not talk about eternal assurance or the ability to know in this life whether one is in reconciliation with God.

And quite importantly, the Amish do not allow women to speak or have authority in church. Quakers from the very beginning have always seen the spiritual equality of men and women. So if you go to an Amish worship service, which is 3 and a half hours in German, women will not speak a word, unless they’re singing a hymn. There are no women in authority, no women in leadership, and that just isn’t the case among Quakers.

There are also a variety of differences in terms of form. Quakers do not use the outward forms of baptism and communion typically, and those are very central to Anabaptist and Amish understanding. The importance of baptism as a sign of entering into the church as an adult, and the importance twice a year of the Lord’s supper, foot washing as well.

Discussion Questions

1. Often the general public isn’t aware of the differences between Quakers and Amish. How have you experienced this confusion?
2. One of the similarities that Max Carter describes between the Quakers and the Amish is that both were “restorationist” movements. Both were attempting to restore the original spirit of Christianity. Are there other similarities that you see between modern Quakerism and the modern Amish?
3. Max points out that the style of dress that most people associate with the Amish was influenced by the Pennsylvania Quakers. What is your experience with this form of dress? What would Quakerism be like if we still wore these types of hand-made garments?
What is a Quaker?

Transcript

Noah Merrill
A Quaker is someone who is seeking to be faithful to the deepest truth that we can encounter, to be guided to that truth by the guidance of the holy spirit, by the presence of God in our lives, and by the understanding that that’s a real experience that we can encounter.

Paul Buckley
Penn said, a Quaker is defined by one fundamental principle, and that was that God had placed within each person an infallible guide, that if followed would lead you to righteousness and salvation. Anyone who follows that guide, who attends to it and does what it leads you to, is a true child of God and, by definition, then, is a Quaker.

C. Wess Daniels
For me, one of the things that means to be Quaker is to be together in a community of people who gather and listen together. We can have spiritual practice outside of meeting, outside of worshipping, but there’s something about coming together and listening together to God as a community that is full of life, and full of conflict and challenge, and to me, that’s what makes Quakerism beautiful.

Faith Kelley
I think there’s also some Quaker distinctives that come out of that experience of Christ alive and in the world with us, and those are things about, you know, sacraments being inward, and our experience of worship—the understanding that God is there in the worship and is with us. And so those things, I think, make someone a Quaker.

Monica Walters-Field
So by definition, your communication changes, because you know, if we’re all, then, therefore that of God, we’re therefore all equal, and so by definition our relationships with each other must change, and will be different.

Noah Merrill
There is a way of trusting the innocence of that power, so that one is not afraid of it—not afraid of the power—but is willing to walk intimately into that power… and be informed by it. Informed. Reformed. Transformed. And in the transformation, of being touched by God, behaviors change. Something different happens.
But it’s more than that, right, because there are many people in many traditions who are seeking to do that.

So then what’s a Quaker? I think a Quaker is someone who is part of this living stream, this sense of being a people who’ve been on this journey for more than 350 years, traveling together as a community, supporting one another with these traditions and these practices that we have found. We didn’t create them; we discovered them. That help people along that journey of faithfulness, as we help each other to be set free and to grow more fully alive. And to me, that’s the Way we’re inviting people into.

**Discussion Questions**

In this video, the Friends describe three levels of understanding and being that Quakers share. The first is *willingness to listen for and be faithful* to something that Friends variously call by several names—the Light, the holy spirit, presence of God, goodness, the infallible guide, or Inward Christ, for example. The second is *willingness to listen—to worship—together in community* with other listeners. The third level is the *effect on individual’s relationships with others in the world* in recognition of a fundamental spiritual equality.

1. What are your reflections on these levels of understanding and being?
2. What is it like to listen for the spirit?
3. What changes when you do that with others, together?
4. How does a recognition of our equality change how you interact with others?
Who is Quaker Meeting For?

Transcript

For me, what it means to be Quaker is that I have the opportunity for a direct experience of relationship with the Divine. And how Quakers practice that is many of us sit and wait. We call it expectant worship. So we sit and expect to be transformed by the relationship we can have with the divine.

My name is Rachel Ernst Stahlhut, and I’m from Cincinnati, Ohio. I currently coordinate the Quaker Quest program with Friends General Conference. Friends General Conference is an organization that supports and brings together Quaker Meetings across North America. So we offer programming, we offer individuals who travel in the ministry to help support individuals and Meetings, and we also create the Gathering every year which brings together Friends from all over to spend time together in fellowship and learning.

Who is Quaker Meeting for?

Who is Quaker Meeting for? I would say, “everyone.” And I know that there are many spiritual opportunities in the world and the Quaker way is not going to speak to everyone, and I would hope that we as Meetings can have an open door so that people who are looking for a spiritual home can come and check us out, feel safe, feel welcome, feel energized, and if it’s not the place for them, they can leave feeling like, “Those Quakers are good people!”

But I would hope that we have something to offer to many people because the core of our faith is a direct relationship with the divine, and I would hope that that is what all seekers are hoping to experience. I hope we can give that to people.

Is Quaker Meeting for You?

What I would encourage you to do is come to a Quaker Meeting. Come meet some real life Quakers and ask them what it means to be Quaker today in this modern, contemporary society we live in. Come and sit in the silence and see what you hear when you really let go of distractions. Come and ask Quakers about what it means to live their faith in action, what that looks like. It looks for some people like social activism. For other people it looks like building beautiful, deep relationships. Come and ask them. Ask yourself, “What, when I really listen, does the Light within me tell me?” And then you can have relationships with Quakers in a Meeting that you visit to figure out what to do with that message. Come and see!
Discussion Questions

1. Who do you think would benefit from coming to Quaker Meeting?
2. Rachel hopes that “that we as Meetings can have an open door so that people who are looking for a spiritual home can come and check us out, feel safe, feel welcome, feel energized, and if it’s not the place for them, they can leave feeling like, *Those Quakers are good people!*” What would you hope that visitors will take away from a visit to Quaker Meeting?
Advice for White Men

Transcript

My idea of heaven is folks being able to be “full-up”, be fully who they are and bring their gifts or be choice-ful about that. That really is my idea of heaven.

*Live up to the truth and remember my child*  
*You are never alone*  
*No, never*

What I have yearned for forever is to have co-whatevers. Co-leaders, co-facilitators, co-musicians who can bring it—where I can bring it fully and that doesn’t mean that they then pull back, because “you’re too strong with yours” or whatever. So that’s my idea of heaven, so I’ll start with that.

But I think it’s a time in our society—at least here in the U.S., which is where I’ve been most of my life—when white men in particular have a very tricky path to healing, because I think so many of the circles that we would define as kind of healing spaces or spiritual places or activist circles jump on white men quickly as soon as they act in any way fully—full up.

So there’s so much—folks are so ready to catch a white man doing the wrong thing (the “wrong thing”) speaking too much, speaking too boldly, being too joyous about who he is, you know, any of that stuff.

And I experienced this a lot at Pendle Hill. I felt that it was very much a culture that—because it was primarily white, middle class, middle aged women—I was very aware that the culture was not very conducive to white men acting in any way except for very humble, toned down. Sort of a toned down way of being.

And so when we would occasionally get a white man that didn’t act that way, I saw him catching hell. But I was very aware of that and so, you know, the world in general has been so colonized and terrorized by white men that its such a hard thing to balance out, but where I put my energy in the moment is trying to make the space for “Bring it. Bring it. Bring yourself more fully.” Because I don’t think I can heal until you… you know. I can’t see like, “OK, put yourself on pause while I…” You know, I don’t think that’s leading towards us all being whole.

So that’s my thing. I completely get the ones that say, “Let the white men just sit in the corner and be quiet while we do our thing.” I understand where that comes from. But that’s not what I want to be up to. Probably because of my idea of heaven.

