

Quaker Testimonies



Introduction

- This pack introduces four Quaker testimonies – simplicity, equality, peace and truth – and uses quotes, pictures, and activities.
- If you have any questions about any of the testimonies, don't be afraid to ask an adult Friend. But don't forget that one Quaker might have very different ideas to another Quaker, so it's always a good idea to ask lots of different people!
- If the word 'God' is difficult for you, try swapping it for another word that you like more, such as 'inner light' or 'good'.

What is a testimony?

“The testimonies are about the way Quakers try to lead their lives. This attempt to put faith into practice, often with great difficulty, arises from an understanding of certain values and principles that are central to the Quaker faith...

Quakers’ understanding of faith is that true human fulfillment comes from an attempt to live life in the spirit of love and truth and peace, answering that of God in everyone.

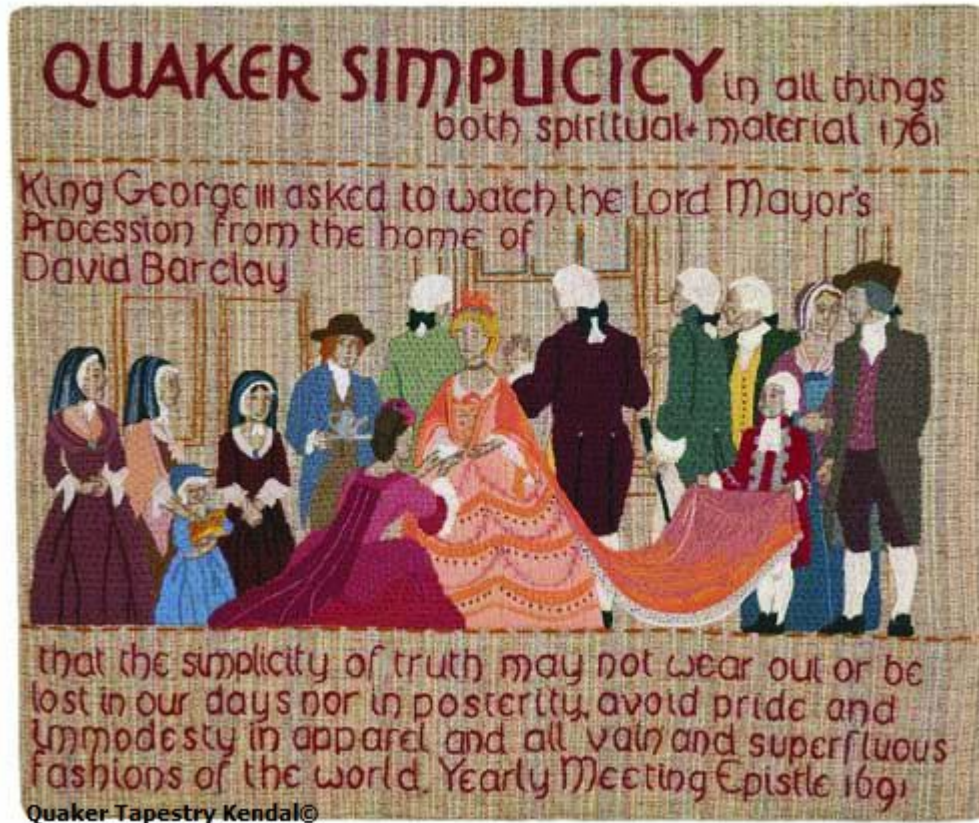
These beliefs spring from a sense of equality, compassion and seeing the sacred in all life. The testimonies are about Quakers’ commitment to those beliefs...

All Quakers have to search for the ways in which the testimonies can become true for themselves. The testimonies also reflect the society we live in, and so have changed over time. Early Quakers had testimonies against outward symbols, taking oaths and the payment of tithes, and about peace, temperance, moderation and forms of address. Later, testimonies evolved with regard to slavery, integrity in business dealings, capital punishment and prison reform, nonviolence and conscientious objection to military service.”

(Quaker United Nations Office website:

<http://www.quno.org/newyork/Resources/AllQuakerTestimonies.pdf>)

Simplicity 1



Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

(Advices and Queries 41)

Simplicity 2

The heart of Quaker ethics is summed up in the word 'simplicity'... Outwardly, simplicity is shunning [excess] dress, speech, behaviour, and possessions, which tend to obscure our vision of reality. Inwardly, simplicity is spiritual detachment from the things of this world as part of the effort to fulfill the first commandment: to love God with all of the heart and mind and strength.

The testimony of outward simplicity began as a protest against the extravagance and snobbery which marked English society in the 1600s...

Simplicity does not mean [boring]... simplicity is an appreciation of all that is helpful towards living as children of the Living God.

(Quaker Faith and Practice 20.27 North Carolina Yearly Meeting [Conservative] 1983)



Simplicity 3

Don't worry about the things you need to live—what you will eat, drink, or wear. Life is more important than food, and the body is more important than what you put on it.. Look at the birds. They don't plant, harvest, or save food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them.... You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it.

“Don't worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ Don't worry, because your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what he wants you to do. Then he will give you all these other things you need. So don't worry about tomorrow.

