

Now after I had received that opening from the Lord that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not sufficient to fit a man to be a minister of Christ, I regarded the priests less and looked more after the dissenting people ... As I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes 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 [hinder] it? And this I knew experimentally.

George Fox, 1647

... [George Fox] went on and said, How 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, etc. And I stood up in my pew, and I 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 Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?" This opened me so that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat me 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" ... I saw it was the truth, and I could not deny it; and I did as the apostle saith, I "received the truth in the love of it," And it was opened to me so clear that I had never a tittle in my heart against it; but I desired the Lord that I might be kept in it, and then I desired no greater portion.

Margaret Fell, 1694

Now to return to my apprenticeship, I had a very kind, loving master and mistress, and I had meat enough, and work enough, but had little consideration about religion, nor any taste thereof. On first days I frequented meetings, and the greater part of the time I slept, and took no account of preaching, nor received any other benefit, than being there kept me out of bad company, which indeed is a very great service to youth ... but one First-day, being at meeting, a young woman, named Anne Wilson, was there and preached: she was very zealous, and fixing my eye upon her, she with a great zeal pointed her finger at me uttering these words with much power, "A traditional Quaker, thou comest to meeting as thou went from it (the last time) and goes from it as thou came to it, but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?" This was so pat to my then condition that, like Saul, I was smitten to the ground, as it might be said, but turning my thoughts inward, in secret I cried, "Lord, what shall I do to help it?" And a voice as it were spoke in my heart, saying "Look unto me, and I will help thee."

Samuel Bownas, 1696

At last, after all my distresses, wanderings and sore travails, I met with some writings of this people called Quakers, which I cast a slight eye upon and disdained, as falling very short of that wisdom, light, life and power, which I had been longing for and searching after ... After a long time, I was invited to hear one of them (as I had been often, they in tender love pitying me and feeling my want of that which they possessed) ... When I came, I felt the presence and power of the Most High among them, and words of truth from the Spirit of truth reaching to my heart and conscience, opening my state as in the presence of the Lord. Yea, I did not only feel words and demonstrations from without, but I felt the dead quickened, the seed raised; in-somuch as my heart, (in the certainty of light and clearness of true sense), said: "This is he; this is he; there is no other; this is he whom I have waited for and sought after from my childhood, who was always near me, and had often begotten life in my heart, but I knew him not distinctly, nor how to receive him or dwell with him."

Isaac Penington, 1667

I was walking across one such green oasis—the lawn outside of St. Michael’s House—when it happened. Someone spoke to me. Not with words at first, but with a tremendous physical sensation. I have described it, ever since, as being as if a great hand seized me by the spinal column. I stopped. And I knew something all the way down to the core of me. The words that came to me reflect just a ghost of the power of the knowing. I’m still working on finding all the implications of that knowing, so no single set of words was going to capture it, but the words were these: If half a dozen men, armed only with box-cutters, can kill thousands, then the day when force could “settle” conflicts—if it ever could—is over and done. Mostly, though, what came to me was a sense that the idea of force as a means to peace was just done for me. I had come to believe that, as the chestnut goes, there is no way to peace; that peace is the way. It was in response to this that I began attending Mt. Toby meeting. I remember sitting in that first meeting I attended, almost weeping with gratitude, watching Friend after Friend arrive. I’m just a single leaf, I thought. I’m just a single leaf, on a single tree, in a great Forest of those who are seeking peace. And as each Friend settled into their seat, I felt gladness. I felt that I was, at last, surrounded by teachers. I felt that everything was going to be All Right. My only fear was that I would not be seen as belonging there. It was so transparently clear to me that I did that it made me a little afraid.

Cat Chapin-Bishop, 2008

I was at a very low point. I was sleeping out of doors on the porch close to the hill. A light breeze rustled through the overhanging branches of a great walnut tree. I was very tired. I looked up at the stars edging over the hill in my mood of great despondency. I said to God, “It’s no use. I’ve tried all I can. I can’t do anything more.” All of a sudden I seemed to be swept bodily out of my bed, carried above the trees and held poised in mid-air, surrounded by light—a light so bright that I could hardly look at it. Even when I closed my eyes I could feel it. A fragrance as of innumerable orange blossoms inundated my senses. And there was an echo of far-off music. All was ecstasy. I have no idea whether it lasted a minute or several hours. But for the rest of the night I lay in a state of peace and indescribable joy. How impossible it is to explain such a phenomenon in everyday language, but whatever it was changed my life. It was not a passing illusion. I never was the same again. For days I was terribly happy. The whole world seemed to be illumined, the flower colors were brighter, bird songs gayer, and people were kind, friendly and loving. This exaggerated brilliance faded somewhat with time and the intense sense of communion fluctuated. Later on there were, of course, low moments amidst the high peaks, and there were failures, dry seasons, and the recurring need for patience and perseverance. But I never lost the clarification of mind and spirit that was revealed to me on that night.