*Oh live up to the Light that thou hast*  
*And more will be granted thee*  
*Be granted thee*
Oh live up to the Light thou hast

Discussion Questions

1. Niyonu says that her idea of heaven is to be fully who they are and bring their gifts. What’s a time in your life or a community in which you have felt “full-up”?

2. Have you experienced the “toned-down” way of being that Niyonu describes as required for white men in some spaces of healing? What are some circumstances or communities in which you have felt like you needed to be “toned down”? 
Why I Don’t Wear a Tie in Court

Transcript

I’m Scott Holmes. I’m a member of Durham Friends Meeting. When I describe who I am, I guess it’s parent, spouse, Quaker, lawyer. I don’t know in what order, but I am a trial lawyer and that’s a very peculiar group of people to be. It means in my work, I had to wear a suit, and for many years I had to wear a tie. That always felt uncomfortable in a sense of my yearning to connect with folks. Immediately I was shutting myself off to most of the people in the world.

Not Clear With the Tie

There came a point in my spiritual journey where I had been to North Carolina Yearly Meeting and I had hung out with some old-time Quakers who were doing plain-dress. It planted a seed in my mind that I was not clear with the tie.

The first few days at work I had this kind of nauseous feeling when I put on the tie, like, “this isn’t resting easy with me.” I thought maybe I should start thinking about asking for a clearness committee and talking to people who know more about this and making sure this is really a spiritual thing and not just some kind of a bug or a stubborn, bone-headed idea I’ve got.

So I put the tie on, wore it, but it was kind of heavy, and then the next day it came time to put on the tie and it was kind of heavier. By the third day, I was like, “You know what, I don’t have time for a clearness committee. I’m just not going to put on a tie today, I’ll just experiment with it and see how it goes.”

Leaving the Tie at Home

And it went great! It was awesome. I was in State Court. I was in some lower courts where I’ve been pretty much all my professional life. All the lawyers knew me, all the judges knew me. “Oh, he forgot his tie,” or I don’t know what they thought. But no one asked me any questions. I got a complete free pass, not having a tie in court. I was like, “this is good. This is great! Maybe I can pull this off and nobody will notice! That would be so cool!”

But then I had Federal Court the next day and that judge, he stopped court immediately and called me up and said, “Have you EVER been in Federal Court?”
Encountering Resistance

He took a recess to give me time to think about this and he said, “We’ll see what you really think and we’ll come back on the record here after lunch. We’ll take it up at that time.” And the impression was, “You need to go get a tie on.”

I had another encounter with a judge who made some kind of comment when we were arguing about it that, “Well if you were wearing a dress I wouldn’t let you appear in this court,” and I was like, “Well why not?” And he didn’t understand that. I said, “Well if I’m qualified and I’m licensed, if I’ve done everything I need to do to be a lawyer and my client wants me to, how can you not let me practice in a dress?”

And so what I started learning really quickly was that it wasn’t about simplicity, it was more about equality. That the tie is this symbol of male power and I started learning from my female attorney friends as they were laughing at my experiment—how women attorneys have to think about their dress everyday. There’s no standard costume that they can just put on and not have anyone question them about their appearance in court. Is the dress too low? Is it too high? Is it the right color? Is it this or that? Is it the right place for the right court?

And there’s this second guessing that happens with their dress that is oppressive, which is inherent in being a woman. They have to live up to this standard and the guys have the free pass because the guys make the rules. And so I started really learning more about oppression and what its like to be treated unfairly because of something completely arbitrary because of something like a tie.

So what I learned was the tie had more to do with the power and privilege of male patriarchy than it did simplicity.

“This Wonderful Sense of Peace”

That whole time I was experiencing what I imagine many folks feel who are spiritually led to do things that aren’t normal. It was this wonderful sense of peace. This wonderful sense of untouchability. It was like I was in the Matrix and none of the bullets could hit me. “The rules suddenly don’t apply to me, judge. I’ve got this other power that’s higher, and do what you’ve got to do, but I’m good.”

I came back without a tie and the judge said, “You may appear as you are,” which seemed kind of presumptuous of him to tell me that I can appear as I am but let me know that I was off the hook and I wasn’t going to go to jail. Meanwhile my poor client is sweating bullets, like, “what the hell lawyer did I get that can’t show up with a tie on?”

Of all the things that are wrong with my costume, somehow the tie ended up being it. Another is I wear hats all the time, but I had no problem taking my hat off in court. That’s another tradition, of removing hats. That’s a more clear, historic Quaker problem with removing the hat.
than it is with the tie, so I’m hoping that I never get the leading to keep my hat on, because that would be a quick way to go to jail.

Discussion Questions

1. Early Quakers often went to prison because they wouldn’t swear on the Bible or refused to remove their hat in the courtroom. Do you see Scott’s action of not wearing a tie as an updated version of this early manifestation?

2. Scott says, “the tie had more to do with the power and privilege of male patriarchy than it did simplicity.” What do you think he means by this? What is your experience of the tie?

3. Sometimes Quakers are called into doing outlandish things that have negative repercussions for us. Scott Holmes was lucky that he didn’t get thrown out of court or go to jail for his. What is the most outlandish leading that you’ve acted on? What is the closest you’ve come to experiencing negative repercussions for faithfully following a leading?
Quaker Thought and Life Today: Behind the Scenes at Friends Journal

Transcript

_Gabe Ehri_
What Quakers believe is that there is that of God in every person. There is the spark of the divine. And when you take that as a fact, as a basic principle of the Universe, it changes the way that you see life.

What we do at Friends Journal is to show life through the perspective of people who are trying to live with that truth.

What is Friends Journal?

_Gail Whiffen Coyle_
Friends Journal is an easy to read, beautifully designed publication for Quakers and for people interested in learning about Quakers.

_Gabe Ehri_
We publish in print 11 times a year and we publish pretty much continuously on FriendsJournal.org and on social media.

What to Expect: Inside the Magazine

I think what you can expect when you open up Friends Journal is to enter into a conversation with a community that is dealing with the toughest questions there are.

_Martin Kelley_
Stories of Friends from the past who did great things but also Friends now who are doing great things

_Patty Quinn_
A good, robust exchange of ideas in the articles but also in the Forum as well.

_Gail Whiffen Coyle_
Great stories, good writing, and new and different perspectives.
Recent Issues to Check Out

One of my favorite more recent issues is definitely the November 2013 issue on books and writing and not just because I’m on the cover but I just really like that collection of articles.

Alla Podolsky
I’m very partial to our first color issue because we wanted to do color so, so long. It was like a surge of creativity on all fronts. It didn’t just push the art department, it pushed everybody.

Patty Quinn
Actually a recent one, the concepts of God because its something that I give a lot of thought to.

Jane Heil
Because it broadens my perspective of how Quakers view God and its also a wonderful issue for me to circulate to my friends.

Is Friends Journal for You?

Martin Kelley
You might be interested in Friends Journal if you are passionate about how faith and spirituality connect with both the larger world and your own personal way of being

Gail Whiffen Coyle
And also if you’re someone who enjoys reading, and not just Friends Journal articles, but books. I have to say that our books column that we put out every month is pretty great.

Jane Heil
If you’re looking to explore different faith traditions and how to deepen your own personal spirituality and those around you, Friends Journal will be a place to come to

Friends Journal Online

Martin Kelley
Friends Journal online is everywhere that we think Friends might be, so we have FriendsJournal.org which is all of the articles, many of which are available for free.

Jane Heil
So feel free to visit our website, you can make connections to our YouTube channel, podcasts…
Gail Whiffen Coyle
If you’re a subscriber, you get full access to our archives, and actually the archives are one of my favorite parts about working here. It’s really cool to look back and see what people were writing about in the 1950s and ‘60s.

