

People simply gathered, listened, waited, and sought to be obedient

Trueblood's description of Seekers, people that George Fox preached to and became Quaker
Really that describes Quakers... it describes us!

We are gathered together in the Presence of God—we Listen together, expecting God to speak to us
But we also seek to be obedient—to follow the Leadings as we hear them—to be faithful to go
To live into the truth of the message that we receive
This is holy obedience—this life of walking with Jesus who speaks to our condition
And tells us how to live out God's purposes in our lives

But I want to contrast what is meant by holy obedience with the idea of being good
As children we are naturally taught to obey our parents and others leaders in our lives
We've all gotten in trouble for not being obedient
We've also been told how proud our parents are when we are good
As we mature, there is more autonomy as we take on the role of decision making for ourselves
We learn to make choices—some good and some poor and we live with consequences
There are still boundaries, laws, and other forms of outside guidance
But the immediate command to obey becomes less central

However, we often transfer the pattern of obedience to God
I must be good and do the right thing
We fall into the trap of learning that in order to be a good Christian I must be good

But that is different from the kind of Holy Obedience that Thomas Kelly and others are talking about
A complete obedience without any reservations
A willingness and desire to follow God's faintest whisper
It has been said that for some religion exists as a dull habit—in others as an acute fever
Religion as a dull habit is not that for which Christ lived and died
As a youth, George Fox was quite religious by earthly standards
It is said that he had memorized many of the scriptures
It was even suggested that he become of ministerial student
But there was something that drove him deeper, looking for more
He was unsatisfied with the religious offerings of his day
This insatiable hunger drove him to look for something else
It is that "something else" that gives rise to a Holy Obedience that is real and beyond goodness

I want to illustrate this shift by telling how it happened in me—by telling my story
I was always a Christian—always believed that Jesus loved me
Grew up in the church and learned the church culture—it was where I was most at home
I sometimes struggled to be good enough
Increasingly I felt a gap between my outer self and my internal being
As a young adult I decided to quit "playing the game" although I stayed in the church
After 10 years of holding God at arm's length I felt God tapping me on the shoulder
Isolated instance in which God got my attention but I struggled to integrate them into my life
Finally one morning I was woken up early and knew that it was God that was speaking
I got up and wrote out my life story and in that I recognized that I was enough
That God loved me as I was and that I didn't have to do anything else to be accepted
That began a journey of intimacy that led me to a life of Holy Obedience

This felt wholly different to me than before

I knew that God loved me in a way that I didn't understand before

It wasn't at all dependent on being who I "should" be or on how well I followed

Actually I really got in my core that I was enough and that I didn't need anything else

From there, it was a joy to live in intimate connection to Jesus—to follow wherever I was led

It became an adventure as we explored life together

I was accompanied by one who both knew me fully and loved me deeply

I felt empowered by that to go forth boldly, opening doors and taking risks of being

Your story will be entirely different

There is no ritual to follow—no prescribed pattern of knowing—no certain words to say

It is simply your story of God's unfolding presence in your life

Don't try to make it more than it is

Let it include your questions and doubts—be real and absolutely honest

Be still and wait—Listen

If it helps, write it out for yourself—tell the whole of it including twists and turns

It won't be a straight line, so don't try to make it straight nor explain inconsistencies

Look for God in your story

Then begin where you are now—follow the next Leading no matter how insignificant

Learn to trust the Leadings that come

Take it one step and one day at a time

If you find that you got off the path, simply turn and get back on—without shame

Don't try to force it, let it come to you

"Be still and know that I am God"