

# **What Can We Say?**

## **The Essentials of Quaker Faith**

**An Answer to the Question,  
What Do Quakers Believe?**

Steven Dale Davison

Friends believe (because they have experienced it themselves) that . . .

1. [God calls each of us](#) into a direct, personal, and unmediated relationship.
2. [God calls the community](#) into a direct and unmediated relationship.
3. [God is continually revealing](#) God's self through God's ongoing presence.
4. God calls us to [live our faith in practice](#).

## **The Light—God\* calls each of us into a direct, personal, unmediated relationship.**

**There is a principle in every person (often called the Light, the Seed, ‘that of God’) that can know God directly.**

### **Quaker sources:**

- Fox: “There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition” (*Journal of George Fox*, John J. Nickalls, editor (hereafter: Nickalls); p. 10)
- Fox: “[There is] that of God in everyone” (Nickalls, p. 263)
- Fox: “I have not come to call you off of forms, but to call you off of forms without power.” (reference unknown)
- Fox: “You will say Christ saith this, and the apostles say this, but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of light and hast though walked in the light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?” (Margaret Fell, quoting from her account of her first encounter with George Fox)
- Barclay: “Direct revelation is still the essential purpose of faith.” (*Barclay’s Apology in Modern English*, Proposition 2, IX; Dean Freiday, editor (hereafter, *Apology*); p. 28)
- “Where true inward knowledge of God exists, through the revelation of his Spirit, everything essential is there, and there is no absolute necessity for anything else.” (from *Barclay’s Apology in Modern English*, Proposition 2, IV, Dean Freiday, editor, p.23)
- Margaret Fell: “And so he went on, and said, 'That Christ was the Light of the world, and lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and that by this light they might be gathered to God,' &c. I stood up in my pew, and wondered at his doctrine, for I had never heard such before. And then he went on, and opened the scriptures, and said, 'The scriptures were the prophets' words, and Christ's and the apostles' words, and what, as they spoke, they enjoyed and possessed, and had it from the Lord': and said, 'Then what had any to do with the scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth? You will say, 'Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;' but **what canst thou say?** Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?' &c. This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat down in my pew again, and cried bitterly: and I cried in my spirit to the Lord, 'We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves.' [from "The testimony of Margaret Fox concerning her late husband," from *The Journal of George Fox*, 1694, describing her first encounter with George Fox as he preached at the Ulverston steeple-house.]

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\* By “God” I mean the Mystery Reality behind, or inside, our religious experience, whatever our experience is. Our religious and spiritual experiences are real and transformative, changing our lives with their power. And yet they are mysterious—we do not fully understand what has happened to us, there is more to the experience than its immediate reality, a depth that lies beyond our senses, our intellectual grasp, our words. They seem to come from somewhere—or even, sometimes, *someone*—that lies beyond the immediate reality we experience. And these experiences speak to something deeper inside us, a deeper self that was also a mystery to us until it was revealed. I will use the word “God” as a placeholder for that Reality Mystery, leaving my readers to define it further for themselves.

**Biblical sources:**

Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Luke 17:21: “The kingdom/reign of God is within/among you.”

John 1:3, 9, 12 “What was coming into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. . . But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God.”

John 3:5 “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”

John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

**Formulations:**

*Faith:* God calls each of us into a direct, personal, unmediated relationship.  
There is ‘that of God’ in everyone.  
True religious experience is personal inner experience—“What canst thou say?”

*Experience:* Vocal ministry  
Convincement in the Light (of Christ)  
Quaking  
‘Miracles’

*Practice:* The faith and practice of traditional Quaker ministry.  
Interpreting the Bible by entering into the Spirit in which it was given forth.  
Deep respect for individual experience.  
Gospel order in personal life.  
Living life as a testimony to the Truth we have experienced inwardly, rather than as adherence to outward rules, creeds or the legacy of tradition.

**Distinctives:**

*The Light.* The Light is both presence and experience and vehicle for direct communion with God. Early Friends (and many Friends today) experienced the Light of Christ as his presence within them revealing the sins and shadows of their souls and guiding them to repentance and renewal. Among Liberal Friends today, the Light often stands for some aspect of the divine that inheres in each person, often referred to as “that of God”.