How to Subscribe

Gabe Ehri
When you subscribe to Friends Journal, which you can do at FriendsJournal.org/subscribe, you get instant access—not only to the current issue but to every issue since 1955. You get a pdf version of the magazine every month that we let you know about by email, and you get the magazine delivered to your mailbox.

Gail Whiffen Coyle
We put a lot of work into each issue and we’re a small staff but we’re dedicated to producing high quality, professional, engaging content for our audience.

Gabe Ehri
Friends Journal has been in continuous publication since 1955 and I want it to be there for my children and for my grandchildren. Subscribing and engaging in becoming a part of this community is a really important part to help us continue to wrestle with these questions.
The Challenge of Sitting in Silence

Transcript

Zac Dutton
I’m bothered when people say “I don’t like to sit silently because I go crazy.”

I want to respond by saying, “Good. That’s good. You should go crazy.” If you’re not going crazy, you’re not actually worshiping.

Abby Murray-Nikkel
I remember the first time I went to a Quaker Meeting at Guilford, I enjoyed it for the first part when someone was speaking, and then when I got to the silence, I didn’t know what to do. It’s just a really different way of worshiping and of being with people than what I have experienced in other life.

Rachel Ernst Stahlhut
It can be definitely challenging in our society of distractions, and it can be uncomfortable and it can be new.

Zac Dutton
I’m saying, “Oh, that’s anxiety. That’s utter terrified feelings. Oh, that’s me going off on some thought binge that’s going to lead down a really scary rabbit hole.” and, “Oh, this is where I am right now!” and just noticing those things.

But then eventually, if it’s a good worship, the observation, the mindfulness sort of transitions into an awareness of not merely my thoughts, not merely my body, but where I am sitting, the people around me. The fact that this is an artificial space that I’m in and that I’m part of a much bigger universe.

Su Penn
My sense that I’m in worship is almost a very physical sensation of being heavier than usual, of sinking into the chair. The chair feels different to me than it does when I’m just sitting and chatting or sitting and working at a computer or something and there’s this very strong stillness that is through my body and that also takes my mind with it.

“Like busting through the sound barrier”

Niyonu Spann
The silence has come to feel very close to the metaphor that Friends have used of a river or of a body of water that we’re all immersed in, and so somehow it feels like the connecting, the connector, the blood running through the body. That’s how I experience the silence now. It’s
very alive and very rich.

AJ Mendoza
I remember the first time during open worship where I felt like I was able to touch the thing that Quakers have spoken to since the 1600s. It was like busting through the sound barrier. When you’re like “poof!” That has kept me coming back.

Callid Keefe-Perry
I’ve been in Meeting for Worship that people have called covered or people have called gathered. The feeling of the Holy Spirit is present. It is a different feeling than mere excitement or anxiety or joy or drugs. I’ve been in that world too and it’s not that. It’s a different thing. And I would name that as the Holy Spirit.

“A deep sense of unity and compassion”

Su Penn
And it’s not that I’m not thinking, but I’m not paying much attention to what I’m thinking. It’s not bothering me. It’s like a background noise. But this sense of stillness and heaviiness is just all through me.

Zac Dutton
The awesome thing is that you’re doing this with other people and feeling crazy and vulnerable and weird and broken with others and there’s also this deep sense of unity and compassion that can emerge, when everyone else is also gotten themselves on the wave, because we see where we’re beautiful, as one body, even though we’re all broken.

Callid Keefe-Perry
We have, in those moments, a sense of what it means to be fully gathered as a people. There are tiny slivers of the kingdom that we become present to in the Meeting for Worship where people are not merely emotional but people see each other and themselves and hear the world as it was intended to be heard, as it was ordered in the gospel.

We love our brothers and sisters as full humans without those demons of sexism and racism and self-defeat, body image problems. We are present in that moment—even if it’s a tiny micro-moment—to the way that things are supposed to be ordered.

Rachel Ernst Stahlhut
It’s when I find energy. I leave Meeting for Worship energized to live, and I leave Meeting with a sense of clarity. It is a spiritual discipline, and it can offer surprising gifts.
Discussion Questions

1. How do you describe what happens to you when you sit in silence, either in a meeting for worship, in meditation, or just otherwise?
2. What is difficult about being still and silent? What value do you find in it?
Quakers and Sex

Transcript

The communion that people have during sex is also a communion with God, and it can be—at its best, when it is full of that love and trust—that shared vulnerability which means that you’re taking care of each other, that you’re making it safe for each other to be vulnerable. I think of it as opening little spaces where God can come in, and I think that sex is one of the ways that we open that space. So I also think, then, that sex is one of the ways that we can experience the presence of God.

I’m Su Penn, and I live in mid-Michigan, near Lansing. My primary worship group is the Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns.

Quakers are uniquely qualified to transform how we deal with sex and sexuality in our culture and make it healthy and wholesome. I think that we’re uniquely qualified to do this because we believe in differences among individuals. We believe in individual leadings and, at the same time, we believe in accountability to the faith community.

So we have a lot of practice in our history of helping a person—helping people—to express themselves, their leadings, their personalities, whatever, within the context of a community that is both a support of that and a check on it, in the sense of helping to make sure that what the person is doing is healthy for them, healthy for the community, ideally comes from God, and helps to unite the individual, the community, and God.

Embracing Sexual Diversity

I think that this is exactly what we need around sex, is an openness to all the individual varieties of ways that people practice sex, explore sexually, and that everything from a person who spoke to me the other day who identifies as asexual and wishes people could hear that and not automatically assume that he’s broken somehow (he wishes that people would understand that for him, understanding himself as an asexual person actually is a healthy self-understanding and it’s a self-acceptance) all the way to people for whom sex is like a vocation (in the good way of being a vocation, something that they put a lot of effort into in their lives and really nurture) and even to people who practice kinds of sex that seem scary or dangerous to a lot of people.

“Sorting out the multitude of right answers”

Having 3 partners in a year, 3 sexual partners in a year, that can be a healthy choice for one person and an unhealthy one for another. And that’s where discernment comes in. That’s why
we don’t get to make rules. That’s why we don’t get to say, “No more than one a year! No more than one a decade. More than two in your lifetime is bad.” We don’t get to do that!

We understand that the same answer is not the right answer for everybody. We have a lot of practice at sorting out the multitude of right answers and we have a lot of practice at really really deep listening with open hearts, and I think that those things put together have the power to transform the messed-up way our culture deals with sexuality.

“A place where Quakers can be leaders in the world”

I think this is a place where Quakers can be leaders in the world, and I think—you asked me what I want to do with our young people—is I want them to grow into that world. I want that to be the world of sexuality that they grow into, where people aren’t afraid to say, “I tried this and it wasn’t good for me. I tried that and it was.” And your explorations are also a healthy thing to do and your mistakes are not the end of the world and that thing you want to do that you’re not sure its OK: it probably is, in the right context, with the right person.

What we want most of all is to help you figure that out, and we want you to come through this without shame, without feeling judged. So that’s what I want for our young people, is for us to get around the work of doing this amazing thing that I know we can do so that our young people—that’s the world they’re raised in.

Discussion Questions

1. Many of the conclusions that Su comes to in the video are based on the statement, “We understand that the same answer is not the right answer for everybody.” Do you agree with this statement? If so, do you draw the same conclusions or different ones?

2. At the end of the video, Su describes the world that she would like to see for young people to grow up in regarding exploring their sexuality. With regards to sexuality, what world would you like to see young people grow up in?

3. Su describes Quakers as being practiced at both support an individual’s expression and leadings, and a check on that individualism, helping to make sure that what the person is doing is healthy for them and for their community. In what community do you experience this support and accountability? How can we maintain that practice faithfully?
The Ministry of Occupy Wall Street

Transcript

The Occupy movement exposed Wall Street and by extension our entire economic system as one of exploitation, as one that God does not approve of and that God is calling us to change.

