

Quakers did have a radical spirituality that spoke deeply to the people of England in the 1650s
It was a time of both political, social and religious upheaval, not unlike what we encounter today
Then as now, people lost heart in religion and its efficacy for authentic life
Religion had been reduced to going through the motions
It no longer seemed to provide answers of substance

If fact the struggles of George Fox are mimicked by many people today—the search for authenticity
A belief that there is more to life than going through the motions—but never finding it
Answers which are readily given by the church—ring hollow and unsatisfying
Religion doesn't seem to speak to the political and social context of the day
In fact, it often spends more time berating the current status than meeting the needs
I once heard George Fox called the original Eeyore
The thing about Fox was that he never gave up—he kept looking and pursuing answers to a end
He left the church of his youth, but he didn't quit asking priests and others for input
He searched the scriptures and knew many of them by heart
There was a yearning deep within that called him to something more
It is interesting to note what disturbed him during this time—was it sin?
Actually he was quite free from a sense of sin and remorse
Rather he had a deep God-hunger—both for himself and for the suffering of others

The lack of answer from outside himself drove him to look deep within, searching for insights
While he had a real sense that he had not found what he was looking for
He had openings—insights into how God worked

1. What is a Christian?
The mark of a true believer is a changing life—not membership in a church. And it did not matter the denomination. Catholics and Protestants are both Christian when there is an immediacy of relationship with God.
2. What is a minister?
A minister is one who ministers. Education at Oxford cannot create a minister.
3. What is the church?
The church is the gathered community of folks with changing lives, not a building or institution. God dwells within the people—not the church building.
4. Are the Scriptures an adequate guide?
In order for Scriptures to be fully known, one must read them in the same Life and Spirit in which they were given forth to the original writers. In this way one understands them from within.

Ultimately he came to the end of his search—not knowing where else to turn
*When all my hope in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'there is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work who shall [prevent] it? And this I knew experimentally."*¹

¹ The Journal of George Fox, edited by John L. Nickalls, Religious Society of Friends, 1995, page 11

This led to additional openings—which, with the others, formed the basis of Quaker understanding

5. What is the basis of faith?

The basis of faith is the first hand acquaintance with Jesus who can speak to each person's condition. It is direct relationship with God experientially. It is not a belief system or theology.

6. What is the power of God in the world?

There is no separation of sacred and secular. God is active in all of life. And the power of love overcomes the power of darkness and evil in all things.

7. Who is the teacher?

Christ has come to teach his people himself. The true Teacher is Christ—not priests or creeds. Even the Scriptures are not our primary teacher. George Fox spoke against bibliolatry, claiming that too often the Scriptures were given first place over Christ. While Fox deeply revered Scripture, his primary teacher was Christ himself. Revelation and Teaching are ongoing with new insights and understandings revealed to us directly by Christ, our Teacher.

Thomas Kelly describes it as *“having passed out of subjective yearning into energizing from beyond, yet a beyond that was within.”*²

As Fox said, *“this I knew experimentally.”* Or as we might say... experientially

It was in that political, social, and religious setting—not so different from ours—that Quakerism began

The huge Quaker discovery—it was only a direct encounter with the Living God that mattered
Quakers knew that the heart of Christianity was a direct, experiential relationship with Jesus.

If a person had this relationship, they didn't need anything else.

If a person didn't have it, nothing else would satisfy.

It started a movement in which people gathered to know God together

—and waited to hear from God directly.

Christ had come to teach his people himself!

This Quaker discovery was not of a doctrine or a belief—but of a Life—a life filled with God

A life that is listening to God directly and following the Leadings that come

This discovery was actually just a rediscovery of the life, power, and fellowship of the early Church

Early Quakers didn't start out to create a denomination

They simply wanted to call people back to the New Testament understanding of God

Back to the truth of knowing God directly and letting Christ be our Teacher

But today, we have become a denomination with institutional structure

Often we are more consumed with the order of the church structure and the theology

Have we forgotten our roots? Have we forgotten the stories in the New Testament?

Because this same God is still speaking

This same Christ has still come to teach us Himself

It is the authentic spirituality our culture is hungry for

It is the answer to their searching

But the world needs us to live into the truth and power of our Quaker discovery!

To see us in action

To live boldly into the truth of our experience of Christ our present Teacher

There is power and life in the transforming grace of God when we live it out without reservation

² Thomas Kelly, *The Eternal Promise*, Friends United Press, 1966, page 71.