*Experience—what canst thou say?* Friends insist on basing their religious lives on what they themselves have experienced, rather than blindly accepting the legacy testimony of others, even the testimony of the Bible. This is not to say that Friends reject or ignore tradition, but that its truth only becomes the Truth that sets you free when it has been revealed inwardly as the Word.

*The sacraments.* When lived in the Life, the direct relationship with God obviates the need for any mediating outward forms or persons such as priests. All of life becomes a sacrament, because God is always offering inward grace and that grace may manifest at any time through any activity. Thus we foster a sacramental attention, an openness and readiness to recognize and receive God at all times and in all our doings. We do not practice the outward forms of the sacraments (an “outward form of an inward grace”), believing that no *pro forma* outward performance will guarantee God’s grace, and the inward experience of God’s grace makes the outward forms unnecessary. This principle applies not only to the two sacraments traditionally practiced by Protestants—baptism and the Eucharist—but also to the quasi-

sacramental reverence some Protestant churches give to the Bible and to the other sacraments practiced by the Roman church: confirmation and penance and reconciliation become, in our tradition, convincement and the sanctifying in-dwelling of the Light; marriage and the anointing of the dying become the meeting for marriage and the meeting for burial or memorial meeting, in which the community testifies to the work of Christ in the couple being married and in the life of the deceased; likewise, holy orders gives way to recording of gifts in ministry and other forms of recognition of God's call to ministry, which can come to anyone regardless of preparation or education, without outward ceremony.

*Universal grace.* As the gospel of John puts it: The Light is enlightening *everyone* who comes into the world, regardless of time, culture or religious tradition. God never ceases offering us grace and God knocks on all hearts, inviting all to receive, independently of any formal profession of the traditional Christian gospel. All those who turn toward the Light receive God's grace inwardly.

*Equality before God.* Because we are all equally both sinners and also precious before God—because “God is no respecter of persons”, as Acts 10:34-35 puts it—we seek to reflect this equality in our social relations. Hence our traditional stand regarding plain speech, hat honor, honorific titles, and more modern expressions of social equality in our witness life. This sense of equality before God was originally a sense of our common sinfulness and God's common gift of grace, both of which states only God could rightly judge. In more modern times, this has evolved into a civil libertarian understanding of all people's right to social equality—the testimony of equality. Some Friends now support this testimony by asserting that ‘there is that of God in everyone,’ still tying it in this way to our belief in our direct relationship with God.

*Ministry.* God may call any one of us, uniquely and directly, into service at any time; God will call on each of us at some time. Thus we have laid down, not the clergy, but the *laity*, seeking to realize the priesthood of all believers.

*Perfectionism—the transformative power of Quaker spirituality.* Early Friends believed in the possibility of living without sin, originally through the transformation of the very substance of the soul itself through possession by the ‘celestial body’ of Christ; later (beginning in the 1670s), through constant strengthening and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Quote from tradition: “Now I was come up in the spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. . . But I was immediately taken up in spirit, to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus, that should never fall.” ~ George Fox (Nickalls, p. 27)

Quote from scripture: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. . . Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” ~ Matthew 5:43, 44, 48

*Quaking.* Friends get their nickname Quakers from the practice of quaking in meeting for worship—from feeling the presence of God so intensely that it manifests in involuntary movement and sometimes involuntary vocalizations. Early Friends expressed this in their writings in the common phrase, “The power of the Lord was over all.” Though much less common today, some Friends still experience quaking in meeting.

*Miracles.* In the fullness of the Spirit, early Friends, and George Fox especially, sometimes found themselves empowered to heal people and to perform other ‘miracles.’ Accounts of Fox's miracles were gathered in a collection called *The Book of Miracles*.