My name is Micah Bales. I live in Washington, DC. I’m a part of Friends of Jesus Fellowship and I was one of the organizers of Occupy DC.

An Apocalyptic Movement

An authentically prophetic spirituality is going to be one that’s apocalyptic. The word apocalyptic, when I say that many people are going to think, “He’s talking about a nuclear war or climate change making the planet uninhabitable or a dramatic cataclysm.” That’s the popular use of the word, but historically and in scripture “apocalypse” comes from the Greek “apocalupsis”, which means unveiling; taking the veil back and seeing what’s actually hidden behind the curtain. It’s like when Dorothy goes to the Emerald City in the Wizard of Oz and she looks behind the curtain and sees that its just this guy talking into a machine. It’s not actually this powerful, God-like figure.

The Early Quaker movement was an apocalyptic movement, a movement that deeply referenced the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic writings and interpreted them in a deeply spiritual sense. When we read about wars and conflicts and tribulations in the book of Revelation and other places in scripture, its not simply talking about the kind of wars that we humans are used to, it’s talking about an inward and spiritual warfare that’s happening between all the ways in which we enslave ourselves and those forces of spiritual darkness, and the power of God to redeem and heal.

An Unveiling

In the Occupy movement I saw an apocalyptic unveiling of – symbolically – New York city, but really of the entire economic system that we live in in this world, and especially in the first world, in the developed world.

This economic system that makes many people very very rich, but at the cost of the lives of so many, that builds up luxury but deprives people of basic necessities.

QuakerSpeak.com
The Golden Calf

When the Hebrews were in the desert after they had left Egypt but before they had gotten to the promised land, while Moses was away, the Hebrews got together and took all of their gold jewelry and made it into an image of a golden calf, and they bowed down to the golden calf and they worshiped it.

What was going on here was the Hebrews had just left everything they knew and they were scared and they didn't know whether they were going to be able to make it out on their own, and so they worshiped a God of wealth and prosperity.

One of the coolest actions that we took part in as a part of Occupy DC and Occupy Church was to take a golden calf – a paper mache golden calf – and we marched it up capitol hill to the capitol building where congress meets and we delivered it to them.

The Fall of Babylon

In the book of revelation, the city of Babylon is a code word for the city of Rome, which was the capital of the greatest empire the world had ever known, and the empire in which everyone was living. In the Book of Revelation, it talks about the city of Babylon (that is the city of Rome) being on fire and the smoke rising up to heaven.

There’s an image of all of the merchants of the Earth weeping over Babylon and weeping over the profits that would be lost and all the beautiful merchandise that was burning up and all the trade that would no longer happen. Included in that trade – there’s actually a list of all sorts of things that they were trading, and the list ends with, “…and human lives.”

Somehow – and I don’t think this was planned from the beginning – the Occupy movement unlocked a real need that we had, not to list demands, not to say what needs to come next, but instead to say, “Look at this burning city of Babylon. Look at the smoke rising up to Heaven. Look at the utter destruction of this city.” And we’re living in it.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the video, Micah says that, “The Occupy movement exposed Wall Street and by extension our entire economic system as one of exploitation, as one that God does not approve of and that God is calling us to change.” Do you agree?

2. Micah takes a different spin on the popular concept of “apocalypse”. How does the use of “apocalypse” as “an unveiling” speak to you? Do you agree with Micah’s comparison of our economic system to the Wizard of Oz?
3. After becoming familiar with the biblical stories of the fall of Babylon and the Hebrews’ worship of the golden calf, what do you make of Micah’s comparison of these Biblical stories to modern times? Could there be a correlation?
Giving Vocal Ministry

Transcript

Callid Keefe-Perry
In the Liberal tradition of Quakerism, at least—although it's present in other places as well—we say we don't have a priest or a pastor. We don't have a human priest or pastor. The impetus—the power that was really exciting, and George Fox (one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends) really says in a number of places—what we worship, when we enter into worship, is God. And God gives us, as in the days of the apostles, a word via the office of prophet. So we're sitting in Meeting for Worship underneath the highest priest.

Faith Kelley
Waiting worship is a time which we sit and focus on the possibility that God is speaking to us. It's an experience that's really unlike any other experience I've had.

Receiving the Call to Speak

Zac Dutton
The telltale sign of when you're sitting in Meeting for Worship and are supposed to give vocal ministry, which is standing up and giving a message that others in the room hear, is the quickening of the heartbeat.

Christie Duncan-Tessmer
It feels a little bit shaky and flowy, maybe. I can just feel it moving through me.

Zac Dutton
…and the feeling like you're in sixth grade again and you're running for your first office in the student council and its the first time you're going to stand up and speak to a group of people. It's that kind of hyper-anxiety.

Micah Bales
Usually there's something that feels like it's crystallizing in me. I'd almost describe it as maybe a sped-up version of what a clam might experience when they get that bit of sand stuck inside and over time it turns into a pearl. Of course usually we only have an hour for that sand to turn into a pearl in the Meeting for Worship, but God puts some spiritual sand in my heart and I wrestle with it. It may just be some sand that I need to wrestle with and its for me, but sometimes it turns into a pearl in a way where I just have to share it, I can't keep the pearl to myself and it's clearly been given for the whole community.
Discerning the Call

Victoria Greene
I think I’ve given a message twice. My concern was this, and I’ve asked a few members, “how do you know that’s God talking to you, how do you know it’s not just you?” And they say, “well, you listen to the still, small voice,” but the still, small voice could be your still small voice. Anyway, I always had a like, “Is this really God speaking to me?”

Faith Kelley
I’m kind of an over-sharer sometimes, and so I need to really sit with it, because I’ve had that experience of God giving me something and it’s just for me, and it actually is usually just for me. And so I have to be careful to only stand up when I feel like God has called me to share that.

Christopher Sammond
I am very good at subtly talking myself out of a leading. And then I can say, “Oh, the leading has gone away. I don’t need to rise and speak.” I can say, “I spoke last week and I shouldn’t speak again,” or, “This isn’t a topic that’s going to go over well in the Meeting,” or, “That’s too close to the bone, I’d rather not share that.” Unless I go to a place of complete faithfulness and say, “I will share whatever I am led to share,” I can make myself feel like the leading has gone away. And then just live with a mild discomfort. So frequently my process is one of having to wrestle with my resistance to speaking and then coming to that place of genuine faithfulness where I will say anything that I am feeling led to say and to share that.

Delivering the Message

Micah Bales
And so if I’ve been sitting with this bit of grit and it’s turned into a pearl and it’s ready to be shared, then I’ll stand up and deliver whatever it is that the Lord has given me to share.

Callid Keefe-Perry
When I give vocal ministry and really feel like it’s coming from a place beyond me, I feel electric. I feel like something is jarring all of my nerves in a way that clears my sinuses, like my mental sinuses. And sometimes when people give powerful vocal ministry that feels like there’s this real big opening, and there’s this piece of kingdom happening, I’ll get that electric feeling even though it’s not coming out of my mouth.

Faith Kelley
It never comes out exactly like how it was when I was wrestling with it interiorly, but I try to be cautious and careful and slow in my speaking so that I don’t say something that God hasn’t given me. I want to make sure that I have stripped away all the extra, superfluous stuff.
Brian Drayton
One of the things that I look for when I listen to someone speak in Meeting is not the content or the rhetorical content because that’s going to vary. The first thing that I try to understand is: am I feeling that, at the bottom, the message is the love of God?

Faith Kelley
I think the other tricky part is to sort of stop and sit down and the right moment. It’s really easy to keep rambling on once you’ve stood up or to try to tie it with this neat little bow and make a conclusion, but I think the important thing to remember is that when I sit down after giving vocal ministry, the worship hasn’t stopped. It’s not my job to – well, I grew up in Evangelical Friends – so it’s not my job to make the alter call. God is doing that in people’s hearts.