Josephine Duvencok, 1978

At age thirty, discouraged, broken, facing a profound spiritual crisis, I found myself under the care of a Presbyterian minister who engaged my services in helping edit his doctoral thesis on the subject of community. He was studying the history of Quakers, Mennonites, and the first century church. I was required to read the Journals of George Fox and John Woolman, works by Elfrida Vipont, Samuel Bownas, and others. I was moved to tears by these works and would cry out in joy, “This is it, this is what I always hoped against hope was true—Christ can teach his people himself!” I began diligently to put myself in a place to hear God speak. Day after day I sat on a chair in my living room determined that I was going to hear God speak or die. Eight months went by without a word. After those long months, I finally heard God’s voice clearly and undeniably. That experience has been the high point of my spiritual journey.

I continued my listening and began to record in a journal every possible thought that came to me that could possibly be God’s voice. I made note of how each thought felt, tasted, smelled, and shaded. I noted if I felt moved, if it was a new thought or old one, or whether or not there was a sense of character attached to it. Then I studied those notations as I watched my life unfold to see which of those thoughts panned out to be actual leadings. I learned that for me, leadings that were indeed from God came with a sense of being unquestionably true, they came often with an accompanying feeling that gave them color and direction. They came from deep inside rather than from the shallow place in my mind, and they always came in the character of God reflecting the virtues spelled out in the beatitudes. I became suspect of leadings that were self-serving, self-aggrandizing, judgmental, arrogant, or possible weapons against those who disagreed with me...

I now believe that God was teaching me how to receive revelation and respond faithfully to its message. Though I often falter and miss the truth, I have at least found a way to hear and recognize the voice of the one who sees.

Stan Thornberg, 2001

I remembered that very early one morning several years ago I had such a dream. It was during that period early in the morning when you’re in the slow process of waking up... I kept dozing off. It was also at a very difficult period in my life. I was trying fairly unsuccessfully to cope with some very serious health problems and I was feeling very alone. I was feeling bereft. I was feeling hopeless.... It was a very simple dream. I dreamed that Jesus was walking toward me. Jesus got very close to me and he smiled and said, “When things grow dimmer, you always have me.” And then he walked away. When I woke up and remembered the dream, the first thought I had was, “Well, I wasn’t really asleep, so it doesn’t count. And then I thought, “No, if Jesus appears to you in any kind of a dream, it counts.” ... Jesus was saying that if I needed him, he would be there for me. In the times when I was blind, he would help me see. During the next few weeks, I realized something else: I did need him. To my surprise I realized that I had a new companion on my spiritual journey. I didn’t expect this companion, I didn’t expect that it would be Jesus, I didn’t expect he would ever be this important to me, but at this stage in my spiritual journey, he’s exactly the companion I need. It reminds me of an old gospel song, “Jesus may not come when you want him, but he’s right on time.” To be honest, I’m a little amazed and a little uncomfortable sometimes, to hear myself say, “I’m a Christian.” I really haven’t a clue where this leg of my spiritual journey is going to take me. I do know that I love where I am, even though I don’t know where that is. I’m in another cycle of coming out, coming through, coming home.

Bill Kreidler, 1993

Necessity, Friends, outstrips the law: necessity has made many people go by the Weeping Cross... I remember I was yonce travelling through Shrewsbury, and my Guide said to me: "I'll show thee the Weeping Cross." "Nay," said I, "thou need not; I have borne it a great while." Now this place that he showed me was four lane ends. I remember when I first met with my Guide. He led me into a very large and cross [place], where I was to speak the truth from my heart—and before I used to swear and lie too for gain. "Nay, then," said I to my Guide, "I mun leave Thee here: if Thou leads me up that lane, I can never follow: I'se be ruined of this butchering trade, if I mun't lie for a gain." Here I left my Guide, and was filled with sorrow, and went back to the Weeping Cross: and I said, if I could find my good Guide again, I'll follow Him, lead me whither He will. So here I found my Guide again, and began to follow Him up this ane and tell the truth from my heart. I had been nought but beggary and poverty before; and now I began to thrive at my trade, and got to the end of this lane, though with some difficulty. But now my Guide began to lead me up another lane, harder than the first, which was to bear my testimony in using the plain language. This was very hard; yet I said to my Guide, "Take my feeble pace, and I'll follow Thee as fast as I can. Don't outstretch me, I pray Thee." So by degrees I got up here. But now I was led up the third lane: it was harder still, to bear my testimony against tithes—my wife not being convinced. I said to my Guide, "Nay, I doubt I never can follow up here: but don't leave me: take my pace, I pray Thee, for I mun rest me." So I tarried here a great while, till my wife cried, "We'se all be ruined: what is thee ganging stark mad to follow t'silly Quakers?" Here I struggled and cried, and begged of my Guide to stay and take my pace: and presently my wife was convinced. "Well," says she, "now follow thy Guide, let come what will. The Lord hath done abundance for us: we will trust in Him."