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## **God calls the community into direct, unmediated relationship.**

**Just as each individual can enjoy a direct relationship with God, so also the community may be led by and gathered into unity in and by the Holy Spirit.**

### **Quaker sources:**

Fox: “But I brought them Scriptures, and told them there was an anointing within man to teach him, and that the Lord would teach his people himself.” (Nickalls, p. 8)

“And so we came to Shrewsbury in East Jersey, and on the first day of the week, the first day of the seventh month [Sept], we had a very large and a precious meeting; and the blessed presence of the Lord was with us. ... And on the second day of the seventh month, we had a men’s and women’s meeting, out of most parts of the new country Jersey, which will be of great service in keeping the gospel order and government of Christ Jesus (the increase of which hath no end) and to walk as becometh the Gospel; and there is a Monthly and a General Meeting set up, and they are building a meeting-place in the midst of them.” (Nickalls, p. 631)

Barclay: “True and acceptable worship of God stems from the inward and unmediated moving and drawing of the Spirit. It is not limited by places, times, or persons.” (Proposition 11, definition; Freiday, p. 239)

### **Biblical sources:**

John 4:23-24: “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

### **Formulations:**

*Faith:* God calls the community into direct, unmediated relationship.

*Experience:* The gathered meeting for worship

*Practice:* Waiting worship, even—especially—for business  
Corporate support of ministry—discernment, support, oversight, minutes, release, and recording  
Corporate discernment, clearness  
Gospel order  
Outward forms, ‘days and seasons’  
Opportunities  
Advices & Queries, state of society reports  
Meeting for threshing

### **Distinctives:**

*Silent, waiting worship.* Because God is present to guide the meeting directly, the outward forms of worship should open the worshippers to God’s presence and not obstruct it. This calls for radical simplicity in the outward forms of worship, eliminating anything that could obstruct or distort God’s direct communion with the community. Thus Quakers worship in waiting silence. The practice of silence

is not a form for mediating this communion, but rather an absence of obstructing forms. Nor is it a simple vacancy of noise, but an active waiting; the silence comes to have power because God fills it. The “waiting on the Lord” is the key element in ‘silent’ worship; it carries the connotations of both expectation and of *attention*, much as a table waiter waits on the diners. The following distinctive Quaker forms serve these goals:

We use no pre-programmed elements of worship, on the belief that they may preempt or interrupt God’s own movement in the meeting, and cannot of themselves guarantee God’s working among us. (Programmed Friends understand the programmed elements of their worship as *facilitators* of God’s work, not as mediators of God’s presence.)

We use no outward symbolism of religious art, rite or architecture.

We employ no mediating priest or formal director of worship.

We use no mediating elements of worship, such as hymn singing, scripture reading, sermons, sacraments, physical props (such as incense or water), or physical gestures.

(Per William Taber in *Four Doors into Quaker Worship*,) a meeting is considered

- “settled” when most of the participants have centered themselves and passed through the “inward door” to worship;
- “gathered” when most of the participants are unitedly waiting together upon God, generally feeling a sense of timeless peace;
- “covered” when the participants also “feel a special sense of the Divine Spirit powerfully at work among them, through spoken ministry or prayer or the invisible energizing, transforming [guiding] and bonding work of the Holy Spirit.”

*Business under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.* The meeting conducts its business under the direct leadership of Christ’s guiding spirit, rather than under the leadership of any person or other outward authority. As with worship, the elements of Quaker business process are designed to facilitate God’s leadership rather than obstruct it. Friends have adopted several of their traditional business conventions from Paul’s discussion of orderly worship in 1 Corinthians 14 (verses 26-33), excepting his prohibition of women speaking in meeting. The presiding clerk and recording clerk serve as facilitators of Spirit’s movement in the meeting. Decision is reached when the body acknowledges its unity in the Spirit, which the clerk expresses in a ‘minute’, which is then confirmed as the ‘the *sense of the meeting*’ by the body of the meeting. This is not a ‘consensus,’ that is, an agreement in which the desires of all attending have been met to everyone’s satisfaction, but rather the corporate recognition of Christ’s wish for the meeting, which may overturn the expectations or original will of some of those present.

*Ministry.* God generates ministry in the meeting for worship through promptings of the Spirit to rise and speak, sing, pray or preach. Thus, by working through direct communion with the individual minister, God communes directly with the community. This ministry seeks to *answer that of God* in each other, to awaken the Life and Seed within the worshippers. God can call all member into such ministry. This calling alone qualifies a minister, not formal training, certification or outward liturgical forms like ordination. Thus no separated person (priest or minister) serves to mediate God’s grace during the community’s worship, but individuals may serve in specific ways as they are called. Vocal ministry, in particular, is a potential calling of any attender of meeting for worship.

