

QUAKER STUDIES 2023

Chris Braider and Chris Griffin-Wehr

On Being a Quaker

SESSION 1 (September 27): INTRODUCTION: Early Friends and the Meaning of Testimony (Chris Braider leading)

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.

George Fox (1624-1691)

Resources:

Arthur Larabee on QuakerSpeak, [9 Core Quaker Beliefs](#)
QuakerSpeak, [What Do Quakers Mean by the Inner Light?](#)
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, [Quaker Testimonies](#)
Leo Damrosch, [Sufferings of the Quaker Jesus \(excerpts\)](#)
James Nayler, [Prayer from Bridewell Jail](#)
[Dates and Chief Denominations and Movements](#)

Queries:

Many convinced (as opposed to birthright) Friends were first drawn to Quakers by one of the Testimonies. Is this your own experience? If so, which Testimony called out to you, and why?

Friends are called to “live their Light.” What does this mean to you? In what ways have you lived your Light, or wished (and failed) to?

How does that of God make itself felt and known in you? How has it changed both you and your life?

Quakers have their Testimonies. But, like James Nayler, they often “stand still and act not, and wait in Patience.” How have you experienced the waiting characteristic of Quaker Worship? How has it prompted or shaped any actions you’ve gone on to undertake?

SESSION 2 (October 4): INTEGRITY: the state of being sound, in unimpaired, undivided wholeness (Chris Griffin-Wehr leading)

There is a principle which is pure placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, when the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, they become brethren.

John Woolman (1720-1772)

Resources:

QuakerSpeak, [What is a Quaker Query?](#)

Quakerspeak, [Made in the Image of God: On Being a Transgender Pastor](#)

Möbius exercise (paper provided in person; if attending on Zoom, have a paper strip handy that's 1" wide by several inches long)

Parker Palmer, [A Hidden Wholeness](#)

Intermountain Yearly Meeting *Faith & Practice*, [Integrity](#)

Thomas Merton, from *No Man is an Island*: [Integrity](#)

Queries:

Each of the three readings, in one way or another, refers to a life of Wholeness, living according to one's soul, rather than seeking perfection in actions and deeds. Does this distinction between being 'whole' rather than 'perfect' speak to you? How?

After reading excerpts from Palmer's book, does "living in personal integrity" still matter as we attempt to live our Quaker faith?

Considering Merton's quotation (below) on integrity, when—or do you ever—feel like you are most authentically living the whole life you were created to live?

Thomas Merton, when asked about Integrity, was fond of quoting the Rabbi Zuzya's call to being wholly ourselves: *In the world to come, I shall not be asked, "Why were you not Moses?" I shall be asked, "Why were you not Zuzya?"*

Or as Richard Rohr writes: "Both Francis and Clare saw orthopraxy [correct practice] as a necessary parallel, and maybe even precedent, to verbal orthodoxy [correct teaching] and not an optional add-on or a possible implication. 'Why aren't you doing what you say you believe?' the prophet invariably asks."

SESSION 3 (October 11): SIMPLICITY (Chris Braider leading)

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Mark 10: 25

Resources:

Thomas Kelly, [The Simplification of Life](#)

Leo Tolstoy, [The Three Hermits](#)

QuakerSpeak, [Why Do Quakers Dress Plain?](#)

Queries:

What does simplicity mean to you? What role does it play both in your Worship and in your daily life? Is it primarily a matter of material possessions or does it also bear on your experience of the Spirit?

How do you cultivate simplicity? What obstacles have you encountered, and how have you tried to overcome them?

The words of Jesus quoted above primarily speak of material riches. But there are other, spiritual kinds that may be equally burdensome: pride, for example, and the spirit of judgment; sanctimony and self-righteousness; the “whited sepulcher” of legalism and hypocrisy; or anger, hurt, and a thirst for self-vindication or revenge. How do you divest the *spirit* of its possessions—both the things it clings to and the things that threaten to darken its light?

Like every testimony of Friends, the Testimony of Simplicity is bound up with all of the others, and for a start Integrity. How does the effort to simplify your life color other areas of Quaker Faith & Practice for you?

SESSION 4 (October 18): COMMUNITY (Chris Griffin-Wehr leading)

Our life is love, and peace, and bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusation one against another; but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Penington (1616-1679)

Resources

QuakerSpeak, [Communal Living at Penington Friends House](#)

QuakerSpeak, [Reconnecting with Community through Quaker Meeting](#)

Intermountain Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*, [Community](#)

Thomas Kelly, [The Blessed Community](#)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (p. 17): “Let the person who cannot be alone beware of community, and let the person who is not in community beware of being alone.”

Queries :

Each of the chosen readings comments that a community of faith is not reliant only on horizontal (or external) relationships between people, but also a vertical (or internal Spirit-driven) connection to God (Light, Spirit. . .). How do you react to that assertion in your relationship to BFM?

What can and do you bring to help you and others belong in BFM as the Beloved Community for all?