Luke Cock, 1721

The first gleam of light, "the first cold light of morning" which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, "Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee." Then I believed that God speaks to man by His Spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

Caroline Fox, 1841

My brother, Russell, and I were jamming away one afternoon nearly 30 years ago when the improvisation took a turn. We both felt a sense of being taken over by the Spirit, of being played. In the music, we heard a sound of a tune we both knew, and, all of a sudden, we found ourselves moving into an improvisation around that song. As we were playing, we both experienced three waves of light passing through and among us. My eyes were closed, but I saw and felt a warm, powerful light passing through my body and the room. Russell said that he was looking at the linoleum-tiled, flecked floor, when one of the white flecks jumped off the floor, expanded to fill the room and passed through his body. In that moment I experienced a musical and spiritual breakthrough. I was taught the musical concept of modal improvisation and I was given tangible assurance of divine reality. Along with the waves of light, I heard various other instruments and voices of a great orchestra and chorus joining our song. Or, perhaps more likely, we were joining that song. Music is a metaphor for my spiritual journey. In my life, music has moved from a place where I retreat, to fill my soul, to a place of prayer, where my soul overflows. ... In recent years, I continue to play music. I love to accompany singing on guitar and still jam away at my violin. Now there is jamming, or improvisation, with a group and then there is doing scales. Spiritual discipline, individual prayer is like playing scales. Meeting for worship is like jamming together with Friends. I cannot control the ways in which God's grace is offered, but I can work on my receptiveness to that grace. The experience of the waves of light passing through my brother and me was grace. The preparation to receive that grace took a lot of scales.

Jonathan Vogel-Borne, 2000

What is salvation? Salvation, for me, is the coming into harmony with the song God is singing. I can only express it as a musical metaphor. There's something visceral and non-verbal about it. If you've ever been trying to come into harmony and you've not been in harmony and then you are, you know what I mean. It is not an event, it is a place, it is happening always anew, and yet it's a place to reside. When I find the center, when I am still and open, I find myself in that harmony, and since time is not a property of God, when I am there I am adjacent to eternity, and if that is what is waiting for me when my body falls away, I am eager for it, and I know it will seem familiar.

Brian Drayton, 2005

As a teenager I looked for proof of the existence of God, but soon realised that there would be none. I chose to adopt as a working hypothesis a belief in God, and to go on from there. I have not felt the need to revise that hypothesis—yet. I believe in a powerful, all-knowing God, but a caring and a forgiving God. I believe he says to us: “All right, you’ve got life, get on with it, live it! I am there behind to guide you, to help you live it; but don’t expect me to interfere to make life smooth for you—you are old enough to stand on your own two feet.”

Jocelyn S. Burnell, 1976

At times the sense of Presence would well up in me. I seemed to feel the anguish of God at all the suffering in the world. Sometimes I had to turn away because I could not bear it. The experience confirmed my intellectual awareness of God as a process, rather than an omnipotent deity outside our human struggles, holding life and death power over mortal. This I know experimentally: God is not outside the universe, but part of it, limited by the same laws of cause and effect, involved in our struggles, working beside us, and unable to save us from the chance disasters that befall us. As I experienced the anguish of God in my own grief, so in time I experienced the compassion of God. God suffers with us. We are not alone. This too, I know experimentally.

Elizabeth Watson, 1977

For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed; and indeed this is the surest way to become a Christian; to whom afterwards the knowledge and understanding of principles will not be wanting, but will grow up so much as is needful as the natural fruit of this good root, and such a knowledge will not be barren nor unfruitful.

Robert Barclay, 1678

The kingdom of heaven did gather us, and catch us all as in a net, and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land; that we came to know a place to stand in, and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration; inso-much that we often said one unto another, with great joy of heart: “What! is the Kingdom of God come to be with men? And will he take up his tabernacle among the sons of men, as he did of old? And what! shall we, that were reckoned as the outcasts of Israel, have this honour of glory communicated amongst us, which were but men of small parts, and of little abilities, in respect of many others, as amongst men?”

Francis Howgill, 1663

While I was too young to have any religion of my own, I had come to a home where religion kept its fires always burning. We had very few “things,” but we were rich in invisible wealth. I was not “christened” in a church, but I was sprinkled from morning to night with the dew of religion. We never ate a meal which did not begin with a hush of thanksgiving; we never began a day without “a family gathering” at which mother read a chapter of the Bible after which there would follow a weighty silence. These silences, during which all the children of our family were hushed with a kind of awe, were very important features of my spiritual development. There was work inside and outside the house waiting to be done, and yet we sat there hushed and quiet, doing nothing. I very quickly discovered that something real was taking place. We were feeling our way down to that place from which living words come, and very often they did come. Some one would bow and talk with God so simply and quietly that He never seemed far away. The words helped to explain the silence. We were now finding what we had been searching for. When I first began to think of God I did not think of Him as very far off. At a meeting some of the Friends who prayed shouted loud and strong when they called upon Him, but at home He always heard easily and He seemed to be there with us in the living silence. My first steps in religion were thus acted. It was a religion which we did together. Almost nothing was said in the way of instructing me. We all joined together to listen for God, and then one of us talked to Him for the others. In these simple ways my religious disposition was being unconsciously formed and the roots of my faith in unseen realities were reaching down far below my crude and childish surface thinking.

Rufus Jones, 1926

Often, as I work, I sense a stirring, an excitement, a focus, that seems more than just a pleasure in the creative process of finding the right words to express something. I feel the quality of message in my body, coming through my typing fingers, rather than out of my mouth; knowing that when those words come to be spoken on Sunday, there will be that stirring of the Spirit once again ... I do my best work when I prepare well ahead of time and give the message time to soak into me. Often I find it is what I really need to hear myself.