Su Penn
The times when I have felt the most like I really was giving a message that came through me from God, I don’t necessarily have a clear memory of what I said. I don’t necessarily say what I planned to say and I often sit down then with a feeling of great relief, but I wouldn’t necessarily be able to verbally reconstruct what I said because of that sense of being almost a conduit for it rather than it coming from my head, where I shaped it and made it nice and put it out there and can claim it as such a pretty piece of talking. It’s something different.

Faith Kelley
It’s not about, “I have this intellectual understanding of what the truth is, and let me talk about it for a while.” It’s about being a conduit for God, about being a conduit for the Spirit’s work and whatever message God has in that particular moment for that particular community.

A New Priesthood

Wess Daniels
One of the pieces I think that we find most important today, or at least we ought to find most important today, is that God can speak to anyone and does speak to all kinds of people, often people who we haven’t sort of sanctioned as people who God speaks through. With the work of Christ there is a new priesthood. We don’t need to have a particular priest to sort of mediate for us.

Discussion Questions

1. Micah Bales talks about vocal ministry being a “pearl” that starts out as a bit of spiritual grit that gets refined throughout the worship process. Do you identify with this experience? What is some grit that you can remember turning into a pearl in worship?
2. Have you felt that “electric feeling” that Callid Keefe-Perry says happens when he
gives vocal ministry?

3. Christopher Sammond lists some of the excuses he comes up with when he has been led to say something particularly challenging in worship. What are some of the excuses you tell yourself when you want to get out of what seems to be a leading?
War is Not the Answer

Transcript

We try to find policies to specifically call for solutions to war, solutions to deadly conflict. Conflict is inevitable, but violent conflict, we believe, is not inevitable.

I’m Diane Randall. I’m the executive secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, based in Washington, DC.

People know FCNL by our blue bumper sticker, “War is Not the Answer,” but FCNL is a lot more than being a bumper-sticker or a sign organization and being anti-war. We think it’s incredibly important to offer alternatives for the world we seek. We seek a world free of war and the threat of war. That’s part of our vision.

So if we’re going to have a world free of war and the threat of war, what are the options, if not military, when conflict arises? First of all, we’ve had a program for a long time to work on prevention of deadly conflict. There are a lot of ways that that can happen. None of them are quick, none of them are immediate. But we believe that when our US state department and our US agency for international development invests in countries in terms of both development and peace building and diplomacy, that the outcomes on behalf of the United States and the rest of the world will be much more beneficial.

Challenging the Military Industrial Complex

We’re spending well over 550 billion dollars a year in pentagon spending. The challenge on that is both that if you believe that we should be more fiscally prudent about federal spending, that’s well over 50 percent of the amount of discretionary spending that we spend in the United States every year, so there’s just a disproportionate amount of money going there, and disproportionate in terms of the amount of money we’re spending domestically.

When we put a disproportionate amount of our resources into the military, then we rely on the military for a disproportionate amount of our solutions and not every problem has a military solution.

Interestingly, it used to be that the debates over how much we spend on the military was about whether or not we would be secure and safe. Now, that debate is whether or not people have jobs. So a lot of people in our country rely on working for defense contractors or their subsidiaries. In every state, in every congressional districts, there are contracts that go out that are sent out through the pentagon. People need jobs, but where else might people get money from that allows them to work?

If we were starting with a clean slate and we had a hundred billion dollars to invest, investing
that hundred billion dollars in jobs that would be for education or for health-care is a much more productive investment in terms of the number of jobs that are created. But if you’re sitting in a city or a state where your neighbors or you work for a defense contractor, it’s hard to say, “Cut all those contracts.”

So that’s what I mean when I say that it’s a system that’s been built up. It was Dwight Eisenhower over 50 years ago who warned us about the military industrial complex, and his warning has come to bear. We have continued to escalate our military spending, and the sad part is that the military spending that has been put in to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan isn’t even part of the military budget. It’s a side budget. And so right now, part of what we’re doing is trying to reduce that spending as well, and trying to make the case that these wars are winding down, that spending should wind down as well.

Living Quaker Faith into Action

Friends have always been highly engaged when they see broken systems. We’ve done that throughout our history, and Friends continue to do that in many ways. So doing advocacy with elected officials is another way to do that that addresses some of the systemic changes that need to happen and it’s a way that we can live our faith into action. We are, as a people, not shy about both speaking up and taking action that comes from the changes that we experience when we know how the divine lives in our own lives, and when we operate from that center that is a call to love, then it calls us to act into the world in different ways.

I think it’s the quote about living in the power and virtue that takes away the occasion for all wars that speaks to me most deeply, because that is about changed lives. Not just about a philosophy or a stance, but it’s about, “What in me has changed that makes me believe that I couldn’t harm another person and I don’t think that’s the way we should live?” Coming to live in that virtue is a lifelong process, and it is practicing love and that’s a lifelong process.

Discussion Questions

1. Diane says that, “conflict is inevitable, but violent conflict, we believe, is not inevitable.” What do you think she means by this? Do you agree?

2. What does it mean to “live in the power and virtue that takes away the occasion for all war?”
Undoing the Damage of Violence

Transcript

Violence is always a bad choice. It just is. It not only makes a horrible mess at the time that it’s happening, but it leaves an even bigger mess after it’s been done. There’s the people who are the victims of the violence, there are the people who have done the violence, and it’s just a huge mess and it has reverberations for a long time. So a lot of compassionate work in the world is undoing the damage that has been done by violence. Maybe we spend most of our lives—Quakers and people from the peace churches—undoing the damage that has been done by violence.

I’m John Calvi. I’m a member of Putney Meeting in Vermont, and I work as a Quaker healer. I think one of the important things in our time right now is that there are many hurt people. There are many positions of power that think that cruelty and domination is a simple, direct way to operate. As a result, there are many many wounded people.

We really live in a time where we need more and more in the way of people doing compassionate work. Friends have a great history of doing compassionate work. Not only the handful of Friends who were involved in ending slavery, but also organizing for women’s suffrage, and one friend of mine, as a Quaker, his first job was to go into Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and sort the living from the dead. That’s a good day’s work for a Quaker. That’s good compassionate work.

So I teach massage, and I teach energy work, so that there are more and more people doing compassionate work. And there are many, many Quakers involved in doing compassionate work around the world.

The Spiritual Practice of Healing Work

When I begin working with someone, I’m listening to what they have to tell me, if we share common language, which is not always the case. But I’m also listening for the guidance—the spiritual guidance—that comes to me. And often I receive messages about where the pain is in their bodies and how it’s been laid there, and I’m receiving messages about the history of that pain, and whether or not it’s my work to release it.

For some people, I’m not very much help, and for some people, I’m a little bit of a help. And for some people—thank goodness—there are times I’m a very big help. And so the pain of rape, or the pain of imprisonment can be mostly released so that that is not the loudest voice in that person’s body, and there is this moment of grace when it is removed, and someone who has been through some horrible circumstance comes to a place they thought they would
never be in before, where they are completely relaxed and at home with themselves again.

I think of my work as a Quaker healer as someone who comes to clean and wash the damage following violence, and this is an aspect of nonviolence, that we’re doing compassionate work following the violence.

**Discussion Questions**

1. John Calvi offers that “maybe we spend most of our lives—Quakers and people from the peace churches—undoing the damage that has been done by violence.” What does it mean to dedicate your life to undoing the damage of violence? Is this something that you feel called to?

2. John says that when he listens, he receives messages about the person that he is doing healing work on: where the pain is in their bodies and how it has been laid there. Is there work that you do in which you notice that, if you listen, you receive guidance about how to conduct that work?
Quakers, Racism and the Blessed Community

Transcript

In the blessed community, for me, it would include all the members of our human species. I see that as a goal for Quakerism. That is something that we strive for within the Religious Society of Friends.