*Corporate discernment, support, and oversight.* The meeting has responsibility for helping individuals who feel called to ministry discern whether the leading is from God. The meeting may hold a clearness committee for discernment and ultimately, the meeting tests the leading in a gathered meeting for business in worship. If the meeting feels the Friend is called, then it helps the minister be faithful to her or his call through committees of support and/or oversight, and through minutes for travel or service, and perhaps, by releasing the minister.

*Minutes for travel or service.* When a meeting has discerned that a Friend is led to travel in the ministry or to serve God in some way, the meeting may write a minute recommending the Friend to those whom she or he will visit or serve. The minute is approved by the meeting for business in

worship and is usually written by the meeting's clerk. When the Friend feels satisfied that he or she has been released from her or his ministry, s/he brings the endorsed minute back to the meeting and reports on its fruits. The meeting then formally lays down its responsibilities for support and oversight.

*Released ministry.* Meetings may choose to "release" ministers into the service to which they feel a Friends has been called, meaning that the meeting does what it can to relieve the minister of any obstacles that may hinder their faithfulness to the call. In the past, commonly, this included helping the minister's family run the business or farm in their absence and providing any other assistance s/he may require. Today, release often takes the form of simple financial assistance. Many pastors are released ministers, in that they are paid a salary that releases them from having to support themselves and their families with other employment.

*Recording.* Friends recognize that God's work is already taking place among us in various ways by *recording*. This includes the recording of minutes, gifts in ministry, marriages and deaths. Recording goes hand in hand with our theology of sacraments: since only God can do the inward work of sacramental transformation, we therefore can only recognize and 'publicize' it the transformative work that God is doing. Thus recording gifts in ministry is quite different than the traditional sacramental understanding of ordination: it confers no authority, but only recognizes the authority that God has conferred. So also with marriage: we recognize and celebrate God's binding love at work in the couple ("what God has joined..."); thus the meeting for marriage is not a sacramental ceremony that effects the marriage. As with meetings for marriage, in which the meeting uses no sacramental words or actions to effect the marriage, so with memorial meetings, the meeting uses no sacramental words or actions that are expected to affect God's reception of the deceased or their state after death.

*Corporate discernment.* The community plays an indispensable role in discerning God's truth and leading. The primary vehicle for corporate discernment is the meeting for business in worship. Friends also have developed a distinctive tool to help in discernment—the clearness committee, a small group that meets in worship to ask and answer queries.

*Clearness committees* take four forms.

- In clearness committees for *membership and for marriage*, a group appointed by the meeting asks the applicant for membership or the couple seeking to be married under the care of the meeting queries designed to seek clearness about whether the meeting and the applicant or couple are clear to proceed with the membership or marriage.
- In clearness committees for *discernment*, a group jointly selected by the seeker and the meeting meet to discern whether someone's leading is of God and how the minister and the meeting might go forward in the service to which she or he has been called.
- *Clearness* committees have also been used in various forms to help an individual discern a course of action when they are uncertain about something.
- *Quaker dialog.* Friends have used clearness committees as tools for *conflict resolution*, sometimes using the form known as "Quaker dialog" or "Claremont dialog" (after the California meeting that popularized it), using attentive listening to deepen the understanding between people in the meeting in the hope of resolving their conflicts. *Gospel order.* The term 'gospel order' includes several aspects of corporate Quaker life as they are conducted under God's guidance. This includes, not only the general principle of living our individual and corporate spiritual lives under the direct leadership of the Holy Spirit, but also these specific embodiments of this principle:

*Meetings for threshing.* In the 17th century, "meetings for threshing" were meetings for worship to which the public were invited that featured the ministry of public ministers chosen for the event. Their purpose was evangelism. In our own time, threshing sessions are meetings for worship convened to thresh out an issue or concern that has proved difficult in the meeting's discernment so far. They are structured as meetings for speaking and listening only, with no intention of coming to a decision,

intended to provide everyone an opportunity to share the light they have been given in a safe environment.