(The Bible, sections of Matthew 6:25-34)



Simplicity Activity 1

Write what simplicity means to you, using 25 words or less. (You don't have to use full sentences, any words will do.) Alternatively, try drawing what simplicity means to you.

Simplicity Activity 2

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.” (Melody Beattie)

Write down everything that you are grateful for in your life that you can think of.

Equality 1

Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

(Advices and Queries 22)



Equality 2

Jesus sat near the Temple collection box and watched as people put money into it. Many rich people put in a lot of money. Then a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth less than a penny.

Jesus called his followers to him and said, "This poor widow put in only two small coins. But the truth is, she gave more than all those rich people. They have plenty, and they gave only what they did not need. This woman is very poor, but she gave all she had. It was money she needed to live on."

(The Bible, Mark 12:41-44)



Equality 3



I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Equality Activity 1

Write what equality means to you, using 25 words or less. (You don't have to use full sentences, any words will do.) Alternatively, try drawing what equality means to you.

Equality Activity 2

Below is a description of what the world would be like if it reflected the people on earth now but there were only 100 people. Sit quietly and reflect on this question: 'what does this tell us about equality?'

If there were only 100 people, there would be:

- 60 Asians
- 14 Africans
- 12 Europeans
- 8 people from Central/South America, Mexico and the Caribbean
- 5 people from the USA/Canada
- 1 person from Australia/New Zealand
- 14 people who could speak Mandarin
- 8 people who could speak Hindi/Urdu
- 8 people who could speak English
- 7 people who speak Spanish
- 4 people who could speak Russian
- 4 people who could speak Arabic

Equality Activity 2 Continued

- Many other people who spoke other languages, including Bengali, Portuguese, Indonesian, Japanese, German, and French, as well as 200 other languages
- 33 Christians
- 22 Muslims
- 15 Hindus
- 14 non-religious people
- 6 Buddhists
- 10 people from other religions
- 10 gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people
- 80 people living in poor housing
- 67 adults (half of them can't read)
- 50 people who don't have enough to eat
- 33 people who don't have access to clean, safe water
- 24 people who don't have electricity
- 42 radios, 24 televisions, 14 telephones and 7 computers (some villagers own more than one of each)
- 7 people who own a car (some of whom own more than one)

Peace 1

We totally oppose all wars, all preparation for war, all use of weapons and coercion by force, and all military alliances: no end could ever justify such means.

We equally and actively oppose all that leads to violence among people and nations, and violence to other species and to our planet...

We must start with our own hearts and minds. Wars will stop only when each of us is convinced that war is never the way.

The places to begin acquiring the skills.... are in our own homes, our personal relationships, our schools, our workplaces, and wherever decisions are made...

Conflicts are inevitable and must not be repressed or ignored but worked through painfully and carefully. We must develop the skills of being sensitive to oppression and grievances, sharing power in decision-making, creating consensus, and making reparation.

In speaking out, we acknowledge that we ourselves are as limited and as erring as anyone else. When put to the test, we each may fall short....

What we advocate is not uniquely Quaker but human and, we believe, the will of God.

(New Zealand

Quakers, 1987)



Peace 2

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

(The Bible, Psalm 34:14)



Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

(The Bible, Matthew 5:9)

Peace 3

Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace.

(Advices and Queries 32)



Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Peace Activity 1

Write what peace means to you, using 25 words or less. (You don't have to use full sentences, any words will do.) Alternatively, try drawing what peace means to you.

Peace Activity 2

Look below at the following scenarios. Think carefully about the different options available in each situation. What could you do to try and make the situation more peaceful? There is no right or wrong answer.

You are really looking forward to a school trip, but it is cancelled because of the actions of two children.

A classmate is suspended from school for something you know they didn't do.

In a shop you overhear a customer make a racist remark to a shop worker.

You see a recognised bully beating up someone you know outside your school.

Truth 1

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

(Advices and Queries 1)