I’m Vanessa Julye. I live in West Mount Airy in Philadelphia and I work with Friends General Conference serving as the Ministry on Racism and Youth Programs Coordinator.

What is the blessed community? Well, for me, it's a community where everyone has value and that we’re actually able to see that of God in each person and to be able to live in community, sharing the gifts that God has given us with each other.

White supremacy is restricting our way of creating a blessed community because it is making it difficult for people of color to be a part of the community.

What is White Supremacy Culture?

What I mean when I say white supremacy is white dominance, essentially. In this culture, what is considered “American” is really European-American culture. If you are a part of that culture and fit into that culture, you don’t notice it and so things don’t seem different for you.

A part of the white supremacy culture is its invisibility to European-Americans in this country, because if you don’t see a structure and feel that that is normal, then there’s no need to change it.

The Revolutionary Aspect of Quakerism

One of the things for me within Quakerism is it feels its alive and that its alive because it can be responsive. The revolutionary aspect for me of Quakerism where we have stood up against the status quo and there have been times that we haven’t, let me be clear. As the author of “Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans and the Myth of Racial Justice” I’m not putting Quakers up here on a pedestal and saying we did things perfectly. Quakers have had—and still have—issues around racism. It’s still very much a part of the Religious Society of Friends, but we were the first religious group to say, “No, we will no longer enslave people of African descent.”
Eliminating Racism in the Religious Society of Friends

The next step for me in the Religious Society of Friends in using our continuing revelation in addressing the issues of white supremacy and white privilege in the Religious Society of Friends is for us to be able as individuals, as Meetings, to admit that this does exist and that race is an issue in this country that needs to be addressed, and for us to educate ourselves about what white privilege and white supremacy is for us.

Once you are able to see some of the systems, then it becomes astonishing, and it is going to be hard, and it is going to be challenging, and there are going to be moments where it’s going to feel like, “I just can’t do this. This is too hard. This is too overwhelming.”

One of the benefits that the Religious Society of Friends has is the structure that we have support systems through support committees. If you are going to—either as a Meeting or as an individual—decide to start doing this work around identifying what white privilege and what white supremacy is... to have support as you’re doing that.

If we’re able, as some of us are beginning to do around climate and looking at the issues of climate change, of saying, “Ok, this country, we do need to make a change” and that we do need to be aware of our white privilege and the white supremacy so that we can make changes to create more of the blessed community that we’re looking for.

Discussion Questions

1. In the video, Vanessa Julye says that “White supremacy is restricting our way of creating a blessed community because it is making it difficult for people of color to be a part of the community.” How can you imagine that the Religious Society of Friends could change to be more accessible for people of color?

2. Part of white supremacy culture, Vanessa says, is “its invisibility to European-Americans in this country, because if you don’t see a structure and feel that that is normal, then there’s no need to change it.” What would it take for European-Americans to peel back the veil and what changes would happen if they could see what Vanessa is talking about?
A Gathered Meeting

Transcript

Maggie Harrison
The potential for this worshiping experience that you're going to be walking into, it's one of the most inspiring things that I've ever witnessed and been part of, which I think is the reason I'm still Quaker with all the things that I struggle with. It's that potential that keeps us there. But the potential is this thing that we call a “gathered” meeting or a “covered” meeting.

Kristina Keefe-Perry
If I was to describe what a gathered Meeting is, I first need to talk about the purpose of Meeting for Worship.

It is human response to Divine initiative. But in a Quaker Meeting for Worship, it’s not individual meditation or individual prayer. It’s really a communal mystical experience. It’s an opportunity to experience for the group as a whole to encounter the divine presence in our midst.

So the gathered Meeting for worship describes a quality that might be achieved in a Meeting for Worship in which the body is gathered together. I imagine the arms of the holy spirit, the arms of God gathering us together.

Christopher Sammond
A Gathered Meeting, in my experience, is one where all of our openness to the Spirit and therefore our availability to each other unites and there is a communion. There is literally a communion of Spirit in the room, and you can feel it. It feels as though the air gets thick and the silence has a quality about it that is very very different. It’s almost like you could cut it with a knife.

An Emerging Presence In the Room

Vanessa Julye
For me, a Gathered Meeting is when we, as a community, are together, and very strongly feel the presence of God’s Spirit in the room.

Ross Hennessy
We start to become more sensitive to the folks around us and their process and what they are going through. As that communication, that nonverbal communication, increases, there starts to be this emerging presence in the center of the room.

Kristina Keefe-Perry
There's also a tendering aspect of it, where the individual members become closer to one
another as they are gathered up together closer to God.

Maggie Harrison
There’s this feeling like you are not just you, that you are with and are, maybe, those other people, and the way that you start feeling that and experiencing that is that what is being shared, it's like your own heart that’s being shared out loud. But you’re not even the one sharing it. And then you’re seeing—from the peoples’ reactions, maybe their face, maybe their body language—that it’s actually resonating with those around you too.

Ross Hennessy
There comes this point where your will starts to bend in the direction of that presence. Up until that point, you feel like you’re in control and you’re the one that’s processing what’s going on and you’re the one that’s making decisions about the content of your mind or you’re making decisions about what your prayer looks like… but then something happens. Something shifts. Something emerges, that you’re not in control anymore and there’s just a gravity that you start to circle around.

Kody Hersh
It’s just an act of grace that we can all just fall into something that is effortless, that is not about any of the things that we do to try and make something happen in our worship experience or in our relationship with God—we just fall into the arms of God together.

Being Carried Into Something That Wasn’t There Before

Christopher Sammond
I can feel a subtle vibration in my body and throughout the room and it’s deeply nourishing. Deeply, deeply nourishing and wonderful.

Maggie Harrison
Maybe like you’re listening to really loud music and it’s kind of this vibrating, and everyone’s there feeling it. So that inspiration is being shared and it’s your heart and it’s out there. And then someone else will stand and it’s your heart again and it’s another level. And you guys are building this wisdom, this shared experience. You’ve come together and you’re being carried as one whole, forward into something that wasn’t there before.

Kody Hersh
And I don’t know why that happens sometimes or how it happens, but it’s a little like Alice into the rabbit hole. You just stumble on it and fall and you’re in something different that you didn’t know was there, which is a powerful thing to get to experience with a group of people.
Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a “Gathered” Meeting for Worship? What was the experience like?
2. What is the most significant or memorable Quaker Meeting for Worship you have experienced?
Why I Stopped Paying Taxes

Transcript

My name is Joseph Olejak, I live in Chatham Center, and I attend the Old Chatham Quaker Meeting. My war tax resistance started in 1994. I was listening to “60 Minutes” and Leslie Stahl was interviewing Madeleine Albright, and she asked Madeleine Albright the question: “Was the sacrifice of a half a million children in Iraq, due to the embargo of food and medicine, worth it?” And without skipping a beat, Madeline Albright said, “Yes.”

I knew at that moment, I couldn’t do it anymore. I couldn’t support the war. And I felt compelled to take an action.

Withholding Taxes

In 1994, I started my tax resistance by just not filling. I got the stuff from my accountant back and it had the whole form filled out and the amount that was due and I was holding it in front of me and I just looked at the numbers and I thought, “How much of this is going to go toward creating bombs and guns and nuclear weapons and everything else?” And I just set it down. And I didn’t file.

Quakers and War

The way Quakers look at war is that, when we destroy other human beings, we’re not only destroying humanity but we’re also destroying that in humanity which is a reflection of God. In the Bible, one of the things that Christ himself said was that you should do unto others as you would do unto yourself, and if you love me, you would love your brethren. And that’s really what it stems from.

And if we take that, along with the commandment to not kill, I think it’s pretty clear. It’s unequivocal. There’s no fine print there.

Where Our Tax Dollars Go

When we write that check to the IRS, we often don’t think about where those tax dollars go. According to the American Friends Service Committee, about 57% of those tax dollars are going either to the preparation for war, funding the debt on war, or funding nuclear weapons. 57% of every dollar is an awful lot of money.