Maggie Edmondson, 2007

In Quaker meeting I've had the remarkable sensation of observing the room through the eyes of a bird perched high on a window looking in; and sitting quietly with my eyes closed, I've felt everything in the room—plants, people, furniture and the Presence penetrating everything—melt together. In the shining joy that accompanies this phenomenon, my differentiated consciousness is a drop of water in the divine sea, not separate but flowing together with all consciousness, all experience. The drop does re-separate and I return to just being myself. But in the lingering glow of what I've seen, everything I touch, every person I pass, I recognize as—well as me, as part of the same sacred identity. There is really in essence no I, you, and it—just we, and we are within the much larger identity of holy universality.

Warren Ostram, 1986

I have experienced in some silence-based meetings for worship, especially memorial meetings, the overwhelming, loving presence of the Spirit in a silence which is almost physically heavy, as though a great chord has just been played. Beyond doubt the whole meeting feels it together. Once we have experienced this, we know the existence of the living God, and nothing that ever happens can take this certainty away from us.

William Burt Kriebel, 2002

On one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and, before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God, with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at the least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven. And, since that day, now more than seventeen years ago, Friends' meetings have indeed been to me the greatest of outward helps to a fuller and fuller entrance into the spirit from which they have sprung; the place of the most soul-subduing, faith restoring, strengthening, and peaceful communion, in feeding upon the bread of life, that I have ever known.

Caroline E. Stephen 1890

In the year 1755, being in company with Comfort Hoag and her companion, from New England, then on a religious visit to Friends in this part of the country, I attended a meeting with them in which I felt a concern to speak to the assembly, but, as usual, evaded it. After meeting Comfort said to me, "David, why didst thou not preach today?" I smiled at the query, seeming to wonder that she should ask such a question, and endeavored to appear innocent and ignorant of any concern of that kind... On the following day a similar concern came upon me, and I evaded it as before. After meeting Comfort again said to me, "David, why didst thou not preach today?" I endeavored to pass it by, as I did before; but she said it was not worth while to evade it, for she was assured that I ought to have preached that day, and that I had almost spoiled her meeting by refraining, which had hindered her service. When I found I could not conceal my faults, I confessed the whole, and told her I had been for more than twenty years in that practice; and then gave her a history of my life from the beginning down to that day... The following day, being at meeting, I again felt a concern to speak to the people, but endeavored to evade it. ... Thus I spent the greater part of an hour. At length my divine Master, the great Master Builder, thus addressed me, "Why dost thou still delay, desiring to be excused until a more convenient season? There never will be a better time than this. I have waited on thee above twenty years; I have clearly made known to thee my will, so that all occasion of doubt has been removed; yet thou hast refused to submit until thy day is far spent; and if thou dost not speedily comply with my commands, it will be too late; thy opportunity will be lost." ... Then I said, "Lord! Here am I; make of me what thou wouldst have me to be; leave me not in displeasure, I beseech thee." All my power to resist was then suspended; ... and was raised on my feet, I hardly knew how, and expressed in a clear and distinct manner what was on my mind... After meeting she told me that, during the time we had sat in silence, her whole concern was on my account; that her anxiety for my deliverance from that bondage was such, that she was willing to offer up her natural life to the Lord, if it might be a means to bring me forth in the ministry; and that on making the offering I rose to speak.

David Ferris, 1755

I remember an instance in my own experience, very painfully corroborating this danger to which ministers—especially those who have abundant words at command—are exposed; and it has been instructively brought to my remembrance, as a watchword of caution and warning, to keep me from falling again in this way: ... Many years since, while traveling in Truth's service, I attended a meeting in which I felt my mind much enlarged in Gospel love, and in travail on behalf of the people then assembled, and I think that I have very seldom, if ever, been more favored with a distinct and clear opening for extensive labor, than on this occasion. I stood up in this opening, and began by repeating three or four disjointed passages of Scripture, as they had been presented to my mind, expecting to go on and show how they harmoniously blended together when properly considered, in establishing and enforcing important principles of Christian doctrines and testimonies. I had, however, no sooner uttered these disjointed and apparently opposite sentences, than I felt a check in my mind, with a gentle intimation that ought at once to sit down and proceed no further. But feeling a fear that some tender, seeking minds then present, would be stumbled and wounded at what they would probably think to be the opposing sentiments which I had uttered, I concluded, after standing awhile silently considering my painfully embarrassing position, that I had better, in as few words as possible, inform the meeting how it had been with me, so that no tender mind might be hurt; firmly intending, after this short explanation, to take my seat. But before I got through with my explanation, the subject a little revived, and words came so pressingly upon me for utterance, that I could find no place for stopping; and so I went on, pouring out words, and passing from subject to subject, with a rapidity such as I have never known before or since. During all this time, I trembled in every limb with fear and amazement, feeling an unholy fire in my heart... It is a fearful thing to slight even the gentlest intimations of the Lord's will; and I had additionally transgressed in endeavoring with the best intentions, but in my own will and wisdom, to patch up and mend that which the Lord had marred, and dearly did I pay for my presumption and disobedience.