*Gospel order.* George Fox coined the phrase “gospel order” to indicate the ordering of personal life and the life of the community according to the gospel, meaning not merely the words and rules of the gospels, but more accurately, according to the guidance of the Word, the leadership of Christ. The term also has come to indicate a range of specific practices used by Friends to bring good order to meeting life.

*Gospel order as meeting structure.* Monthly meetings are organized into quarterly meetings and these are organized into yearly meetings. These progressively inclusive concentric circles of meeting organization help to impart ‘good order’ to the Society’s business by providing progressively wider bodies for discernment and action. The names for these various levels of meeting life vary, but the basic structure is fairly universal. Traditionally, and still in parts of the Religious Society of Friends, the more inclusive bodies have some disciplinary authority over the smaller bodies, based on Jesus’ promise in Matthew 18:18 to confer binding authority on the worshipping body.

*Gospel order as corporate discipline and conflict resolution.* Friends follow a three-step process to resolve conflict between persons and to discipline members who are “walking disorderly”, guided by the provisions in Matthew 18:15-20. Friends traditionally have described this process as “bringing gospel order to” a situation or a person. The passage in Matthew ends with Jesus’ promise to be present whenever believers are gathered. Thus gospel order draws on the faith that God as Reconciler will restore peace to the meeting if invited into the process in a spirit of worship.

*Gospel order as ‘Quaker process’ for business.* Friends assume that business arises initially as the leading of individuals, who then bring their concerns to the local meeting for business in worship. If the local meeting discerns that the concern deserves wider consideration, then it may refer the Friend and the concern to the quarterly meeting. Likewise, the quarterly meeting may refer the Friend and the matter to the yearly meeting. This progress of a leading or concern through larger bodies for discernment is also called ‘gospel order.’

*Outward forms, ‘days and seasons’.* No outward forms can mediate God’s grace, nor are any particular times inherently more fit for receiving God’s grace. Thus, in addition to avoiding outward forms in our worship, Friends avoid religious symbolism in meetinghouse architecture and do not follow a formal liturgical calendar or celebrate special religious holidays. (Friends today almost universally ignore this tenet of faith in the case of Christmas and some meetings also celebrate Easter.)

*Opportunities.* Traditionally, Friends have sometimes felt led into worship while gathered together for other purposes, especially when working together or when engaged in the normal processes of everyday family life. These impromptu opportunities for short periods of worship Friends have called “opportunities”. Today, especially under the leadership of William Taber, Friends have also used the term to denote planned but informal small gatherings for a short meeting for worship, often held in people’s homes, followed by fellowship as Friends are led.

*Advices & Queries.* Friends have developed sets of advices for both private life and meeting life, and sets of questions, called ‘Queries,’ designed to inspire and guide searching self-examination by both individuals and meetings. Friends use these tools to focus attention on the life of the spirit as aids to discern what God’s current work is, both within and among the membership. While not mediating grace, these vehicles help to facilitate renewed communion with God, both for the individual and for the community.

Originally, advices and queries were used as instruments for discipline in meetings. Meetings sent written responses to the queries to quarterly meetings, which then followed up with visitations and responsive advices.

The advices and queries have evolved in the last century into periodically revised sets of exhortations and questions that are publicly published by yearly meetings, and which monthly and quarterly meetings are free to use as they wish. Often, meetings read one set a month in meeting for business in worship or in the meeting for worship itself before meeting for business in worship.



*State of Society reports.* Many Quaker meetings write annual state of the meeting reports that provide a record of the meeting's statistics, activities, and concerns for the past year, and, hopefully, a sense of the meeting's spiritual condition. Many yearly meetings ask monthly meetings to send these reports to them so that they can also write state of the society reports for the yearly meeting. Often, yearly meetings send monthly meetings a set of queries, the answers to which they distill and include in the state of the society report.

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## **God is continually revealing, through God's ongoing presence.**

**God's revelation did not cease with the writing of scripture, but continues for and in those who heed the Light.**

### **Quaker sources:**

Fox: "Now I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light, that they might receive Christ Jesus, for to as many as should receive him in his light, I saw that he would give power to become the sons of God, which I had obtained by receiving Christ. And I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all Truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth. And I was to turn them to the grace of God, and to the Truth in the heart, which came by Jesus, that by this grace they might be taught..." (Nickalls, p. 34)

Barclay: "He who gathers Christians also provides ministers and teachers among them by the inward unmediated operation of his own Spirit, to watch over and instruct them and maintain them in an animated, refreshed and powerful condition." (Proposition 10, definition; Freiday, p. 171)

### **Biblical sources:**

John 14:26: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

John 15:15: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."