If there was indeed a Peace Tax, you would write that check and what the peace tax law
would say is, the funds that you’re giving to government are going to be used to support things that are other than war. I think, given our long history as peaceniks, Quakers should definitely have an exception for where their money goes, and anyone else who is a Christian who feels uncomfortable paying for war.

Facing the Consequences

In April of 2009, 11 armed IRS agents in Kevlar vests came into my office and removed all my books and records. And that’s when the prosecution started. I pled guilty to one count of willful failure to file, and told the probation department when I had my interview that I was a Quaker and that did what I did because of conscientious objections to war.

They were pretty lenient on me. They gave me 26 weekends in the county jail, which I’ve completed, and now I’m on probation for 5 years. When I was in the Columbia County jail for my war tax resistance sentence, the Meeting was deeply involved. A lot of people came and visited me, they called me up, they asked me questions, and it was really good. I would say that my spiritual family supported me more than my blood family, which was surprising.

A Step of Faith

Martin Luther King said you don’t need to see the top of the stairs to take the next step. At the time, I felt like there was an important step that needed to be taken, and I took it. Really, it was a step of faith. And, you know, I’m still alive. I’m still here. I still have food. I still have clothing. I still have the support of my children and my Meeting and I think it’s going to be OK.

I’m not unhappy with the decision I took. I won’t say that it hasn’t had its challenges, but I think the challenges have helped me to grow in my faith and have helped to make the world a better place. I know I’ve only done it on a small scale, but I think, with the help of my Meeting and with the growing awareness of the need for peace and a Peace Tax, I’m hoping that this action will shed light and help peace to grow.

Discussion Questions

1. Joseph quotes Martin Luther King Jr., who said, “You don’t need to see the top of the stairs to take the next step” and calls his action a "step of faith." What was a time in your life when you took the next step without seeing the top of the stairs? How did it turn out?
2. Joseph points out that 57% of our taxes go towards war and the preparation for war,
but if there was something called a “peace tax”, then you would have more control over how your money is spent. Are you in support of a peace tax?
Rise Up Singing

Transcript

Annie Patterson
I'm Annie Patterson, and I go to Mount Toby Meeting in Western Massachusetts. It's part of New England Yearly Meeting. And I'm one of the co-creators of the songbook Rise Up Singing.

Peter Blood-Patterson
I'm Peter Blood-Patterson. All the same, another co-conspirator of songbook making.

Rise Up Singing is a collection of 1,200 songs. Just has words and chords, no music in it at all. It's basically designed for people to teach each other songs and sing together and be able to have the words. It's been amazingly popular, more than we ever imagined.

Annie Patterson
And today it's sold over a million copies. It's being used in China, in the Ukraine, Russia, and all kinds of places as a community builder, so Rise Up Singing became what we really wanted it to become. We wanted it to become a kind of tool for community organizing and for gathering people together.

Peter Blood-Patterson
The kind of mission we had for this work is similar to what Pete Seeger's done with music over the past, which is to use song as a way of drawing people together into community, even people who think they can't sing often end up at concerts singing their hearts out, and using that experience of singing with other people to kind of draw hearts together and to create transformation. Transformation that gives people inspiration to do peace and justice work and healing of the planet work, and also to empower them to overcome whatever obstacles there might be in their own lives personally.

Annie Patterson
I think it's hard to talk about what we do when we lead singing without talking about Spirit and our connection to prayer and to how we live our lives as Quakers, because when we do a sing-a-long, we often take time beforehand to meet together and just to sort of say, “what are we feeling?” “What are we connecting with with the energy we’re feeling from the audience?”

Different places call for different kinds of songs, but we really think about that on that level in which we actually would also pray and have quiet time in Meeting for Worship.

Peter Blood-Patterson
When we’re doing concerts we actually occasionally fall into silence. There’s not usually silence… maybe after a very poignant song, but throughout the entire evening, we’ll be listening to the voice, the still small voice of God so to speak, giving us little nudges or
whispers about where this is going. So sometimes we’ll end up singing songs that are quite different than what we planned in the beginning.

I think likewise, Spirit works through the people that are with us, because probably some people came and said, “Oh, I’m just going to sit and listen to these people sing,” and when they were in the audience, somehow the Spirit nudged them and they found their voices rising up in ways that they didn’t expect.

*Annie Patterson*
Because we see it. We see it all the time. People get caught up in the energy of the song, and certain songs really do bring that out in people.

*Peter Blood-Patterson*
So basically, we feel it is possible that God can influence people and change them in any situation, but in situations like a really good singalong is a place where maybe their barriers are down a little bit more, and they’re more able to be impacted by Spirit’s work in their hearts.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever had the experience that Annie and Peter are talking about, where you felt opened and even transformed by singing with a group?
2. What are some of your favorite songs to sing with groups?
What to Expect in Quaker Meeting for Worship

Transcript

Josh Brown
Quakers believe that if you want to find out what God has to say, you need to listen. And so we spend a lot of time listening in quiet prayer. That quiet prayer time, which can happen anytime, anywhere, is the heart of the Quaker religious experience.

Maggie Harrison
If you are going to go into Quaker Meeting for the first time, first of all, congratulations. So you walk in, sit down, be quiet. What to expect when you’re there, besides just “go with the flow” is different things depending on where you are.

What Should I Wear?

Vanessa Julye
Unlike some other churches, you don’t need to dress up with suit and tie or a fancy dress. Most of the folks come in jeans, t-shirts, or shorts/t-shirts. Whatever you’re comfortable in.

Should I Bring My Kids?

Maggie Harrison
So you’re thinking about coming to Meeting and you have children. You really need to know that you have to bring them. They may or may not enjoy themselves but we’re always so thrilled to have young people join us. They come and they’re bringing their alive-ness and their love and their genuine-ness. So please, yes, bring them.

Entering The Space: A Plain Setting

Maggie Harrison
So if you come into this space and you’re looking for images or words on the walls, some kind of direction, and you’re going to notice that there isn’t going to be any there. From the very beginning of Quakerism, it’s about the inside. So it’s about you not looking around you for that, but really going inward for your own wisdom, for your own piece of the divine that’s been given to you.

Kody Hersh
Sometimes a worship room will look like a really old building with benches that have been sat on by thousands of Quakers over hundreds of years and sometimes it will look like the
basement of another local church.

**Entering the Space: Where Should I Sit?**

*Kody Hersh*
Something that’s common to them is that people often will enter already in silence, find a place in the room and sit down in silence. Anyone coming into the room can sit anywhere, there’s not a right place or a wrong place to sit.

**The Service: Learning to Listen**

*Christie Duncan-Tessmer*
So before you go into Meeting for Worship for the first time, I’ll tell you what I’ve always told my kids when they were little, every week before we went in, which is just, “remember when you go in, to just sit down and listen for God. God is here with us and this is a space to listen.”

*Charlotte Cloyd*
The first time I went to Quaker Meeting I didn’t know how to listen. Because I had never listened in church before. I had to work on that process of figuring out: what am I listening for? Am I listening to myself? What’s going on? What is everyone else listening to and how does that affect the community and me?

*Maggie Harrison*
So in that quiet-ness you walk in, you say, “Ok, everyone is sitting there quietly, when are the directions going to come? What am I going to do?” Just follow suit.

*Christie Duncan-Tessmer*
Just sit down in that space. Just feel the space and the people around you and open yourself as much as you can. Just continue to notice how you can be aware of all that’s around you and all that’s within you, and how that’s all connected to everybody else in the room.