Joseph Hoag, 1832

When it was time for the "keynote" I carried a chair over my head through the sea of people and chairs so I could sit up front, but off to one side. [Jan Hoffman] stood near the fireplace and spoke on her feet, with just a chair near her containing a few pages of notes. A centering silence to begin, and then the words began to flow out of her, at first a well-organized and well-delivered flow of ideas to flood the expectant openness with a first calm lake of shared understanding. But the calm, quiet stream began to build in depth and power to a message of elegant, one-pointed coherence and wisdom and saving power, full of Life. There was not one false or hesitant note. I did not look at her, I was deeply submerged in prayer—she was the only person in the room for me. I could feel her drawing energy from my prayer. I could feel her making her way into deeper and deeper waters, surely, clearly, with complete trust. The words and quotes came to her exactly when they were needed. I could feel something hugely important coming; it was just out of sight. I felt her gather herself. I "woke up," intensely alert in my prayer, and found this prayer form in me: "Please Jesus, stand near to Jan; hold her and whisper in her ear the words You would have her say." And just then Jan paused for the briefest moment and turned her message in a new and far deeper direction saying "But these are just words, a lot of words, when what is really asked of us is communion, instead of communication—a communion that is beyond all words." And I said, "Why thank you Jesus for saying so clearly that you are here and this is what you want us to know." ... I was so drawn in by hearing Jesus that my brain stopped working... Towards the end I asked myself if there was anything more she had wanted to talk about and I realized she had not really explained "elders." So shortly after that she fully and beautifully expressed the elder's gift, the loneliness and missed opportunity of unrecognized, uncalled-out elders in a meeting... When she finished and sat down next to me I was moved to reach over and place my hand on her knee, firmly and squeeze. She instantly clasped my hand and held it tightly for a long, deep moment until she just as decisively let go. We settled into a deeply-held silence until it was time to close the meeting.

Susan Davies, 2007

One of the women in my care committee for the School of the Spirit asked me to present a paper I had written on spiritual health of meetings to her meeting, which had been going through a stressful situation. I do not consider myself to be a mediator, even with a background in social work group process, years of teaching special education and many hours of playground duty. We prayed about it and, with a Friend from my meeting as elder, agreed to the visit. The Friends from that meeting were welcoming and there was a sense of rightness, despite an elevated anxiety level. I began the presentation out of the silence, and Friends listened politely. One of the indicators of a healthy meeting is how it handles conflict, and I said something to the effect of their knowing about conflict. It was then that God took over the evening and I sat back, holding the process in prayer, while Friends began to discuss the situation at length. The next morning, my friend told me that it was the first time that the group was able to discuss the situation without someone crying. As a result, they had some direction to take to resolve the conflict. As I was driving home, I was overcome with a sense of total oneness—a sense of being part of everything and not existing as a separate entity. Words do not begin to convey the power of that unity—floating, a total lack of fear, being held in perfect love, not disappearing but becoming more. I had a feeling of gratitude for being able to live in holy surrender, that anxiety and feelings of inadequacy for the task did not prevent me from saying “yes” when it was clear from the discernment that it was mine to do.

Sue Reilly, 2009

I was under great temptations sometimes, and my inward sufferings were heavy; but I could find none to open my condition to but the Lord alone, unto whom I cried night and day. And I went back into Nottinghamshire, and there the Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without, were within in the hearts and minds of wicked men ... And I cried to the Lord, saying, “Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?” And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings.

George Fox, 1647

I often remember a time when I was in some sadness of spirit, and I went into our little village church at evensong. One of the psalms we were chanting suddenly had something to say to me. ... We came to a passage which had often puzzled me: “Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well,” I found the words were different. They were translated: “Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well.” At that moment I realised that our times of despair, our times of sorrow, our times of suffering, can all be used as a well. ... Let us not waste our sorrows, our sufferings, our moments of despair. We must use them. We must use them for a well, and the living water will spring up and refresh our spirits, and the spirits of those around us.

Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983

In the pain and loss, which were acute, I had a curious experience of God’s presence. That was true at the beginning and it has remained true these two years. It was curious because I had heretofore assumed that such pain and emptiness were incompatible with a strong sense of God’s presence. But that is untrue. Those people who recommend a stronger prayer life as though grief is synonymous with loss of faith in God are quite mistaken. I could and did have experiences of joy and loss at the same time.

Sandra L. Cronk, 1985

My beloved daughter faces a life threatening, life-changing disease. It is not in my belief system to ask God for a miracle cure but to be present with us as I walk along the path of her illness. I am faithful to the practice of lighting a morning candle, opening the window to the outside world, no matter the weather. I look to see what God has brought to me this day; what beauty, what changes, what companions from the natural world. I read sacred literature and I pray. I ask with hope that the mist clears from my eyes so that I glimpse/feel/ understand the presence of the Spirit and I am always utterly surprised when insight pops into my consciousness. Most of all, I relinquish my heart to utter trust. This faithful, everyday practice builds my own sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit in my heart. It nourishes me enough to face the challenges I am given and to embrace gifts of happiness and wisdom. At the darkest moments, the Spirit is my resource.

Marybeth Toomey, 2010

Thus having in a great measure lost my own Guide, and darkness being come upon me, I sought a place where I might have been alone, to weep and cry before the Lord, that His face I might find, and my condition recover: But then my adversary who had long waited his opportunity, had got in, and bestirred himself every way, so that I could not be hid, and diverse messages came to me in that case, some true, some false (as I have seen since). ... Yea, the provocations of that time of temptation was exceeding great against the pure love of God, yet He left me not; ... my adversary so prevailed, that all things were turned and perverted against my right seeing, hearing or understanding, only a secret hope and faith I had in my God, whom I had served, that He would bring me through it, and to the end of it; and that I should see again the day of my redemption from under it all: And this quieted my soul in my greatest tribulation.