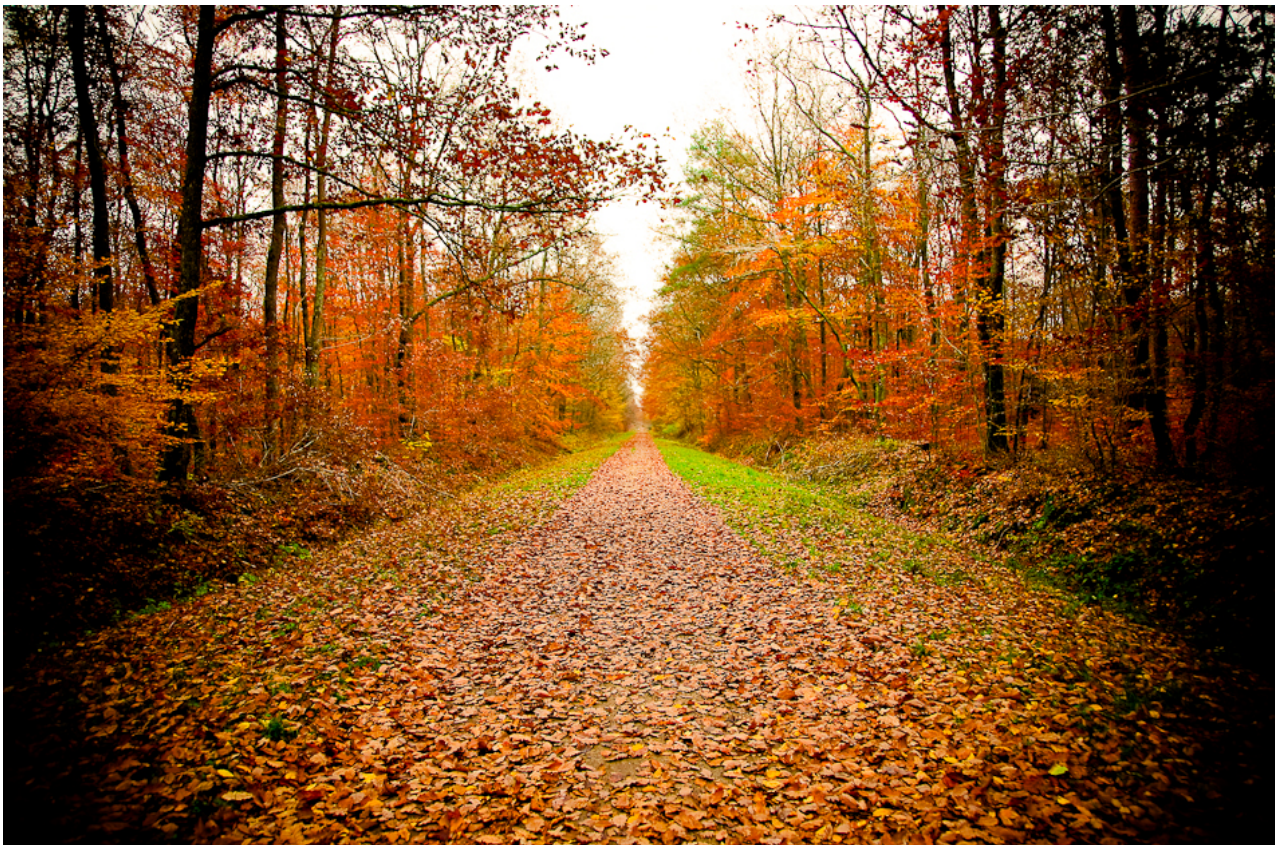
We can live lives of integrity, letting both 'yes' and 'no' come out of the depth of truth within us, careful of the truth in all our dealings, so that our words and our lives speak the same message.

(Elizabeth Watson in 1980, Quaker Faith and Practice 22.63)

Truth 2

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact.
Everything we see is a perspective, not the
truth.

(Marcus Aurelius)



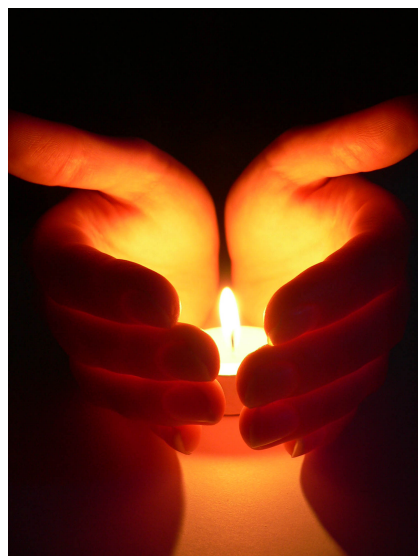
Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun,
the moon, and the truth.

(Buddha)

Truth 3

A neighbour ... desired me to write his will: I took notes, and, amongst other things, he told me to which of his children he gave his young negro: I considered the pain and distress he was in, and knew not how it would end, so I wrote his will, save only that part concerning his slave, and carrying it to his bedside, read it to him, and then told him in a friendly way, that I could not write any instruments by which my fellow-creatures were made slaves, without bringing trouble on my own mind. I let him know that I charged nothing for what I had done, and desired to be excused from doing the other part in the way he proposed. Then we had a serious conference on the subject, and at length, he agreeing to set her free, I finished his will.

(John Woolman in 1776, Quaker Faith and Practice 20.46)



Truth Activity 1

Write what truth means to you, using 25 words or less. (You don't have to use full sentences, any words will do.) Alternatively, try drawing what truth means to you.

Truth Activity 2

There are lots of ways that the testimony of truth can be thought of. Look at the suggestions of ways to be truthful below. Which do you think are most important, if any, any why? How can you think about these in your own life?

- making sure that one's words and actions flow from one's beliefs
- speaking the truth, even when it is difficult
- paying people fair wages for their work
- saying difficult things with grace and tact
- taking responsibility for your actions and their results
- fulfilling one's commitments
- taking care of items entrusted to you
- being open to the ideas of others but not being too easily swayed by them

Final Testimonies Activity

The testimonies are very important to Quakers but can be difficult as well. Take a quiet moment to think about the most important aspects of each – simplicity, equality, peace and truth – and how you want to try and apply these to your own life.

Then think about the quote below from George Fox, who was the founder of the Quakers:

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come”



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