### **Formulations:**

*Belief:* Continuing revelation

*Experience:* New Quaker testimonies (for example, on outward sacraments, on women as ministers, on the abolition of slavery)  
Openings ... Leadings ... Ministry ... Callings ... Concerns

*Practice:* Vocal and other ministry  
Biblical interpretation in the Spirit in which it was given forth  
No creed

### **Distinctives:**

*Continuing revelation/illumination.* Some Friends believe God gives us new testimonies for new times and circumstances, as we need them. Some Friends believe that the Bible already holds sufficient revelation, and God continually opens scripture anew, illuminating new understandings to meet our changing needs.

*Openings, leadings, callings.* God continually opens new insights in us; these are expressed most often through vocal ministry. Sometimes such openings mature into leadings to perform some specific service in God's work. Sometimes these leadings mature into callings that come to shape the whole of a Quaker minister's life. Thus ministry among Friends is an expression of God's continuing revelation, especially as it draws the community forward into new understanding of God's wish for us; e.g., Woolman's ministry on slavery.

*New leadings.* Our corporate discernment processes confirm new leadings or directions for the community, thus extending the tradition. Notable examples include our acceptance of women in the ministry, our rejection of the outward practice of the sacraments, our rejection of slavery, our testimony on right sharing of resources. On the surface, some of these new testimonies seem to obviate the inherited testimony of scripture; this applies most notably to our treatment of the sacraments, slavery, and women in ministry.

*Biblical authority and interpretation.* Friends declare that, as full of value, power and truth as the Bible is, it is not the highest or final religious authority, which belongs only to God. In order to truly understand the Bible—or rather, to experience the truth that God intends to impart through scripture—you must “enter into the spirit in which it was given forth”; that is, the truth is revealed by the Spirit, directly and inwardly, not by the outward words. The Bible’s truth is revealed **in** us, not **to** us. Jesus is the Word of God (John chapter one); the Bible is the words of God. Jesus is the gospel; the Bible merely proclaims him.

*Creeds.* Friends commit the transmission of the tradition to living vocal and written ministry; this ministry is liberated into God’s hands by having no written creed as primary authority. Furthermore, we determine fitness for membership through a clearness process conducted under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, rather than through public formal profession of predefined articles of faith.

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## God calls us to live our faith in practice.

God calls us to live our lives as testimony to the Truth that has been awakened in us.

### Quaker sources:

Fox: "And so be faithful every one to God, in your measures of his power and life, that ye may answer God's love and mercy to you, as the obedient children of the Most High, dwelling in love, unity, and peace, and in innocency of heart towards one another, that God may be glorified in you, and you keep faithful witnesses for him and valiant for the Truth on earth." (Nickalls, p. 282)

"Let your lives speak"

"Speak truth to power"

William Penn: "We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by Love or Information. And yet we can hurt no Man that we believe loves us. **Let us then try what Love will do:** For if Men did once see we Love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: And he that forgives first, wins the Laurel." (*Some Fruits of Solitude*)

John Woolman: "Twelfth of sixth month being the first of the week and a rainy day, we continued in our tent, and I was led to think on the nature of the exercise which hath attended me. **Love was the first motion**, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them; and as it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing, and when, by reason of much wet weather, traveling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favorable opportunity to season my mind, and to bring me into a nearer sympathy with them. As mine eye was to the great Father of Mercies, humbly desiring to learn his will concerning me, I was made quiet and content." (*The Journal*)

### Biblical sources:

Matthew 5:16: "In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

James 2:17: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

John 15:9-17 "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." [the origins of the name Religious Society of Friends]

Matthew 5:44 "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

**Formulations:**

- Belief:* God calls us to live our faith in practice, in lives of testimonial service and witness.  
We are to love one another, even as God has loved us.
- Experience:* Leadings.  
God's love as the ultimate source of all aspects of Quaker faith.
- Practice:* Faith and practice of Quaker ministry, including individual and corporate discernment and corporate nurture and eldership  
Peace and forgiveness in the face of persecution.  
Testimonies.  
Witness, service, and evangelism.