Should our community always be only an agreeable mutual admiration society, or can we grow in faith and as a community when challenged?

SESSION 5 (October 25): EQUALITY (Chris Braider leading)

*When Adam dug and Eve span,
Who was then a Gentleman?*

Digger epigram (17th century)

Much of current philanthropical effort is directed to remedying the more superficial manifestations of weakness and evil, while little thought or effort is directed to search out their underlying causes. The soup kitchen in York never has difficulty in obtaining financial aid, but an enquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would enlist little support.

Joseph Rowntree (1836-1925)

Resources:

Amesbury Friends, [Equality Testimony](#)*
Rashid Darden on QuakerSpeak, [Growing Quaker Community](#)
Gilbert George on QuakerSpeak, [Hierarchy on Its Head](#)
Wendy Swallow, [The Angry Quaker](#)
Diana Jeater, [Bearing Witness or Bearing Whiteness?](#)

*The Amesbury Friends page contains short essays and videos that are well worth reading and watching.

Queries:

Early Friends testified to equality from two sides. They acknowledged the equality of others in affirming the autonomy of women or pursuing the abolition of slavery. But they also affirmed their *own* equality in the face of the oppression they suffered as non-conformists and as small farmers and artisans—by the refusal of “hat honor,” for example, by “theeing and thouing,” or by plainspoken faithfulness to truth. In a world where being a Friend comes at little social cost, which of these two ways seems more fundamental to you? And who testifies more authentically to equality: those who can largely take it for granted or those who have to demand it?

One of Irish Murdoch’s novels is called *The Nice and the Good*. Quakers are generally nice people. But are they good? Aren’t there even times when our niceness alienates people who don’t share the privileges most of us do?

Is it enough simply to *acknowledge* someone else’s equality? Doesn’t the power to offer acknowledgement subtly reaffirm the inequality of the person who awaits it?

In what terms should we think of equality? Does it somehow make us *the same*, or does it require something more from us? Are you genuinely my equal if I only see it from my own point of view, leaving me unchanged?

SESSION 6 (November 1): PEACE (Chris Griffin-Wehr leading)

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons for any end or under any pressure whatsoever. This is our testimony for the world.

George Fox (1624-1691)

We must love them both, those whose opinions we share, and those whose opinions we reject. We both have labored in the search of truth and both have helped us in the finding of it.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Resources:

QuakerSpeak, [Examining the Quaker Peace Testimony](#)
QuakerSpeak, [A Quaker Way toward Ending Gun Violence](#)
Rufus Jones, [Quakers as Peacemakers](#)
Intermountain Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*, [Peace Testimony](#)

Queries:

Looking at ourselves and our lives (not just leaders and war-makers) in terms of justice, how do we today practice Woolman's (1720-1772) call to: *look upon our treasures, and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these possessions or not.*

Undeniably still living in a world riddled with war and injustice, do you feel that Rufus Jones is right: has "a small group" been able to take even a tiny stand in this world toward peace and justice?

SESSION 7 (November 8): STEWARDSHIP (Chris Braider Leading)

It would go a long way to caution people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and knowing on the Creation of it. For how could they find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part of it?

William Penn (1644-1718)

Resources:

Jackie Bonomo, [Addressing Environmental Issues as a Spiritual Community](#)
Thomas Berry, [The New Story](#)
Mary Coelho, [The Sacred Depths of Nature](#)
Quaker Earthcare Witness, [Earth Awareness](#)

Queries:

Earth awareness, Earthcare Witness, environmentalism, sustainability, climate-change activism: we have as many names for a concern for life on our planet as there are dramatic—and growing—crises in the natural world and our relationship with it. I personally prefer (and have chosen) the term “stewardship” because it seems to me to combine acknowledgement of life as an unmerited gift or inheritance we enjoy with recognition of our responsibility to and for it as something we are called to hand on in turn. What words do you prefer, and why?

In their different ways, Thomas Berry, Mary Coelho, and Friends in Earthcare Witness stress the place of the natural world in the experience of value and meaning. Berry in particular grounds this experience in both the story we tell ourselves about our lives and the story of life itself, regardless of our role in or understanding of it. How does this express itself in your own experience, in your own concerns, and in your ongoing communion with Spirit as well as nature?

How do you *live* the Light of life on Earth—of your life on Earth, and that of other creatures? What obstacles have you encountered, and how have you tried to overcome them?

William Penn speaks of Creation and the Creator. Contemporary Friends more comfortably talk of Nature. Is this a distinction without a difference, or does it tell us something important about life in the Spirit as well as our relationship with the natural world?

SESSION 8 (November 15): CLOSING CONVERSATION (Chris Griffin-Wehr leading)

Seek not to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; Rather seek what they sought.

Gautama Buddha (563/480-483/400 BCE)

Review resource:

YouTube, [Rufus Jones, Quaker, Quakerism](#)

Queries:

What will you take away from this year's Quaker Studies?

What were the most memorable quotations for you?

What were the most meaningful Queries to you?

What would you like to have shared or covered that we didn't?