James Nayler, 1659

Candles in the Shadows

At a team worship time soon after the kidnapping of Margaret Hassan I [had] a very clear image. It was of a land of shadows and darkness. But within that land candles were burning; not many but enough to shed some light on the landscape. Some candles disappeared and it was my sense that their light was taken away for protection. Other candles burned until nothing was left and a small number of candles seemed to have their light snuffed out by the shadows and the darkness. What was most striking to me was that as the candles which burned until the end and the candles whose light was snuffed out ceased to burn more candles came into being seemingly to build on their light. ... [It's] my sense that removing ourselves from the shadows and darkness will never create the capacity for those living in the shadows to grow in the light.

Tom Fox, 2004

As many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light, and makes it more to shine forth; so when many are gathered together into the same Life, there is more of the glory of God, and his powers appear to the refreshment of each individual for that he partakes not only of the Light and life raised in himself but in all the rest.

Robert Barclay, 1678

Our witness is that the Kingdom of God is among us now, accessible to all who will allow it to re-orient and guide their lives. You and I and any who wish to join us can live in a profoundly different way, and we don't have to wait for permission from some human authority to do so. Our meeting communities are the primary locus for this witness—but only when we learn to love one another. That means loving the Friend who annoys me most, whose spiritual vocabulary sets my teeth on edge, who is most different from me or most challenging to me. That means loving all those who call themselves Friends who have adopted the pastoral system, or call themselves evangelicals, or seem to be stuck in old-fashioned ways of speaking and dressing, or who seem to be more concerned about their political activism than their spiritual health. If we can't love one another, we have no ground on which to stand for witnessing to the rest of the world that they can and should love one another across much more profound divisions.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, 2006

I cannot escape from the reality of pain, but I can experience “joy” in trying to stop (and at the very least lessen) the impact of social and economic injustice on the larger community. As a Friend I am called to witness to a living goodness that exists in all women and men. For me that often means confronting that which negates a positive life experience. I must reflect in the silence of worship, finding strength in my spiritual community, and move onward towards an active expression of my belief. ... As a Black, I view the relationship of Christianity to people of color as radical in its expression, serving as a liberating force. An important voice in the Black religious community, James Cone, points out that “Being black in America has little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind and your body are where the dispossessed are.”... This is where I stand as a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Greg Williams, 1983

It's a long journey, this hike to Zion, and as much as God's kingdom is here and now—and I believe it is—the journey is neither short nor easy. Zion is a long way off, and it takes a lot of marching, a lot of loving, and Spirit-powered GPS. It's so long that it's generational. Walking along with our spiritual ancestors is not as quaint as it might sound on first blush. Surely Elias Hicks studiously avoids Joseph Hoag and Stephen Grellet; John Wilber and Joseph John Gurney look askance at each other. Plain friends roll their eyes at Margaret Fell's red cloak and Elizabeth Fry's purple shoes. A whole group of Friends shun Hannah and Joel Bean. But it is easy for us modern Friends to feel some kind of bond with these folk, to see the places we're connected and to look with generous eye at differences. It's an arduous trek to get to the “beautiful city of God.” We need to lean on each other's love today just as we love our spiritual foremothers and forefathers, accentuating our commonalities and looking kindly at our differences. We need the wisdom of our spiritual ancestors. We need the forgiveness and love of each other, and we need the good hiking shoes of an open heart.

Carl Williams, 2009

Someone in worship today gave a brief summary of the naturalistic interpretation of religion. How rational, judicious, and powerless seemed our intellectual expressions and how little they met the need of a young attender, obviously in need of deeper ministry, who left, overcome by emotion, in the middle of meeting. The real ministry of our meeting came from the concern of several who followed him out to give him comfort. I saw that such lovingkindness, call it love or agape, is the manifestation in the natural world of that which transcends it. Love does have power—not the political or mechanical power the world seems to covet, but a basic power that works in another way, not by overcoming but by reunion. Such a working, when it points to its source, can be called a miracle—not a breach of nature, but an inbreak of love.

Carol Murphy, 1989

I have felt welcome through the open doors of the Quaker Meeting as a refugee from church. I have been given space and direction to make my peace with God, with the Spirit, with Jesus in the loving mix of Christians, Jews, Universalists and Atheists whom I love and who are here to stay. And I love to unite with them in that Friend of Friends that may or may not be God, that is here in the sanctuary of the heart always present to teach us directly... I am more Christian in Spanish than in English: more Universalist in English than in Spanish. What I believe does not matter as much as what I can say with conviction, what I hear inside me lovingly convicting me, what roots me to a life established and convinced.