**Distinctives:**

*Quaker spirituality.* The essence of Quaker spirituality is the practice of constant inward listening with the heart for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all one's activities. Thus one lives one's outward life in the world as an expression of one's inward experience of God's presence and guidance.

*Ministry.* Sometimes God prompts us to a specific task or service in the world—a ministry. The signature form of ministry is vocal ministry in meeting for worship, but Quaker ministry can take many forms. The faith and practice of Quaker ministry requires discipline on the part of the minister and of the minister's meeting.

For the individual minister, this discipline includes:

- preparation—a devotional life that attunes one to the work of the light within us;
- discernment—seeking personally and with the meeting to determine whether the leading is of the Spirit;
- faithfulness—accepting the burden of service, even when it is a “cross to the heart” (something one would rather not do), until one has been released from the call.

For the meeting, this discipline includes:

- nurturing eldership—helping members with their spiritual preparation by providing opportunities and resources for spiritual deepening and education about the faith and practice of Quaker ministry;
- discernment—helping ministers with their discernment by conducting clearness committees for discernment, when appropriate, and considering their leadings in meeting for business in worship;
- minutes for travel or service, and their endorsement and review—formally recognizing a minister's leading with a letter of support and introduction, when appropriate;
- support and oversight—creating committees for support and/or oversight for ministers, when appropriate;
- release into ministry—covering the responsibilities that would prevent a minister from answering the call to service;
- recording—recording of gifts in ministry, when the meeting feels it would be useful to formally acknowledge God's ongoing work in and through a Friend.

*The commandment of love.* Friends take their formal name from the fifteenth chapter of the gospel of John: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have

called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” Thus our very identity as a religious community is integrally tied to the commandment of love.

*The testimonies.* Friends have traditionally expressed this Quaker essential—that we should “let our lives speak”—as the call to live our lives as a testimony and a witness to God’s truth, to God’s work within us and among us. Historically, Friends have come to unity around an evolving set of specific stands regarding our relations with others, with the creation, and with the societies in which we live, which we call “the testimonies”. Though we now outwardly express these “testimonies” in our books of discipline, nevertheless we *live* the testimonies, not in obedience to external rules of behavior but as outward expression of our inner experience of their truth. Though lists of the testimonies vary, they commonly include the following:

- |              |                                    |                              |
|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ~ Peace      | ~ Earthcare                        | ~ Against capital punishment |
| ~ Equality   | ~ Right Sharing of World Resources | ~ Against civil suit         |
| ~ Community  | ~ Prison concerns                  | ~ Integrity                  |
| ~ Simplicity |                                    |                              |

We continue to add to the tradition of testimonies. Some agree with Wilmer Cooper, who first articulated the testimony of integrity (*The Testimony of Integrity in the Religious Society of Friends*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #296), that it stands as a useful hallmark for them all, in that it calls for a conformity of the inward and outward life, which expresses the central intention of testimonial living.

We traditionally view the testimonies, not as rules to which we must conform, but rather as testimonies to truths that we have consistently found awakened in our hearts by divine inspiration.

Thus the ‘testimonial life’ is one lived in faithful obedience to God’s inner promptings regarding truth and right living, rather than one lived in obedience to a set of rules.

*Witness.* Testimonial living engages us in acts of witness to God’s truth. The hallmark of Quaker witness is the faithful presentation of God’s truth, in both word and deed, with clarity and courage, but without violence or coercion. Quaker witness also recognizes that, although victims of evil deserve our love and protection the most and first, the perpetrators of evil suffer and deserve our love, as well.

*Service.* Quakers are called to minister to all who are suffering, regardless of their status in the eyes of others.

*Missions and evangelism.* Early Friends were intense evangelists, often holding what were then called “meetings for threshing,” public meetings in which the public was invited and chosen “public ministers” preached, trying to bring those gathered into conviction. For many Friends, witnessing to the gospel still is inseparable from other forms of testimonial witness.

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