**The Service: There is No Program**

*Josh Brown*
It’s called “unprogrammed worship” because there’s no sermon, there’s no hymns, no Bible readings, no prayers written out ahead of time. The whole idea of unprogrammed worship is to spend quiet time in prayer with our hearts and minds open to God.
AJ Mendoza
If God has ever spoken, then God is still speaking. And expecting God to move, through somebody… maybe through me, maybe not through me, maybe just internally and the message is just for me, maybe one that needs to be shared – and I think that is so provocative. It’s provocative to say, “there’s no guidelines here!” I want to know what I’m expecting. And I don’t! I don’t know what I’m expecting every Sunday, but I know that I’m expecting.

The Service: Anyone Can Bring the Message

Josh Brown
Sometimes during that quiet time, people will feel moved to speak. It might be just a couple of words or it might be several minutes. And then there will be some more quiet time and then someone else will speak. They might continue what the first person says or they might go in a different direction.

Vanessa Julye
We’ve had people dance a message, we’ve had people walk a message, we’ve had people sing a message in addition to the usual standing up and giving a verbal message.

The Service: Ending with a Handshake

Maggie Harrison
And it might just be like that for an hour. And then, what to expect at the end? It’ll be like it’s just somehow, it just started happening, everyone will start shaking hands.

Ross Hennesy
Which sort of signifies the changing from the spiritual to the secular world of sorts

Maggie Harrison
And then we’ll all be aware that’s happening and we’ll all follow suit, so all of this hand-shaking is going to happen and this greeting.

After the Service: Fellowship

Ross Hennesy
Generally Quakers have a litany of announcements of various activities that are going on, what protests we’re involved with this time around, or good organizations to be a part of or what potlucks are happening, things like that. And then, usually, Quakers gather for coffee,
Kody Hersh
Particularly when I’m new to a community, I want to sneak in and sneak out again and I find that it’s a good discipline for me. Often there’s this community-building conversation activity that happens after worship, which is really an important part of the worship experience. Building connections with one another that make the worship experience richer and deeper

Ross Hennesy
And that’s about it. That’s a Quaker Meeting for Worship.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your first experience in a Quaker Meeting for Worship like? What do you wish that you had been told to expect?

2. How do you talk with newcomers about what happens in Quaker Meeting? How do you think we can “demystify” our worship service?
Quaker Voluntary Service: Transforming Service, Living Faith

Transcript

Liz Nicholson
So when I heard about QVS, it was the perfect way to incorporate these ideas that I’ve been thinking about: What is my calling? What kind of service do I see myself doing? Figuring out what it means to be in community with people, and so those are the things that excited me about the program initially.

Carol Anne Ferlauto
I had been doing work for a while that was not fulfilling for me at all. I didn’t feel like the work that I was doing was in line with what my beliefs are.

AJ Mendoza
What does that look like, lived? How do you live into these values that you’re claiming and testifying to believe? And that, for me, is what the dream and the challenge of this year is.

Mowie Freeman
I was interested in QVS primarily because I have lived in community in different places in my life and that’s been some of the most meaningful experiences and so I was really interested in having the coming year involve community in some form. Finding QVS, and particularly the Quaker nature of QVS and the grounding, which is something that I’ve been wanting to explore more and connect back to, so the fact that it was in community and it was Quaker based and then also involved this year of getting to work in a different social service organization and learn about a different social issue - felt really exciting.

Carol Anne Ferlauto
I really loved the opportunity to be able to serve doing work that was meaningful for me, in line with my Quaker values and the opportunity to live in intentional community with other volunteers.

AJ Mendoza
Before I said, “yes” to this year in Quaker Voluntary Service, I had a very very clear leading. This is where you’re supposed to be.

Anthony Alexander
I decided to do QVS because I wanted to do a year of service and I had already attended Atlanta Friends Meeting for about six months prior to doing this program.

Alma Sanchez-Eppler
At the end of College I was finding it very difficult to imagine myself being a person in the world, and I felt and continue to feel that QVS is a program that allows me to be myself, doesn’t expect me to posture anything, and doesn’t ask me to be doing things that I don’t feel
like have much integrity.

_Trevor Johnson_
QVS stood out because they knew what their mission was. They knew what they were headed towards. It hadn’t outgrown its mission. It was small enough that it still had this sense of place that it was going, and I think it still has that.

The Experience of Doing Service

_Mowie Freeman_
So what’s meaningful to me about doing the work is that I get to work directly with all different kinds of people and I get to hear their stories and hear where they’re coming from and I get to help use those stories to get them citizenship or get them some sort of status that they’re seeking.

_Alma Sanchez-Eppler_
It’s definitely a way to get to really know how Philadelphia is for the people who are probably least served by the city.

_Allison Letts_
And it was an inclusive school so we had about 30% kids with special needs, and I was just providing additional capacity as a full time teacher.

_Carol Anne_
I work in grantmaking. I will be helping to process the grants once that cycle of the year starts back up again. I help with managing the social media, I help out with writing the newsletter. I do a wide array of different activities having to do with organizing events.

Who is QVS For?

_Mowie Freeman_
I guess I would recommend QVS to someone who was up for and interested in a really immersive experience and was interested in community in small and big ways. Someone who both wants to engage community themselves in terms of how they’re living and where they’re living and also is interested in larger communities and learning more about and becoming a part of larger communities.

_Alma Sanchez-Eppler_
I would recommend QVS to anyone who is curious about how nonprofits work and doesn’t have enough experience really to get a job that’s doing exciting work with nonprofits flat out.
Allison Letts
I would recommend QVS to anybody who is interested in social action or social change, to anybody who really wants to explore their spirituality.

Carol Anne Ferlauto
I would recommend this to anybody who is looking to have an experience doing service work, anyone who is not quite sure of what direction they would like to take their life or career in and need some time to discern what it is that they would like to do with their life. I think its a great opportunity to explore what options are available while serving in a meaningful way.

Trevor Johnson
If you're looking to do Quaker Voluntary Service, I'd say you're looking for a really good experience doing good work in the world, serving people who need to be served. But its not going to be an easy year. It wasn't for me. Expect it to be hard, but expect it to be extremely rewarding at the same time.

What Makes QVS Unique?

Trevor Johnson
QVS is an organization that feels like it is very much on a mission and it's opposing a lot of the powers-that-be in this world right now, which is one of the reasons that it most appealed to me, is that it seems to be trying to operate outside of a lot of the systems of empire that I see in the world, so that's something that I think is really great.

AJ Mendoza
I'm gonna exist in community when it is beautiful and when it’s HARD. Community is acknowledging that other people have the right to speak into my life.

Carol Anne Ferlauto
I find that it can be difficult to find work that I feel is truly doing that because a lot of times the work that we end up getting paid for is serving the interests of a corporation or something like that and it's very meaningful for me to be able to do work that I feel is actually helping people rather than just profit driven. I knew what was out there and I was not happy with the routine in life that I had become involved with, so I was very welcoming to the opportunity to do something different. I feel like my life just restarted.

Trevor Johnson
I met so many wonderful folks and that was great, but I also had actual, good, real experiences with God throughout the course of the year, and I'm not going to just leave that behind. I want to seek that out more and see what happens, so we'll see what happens.
An Unforgettable Year

Allison Letts
I am so glad that I did QVS. I think it was one of the best experiences that I’ve had in terms of learning about myself as a person and what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be.

Carol Anne Ferlauto
I feel like my life just restarted and I gave myself a chance to do something that was different, very different than what I was doing before and I feel like in a way I set myself free by giving myself the opportunity to explore alternative options of what there is out there and options for work and purpose that are not necessarily the most traditional but are very much so rewarding.

AJ Mendoza
I think that this year has called me to start thinking about those things and what faith in the world looks like. What Quakers, I think, have been doing. That’s our tradition, of pushing our faith into places that God seems really really far from, or into systems that just seem so overwhelmingly unjust, and trusting that out of an ocean of darkness, there is an ocean of Light. I think that risk is so worth it. It’s been an unforgettable year.