Benigno Sanchez-Eppler, 2007

This summer has *opened up* what was already opening up before, a new sense of unreserved dedication of oneself to a life of childlike devotion to God. This comes not of the feeling that one has of having looked into the *awful* depths of human woe, overwhelming as that is. What I want to say does not grow out of any specific external influence—it seems to grow out of an *internal influence*, which is so overwhelming that I can only recognize it as God working within me. Last winter you know I was much shaken by the experience of Presence—something that I did not seek, but that *sought* me. ... And the work here this summer, or, *in the midst* of the work here this summer, has come an increased sense of *being laid hold on* by a Power, a gentle, loving, but awful Power. And it makes one *know* the reality of God at work in the world. And it takes away the old self-seeking, self-centered self, from which selfishness I have laid heavy burdens on you, dear one... It would be easy to say that what I say here is growing out of the summer's deep experience with tragedy. One often says to oneself, "What right have I to live in such comfortable circumstances at Haverford, when the world is aflame?" And we can't, as the average American is now living, accepting things as naturally our right. If we use them, and live in such parklike surroundings, with privileges I never appreciated before, it is a holy trust, out of which we must make something that is an offering to the wounds of this terrible world. But what I have said goes deeper than this reaction to human suffering. It is grounded not in time and suffering, but in the Eternal, as He breaks into us and teaches us His final nature, as *love*. But the suffering of the world is a part too of the life of God, and so maybe, after all, it is a revelation.

Thomas Kelly, 1938

I had to go do it. ... I think that is the real essence of a leading: you have to go do it ... to the extent that it makes you laugh at yourself. I think if you can laugh about the amount of absurdity and the contradiction and the amount of passion that comes through, that to me is a sign of active spiritual life rather than misguided egotism. ... One of the blessings and burdens in my leading is that I've always had a great deal of certainty. I've not had any doubt from the beginning that this is a life work. ... I did not know where it was going or what it was leading to or what it would look like. But I knew that they (my guides) had me, and I was theirs forever, and they called me to surrender.

John Calvi, 2001

I was at the plow, meditating on the things of God, and suddenly I heard a voice saying unto me, "Get thee out from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." And I had a promise given with it, whereupon I did exceedingly rejoice that I had heard the voice of that God which I had professed from a child, but had never known him ... And when I came at home I gave up my estate, cast out my money; but not being obedient in going forth, the wrath of God was upon me, so that I was made a wonder to all, and none thought I would have lived. But after I was made willing, I began to make some preparation, as apparel and other necessaries, not knowing whither I should go. But shortly afterwards going a gate-ward with a friend from my own house, having on an old suit, without any money, having neither taken leave of wife or children, not thinking then of any journey, I was commanded to go into the west, not knowing whether I should go, nor what I was to do there. But when I had been there a little while, I had given me what I was to declare. And ever since I have remained not knowing today what I was to do tomorrow ... [The promise was] that God would be with me, which promise I find made good every day.

James Nayler, 1652

Here we are in prison in our own land for no crimes, no offence to God nor man; nay, more: we are here for obeying the commands of the Son of God and the influences of his Holy Spirit. I must look for patience in this dark day. I am troubled too much and excited and perplexed. ... Yesterday my mind was much agitated: doubts and fears and forebodings seized me. I was alone, seeking a resting-place and finding none. It seemed as if God had forsaken me in this dark hour; and the Tempter whispered, that after all I might be only the victim of a delusion. My prayers for faith and strength seemed all in vain. But this morning I enjoy peace, and feel as though I could face anything ... Oh, praise be to the Lord for the peace and love and resignation that has filled my soul today! Oh, the passing beauty of holiness! There is a holy life that is above fear; it is a close communion with Christ. I pray for this continually but am not free from the shadow of the tempter. There is ever present with us the thought that perhaps we shall serve the Lord the most effectually by our death, and desire, if that be the service He requires of us, that we may be ready and resigned.

Cyrus Pringle, 1863

The time was now come to endeavor to support our Testimony against War, or abandon it, as this very instrument was a severe test. I could not hesitate which to choose, and therefore denied the applicant. My reason for not furnishing them was demanded, to which I readily answered, "As this instrument is purposely made and used for the destruction of mankind, I can put no weapon into a man's hand to destroy another, that I cannot use myself in the same way." The person left me much dissatisfied. Others came, and received the same denial. It made a great noise in the Country, and my life was threatened. I would gladly have beaten them into "pruning hooks," but I took an early opportunity of throwing them into the sea. A short time after I was called before a Committee appointed by the Court then held at Watertown near Boston, and questioned, amongst other things respecting my bayonets. I gave a full account of my proceedings, and closed it with saying, "I sunk them in the bottom of the sea, I did it from principle, I have ever been glad that I had done it, and if I am wrong I am to be pitied." The chairman of the Committee Major Hawley (a worthy character) then addressed the Committee, and said "I believe Mr. Rotch has given us a candid account, and every man has a right to act consistently with his religious principles, but I am sorry that we could not have the bayonets, for we want them very much." The Major was desirous of knowing more of our principles on which I informed him as far as he enquired. One of the Committee in a pert manner observed "then your principles are passive Obedience and non-resistance." I replied, "No, my friend, our principles are active Obedience or passive suffering."

William Rotch, 1814

I must also live out my understanding of peace and what it means to me, and risk everything. We both carry ministries against war. As different as they might be, I must believe that one God led us each to our own life's work. My brother's calling is a reaction to establish peace, while my heart calls for proactive measures against the conditions for war. We must both risk our entire lives for what we believe. We are the necessary balance of idealism and realism. In this imperfect world, we must steady our aims and breathe fire to ignite whatever future will have us.

Stephen Willis Dotson, 2010

Consciousness of the spiritual, of God—whatever that means—is at the heart of who I am. Yet I appear to myself and quite probably to those who know me as an ordinary, daily sort of person, as mundane, as worldly, as anyone else, living a life made up of bills, telephone calls, computers, car-washes, work, food, laundry and so on ... [although] in every particular my life is aware of a spirit in things ... But the sense of a spirit in things is what keeps me alive. I suspect such a recognition is common. I suspect many do not speak of what they deeply recognize as faith. ... I believe that many lives as ordinary as my own are founded in a sense of the spirit. I believe that faith, consciousness of the unseen Other, works constantly in ordinary lives like mine in a wonderful and mysterious way. Even though no one but the one who knows such faith may feel its power, I believe that in those who are silent faith may be profound and strong, may be the very force which brings about miracles of light.

Phyllis Hoge, 2005

The leading to marry, and the wedding worship itself, were powerful spiritual experiences for me. I stand now in that memory, as I seek to say something useful about the words I use to express my faith. To me, God (whom I most often call Spirit) was the source of the nudge I felt. In following the leading to marry Polly, I believe that I was following Spirit's guidance, which expressed itself within me as a yearning, a growing sense of rightness, and trust. I came to believe that, should Polly and I fall on difficult times in our relationship and our lives, divine assistance (coming through loving friends, worship, prayer, the Quaker clearness and support process) would help us. The Spirit I understood to be leading me into marriage with Polly isn't a white-haired old white man up in the sky. It is, she is, he is, a spirit of love that yearns for us all like a lover, a spirit that yearns for justice, and suffers with us when tragedy and cruelty occur. The God I have glimpsed needs us to be God's hands and feet and voice, needs us to be the face of Love in our families and in the world around us.

Wendy Sanford, 2005

All my life I had wanted to live with integrity, that is, to make my personal behavior a reflection of my professed values. But it did not occur to me to seek support for this newfound environmental concern within my Quaker Meeting. Some Friends in my Meeting were practicing a form of simple living, which they linked to the testimonies of Peace and Equality. But no one talked about the Quaker faith itself as a primary source of guidance and inspiration for living more lightly on the planet. ... This is what had been missing in my earlier frantic environmental activism—an understanding of the spiritual transformation that is essential to curbing our ecologically disruptive behavior.

Louis Cox, 2007

About this time an ancient man of good esteem in the neighborhood came to my house to get his will written. He had young negroes, and I asked him privately how he proposed to dispose of them. He told me; I then said, "I cannot write thy will without breaking my own peace," and respectfully gave him my reasons for it. He signified that he had a choice that I should have written it, but as I could not, consistently with my conscience, he did not desire it, and so he got it written by some other person. A few years later, there being great alteration in his family, he came to me again to get me to write his will. His negroes were yet young, and his son, to whom he intended to give them, was, since he first spoke to me, from a libertine become a sober young man, and he supposed that I would have been free on that account to write it. We had much friendly talk on the subject, and then deferred it. A few days after he came again and directed their freedom, and I then wrote his will.

John Woolman, 1756

Upon my return from Iraq I went back to my job at the high-tech firm, but I found that all I could do was stare at my computer screen. It was very difficult to focus on anything, as I kept remembering the people I met in Iraq, the children lying in hospital beds with no hope of recovery, and knowing that my country's policies were part of the cause of their suffering. Deep down I realized that God wasn't leading me to continue working at a high-tech firm. God was leading me to become a voice for the voiceless. It is a blessing when a leading is made eminently clear because way opens at every turn. Such was the case in this journey. At the end of July 2000 I left my job and went to Basra to live with a family in the city's poorest neighborhood (Al Jumhuriyah, which means, ironically, "the revolution") for six weeks. I bought only the equivalent of the meager food rations my Iraqi friends received from the UN, rested in the extreme summer afternoon heat, heard the U.S. and UK fighter jets patrolling the sky, and took in the squalor and suffering that was the life of most Iraqis in summer 2000. In the act of following this leading, I realized that in reaching out to people thought of as "the enemy," I found that they were, in fact, not our enemies. That of God was quite apparent in these kind, welcoming people. It was all the more clear to me that I was led to not only share this witness with Friends and others, but also to speak truth to power on this issue.

Thomas Jackson, 2009

A knot of my old acquaintance [at Oxford], espying me, came to me. One of these was a scholar in his gown, another a surgeon of that city ... When they were come up to me, they all saluted me, after the usual manner, putting off their hats and bowing, and saying, "Your humble Servant, Sir," expecting no doubt the same from me. But when they saw me stand still, not moving my cap, nor bowing my knee, in way of congee to them, they were amazed, and looked first one upon another, then upon me, and then one upon another again for a while, without a word speaking. At length, the surgeon ... clapping his hand in a familiar way upon my shoulder and smiling on me said, "What, Tom, a Quaker!" To which I readily, and cheerfully answered, "Yes, a Quaker." And as the words passed out of my mouth I felt joy spring in my heart, for I rejoiced that I had not been drawn out by them into a compliance with them, and that I had strength and boldness given me to confess myself to be one of that despised people.

Thomas Ellwood, 1659