

Finding Quaker Core Values in the Bible

Leann Williams for Spokane Friends October 4, 2026

Good morning. Today is World Quaker Day where Quakers all over the world are encouraged to remember that we are connected by shared values including the value of diversity. Our diversity is expressed in different styles of worship, ways of addressing our shared values, and different belief systems. We chose to communicate our values to each other and the world around us through the acronym SPICES, Simplicity Peace Integrity Equality and Stewardship. Not all Quakers are oriented toward Christianity and the Bible. So, for those of us who are and for those of us who are not, I thought it might be interesting to consider if and how our values might be represented in the bible. Clearly, the thoughts I offer are my own and not meant to represent Quakers generally or even Christ centered Quakers specifically.

My guiding queries have been: What stories or teachings give birth to or nurture Quaker values? What underlying attitude or heart condition supports these values?

Simplicity brings to my mind living within my means, not accumulating more than I need (at which I fail miserably), and creating margins in my life that hold space for time and resources that can be available to others if needed.

The first biblical passage that came to my mind relating to simplicity is found in Luke 9:3 where Jesus instructs his followers before he sends them out into the community to minister, “Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.” I think what Jesus was communicating to his disciples was that it’s who you are, not what you have that will make a difference in people’s lives.

In Matthew 6:19-20 The Living Bible records Jesus instructing, “Don’t store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves.” Many translations add, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” I appreciate the connection between our hearts and our actions. It seems to me that the heart condition that supports simplicity is contentment. The New Life version of first Timothy 6:6-7 reads, “A God like life gives us much when we are happy for what we have here. We come into this world with nothing. For sure, when we die, we will take nothing with us. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

Of course, simplicity is not limited to material matters. Holland Friends, a meeting in Holland, Michigan has this definition of simplicity on their website: *The cutting away of everything that is extraneous, so that our outward life fully reflects our inward life.* This definition also reflects our value of integrity to me.

The next value in SPICES is Peace. In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” In Romans 14 Paul is dealing with the issue of differing beliefs and practices among Christ followers. In the Contemporary English

Version, he gives these instructions extracted from the more detailed passage:” Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours... After all, God welcomes everyone... We must stop judging others. We must also make up our minds not to upset anyone's faith... God's kingdom isn't about eating and drinking. It is about pleasing God, about living in peace, and about true happiness. All this comes from the Holy Spirit... We should try to live at peace and help each other have a strong faith.” Paul ends the second letter to the Corinthians with these words, “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

I believe this personal peacemaking among our families, faith communities, neighborhoods, and nation is the basis that gives credibility to our broader peace testimony. I quote again from Holland Friends meeting: “We believe in a world transformed by Love, not violence. Seeking to be a loving testimony that good can overcome evil, we oppose all war, suffering, and injustice.”

I think a heart condition that supports and nurtures peace is humility. Colossians 3 speaks to this. Verses 12-13 state, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Compassion and humility seem to be prerequisite heart conditions to live out all of our values.

The book of Proverbs speaks of Integrity, the next value in the SPICES. Proverbs 11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. Proverbs 21:3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. Proverbs 4:26 Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.

Titus 2:7 instructs, “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity and dignity.” Luke says in Acts 24, “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”

From various sources all over the internet, Quakers have expressed integrity as

- **Truthfulness:** Avoiding misleading statements and speaking honestly in all circumstances.
- **Consistency:** Aligning actions with beliefs, ensuring that personal and spiritual values are reflected in daily life.
- **Accountability:** Accepting responsibility for one’s actions and making amends when harm occurs.
- **Ethical conduct:** Upholding fairness in business, social interactions, and community life.
- **Refusal to take oaths:** Following Jesus’s teaching, Quakers answer “yea” or “nay” rather than swearing oaths, trusting that their word alone reflects truth.

A necessary heart condition or reference point for integrity seems to me to be an accurate appraisal of myself and others. Romans 12:3 tells us to not think more highly of ourselves than we should. It goes on to talk about how we all have different gifts and purposes. Jesus is recorded in Matthew 7:12 as saying that the Law and the Prophets can be summed up in the command, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.” Quakers believe there is “that of God”, a divine spark, in every person which should call us to integrity which prevents us from exploiting, manipulating, or deceiving anyone else (or ourselves). Integrity also requires empathy, an ability to see how my choices can impact the wellbeing and feelings of those around me.

But, Integrity is more than just my personal way of being in the world. I appreciate the following statements from Friends School of Minnesota at their Gathering for Racial Justice:

“We practice integrity when we truthfully acknowledge the history of a place. We practice integrity when we are honest about the injustice in that history and when we acknowledge the power, resistance, and resilience that fought (and fights) against that injustice. We practice integrity when we think about our own many identities and perspectives and the many identities and perspectives of others. We practice integrity when we practice our conflict resolution skills, we learn how to voice our concerns to each other, and figure out how to reach a common understanding. We practice integrity when we take care of ourselves, our community, and our environment. We practice integrity when we recognize injustice and take action to create a more just world. We practice integrity when we reflect and learn and grow from that reflection.”

These statements lead directly to the next SPICES, Community and Equality.

Acts chapter 2 gives us an example of the church living out the value of Community, “They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer... All believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had a need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”

Both Old and New Testament verses point out the value of community. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up... a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Proverbs 27:17 “As the iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another.”

Early Quakers encountered much persecution and had to live out these verses for survival. In the process of establishing a faith community that did not rely on top-down leadership as did

the Church of England, they developed the discipline of interpreting scripture as a community in which each voice was welcomed and taken into account as they discerned communally how to understand a passage. Today many Quaker groups explain the value of community as “Supporting one another in our faith journeys and in times of joy and sorrow; sharing with and caring for each other”.

The heart condition that nurtures our value of Community, I believe, is found in the next value, Equality. When we see every person as a unique, sacred, being to be known and loved, we can live out Community in ways that the world can be moved toward greater understanding, justice, and peace.

Equality is a value expressed throughout the Bible. The Old Testament instructs in Leviticus 19:33-34, “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as a native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” When Jesus was asked by an expert of the O.T. law, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus Told him to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. After saying that, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan indicating that anyone, everyone is your neighbor. In Acts 10 Peter had a vision about all kinds of animals and is told do not call anything impure that God has made clean. Shortly after that, Peter was invited to speak to a large group of Gentiles. He began with these words, “Now I realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” Finally, in Galatians 3:28 Paul says, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male and female. You are all one in Christ Jesus.” teaching that economic or social status, gender, or nationality are irrelevant in God’s sight.

Because the value and perspective of Equality is so foundational for all the other values, I think we should reorder SPICE to EPICS It follows in a logical progression. Equality nurtures Peace which requires Integrity which supports Community and leads us to Simplicity. But I wouldn’t know what to do with the other S which is Stewardship, our final value. To me, Stewardship is the obvious outgrowth of the other values. When we see every person as a sacred being of equal value, we should want to live in peace with them. To do that, we need to live with Integrity to promote the kind of Community that lives in Simplicity to be able to share resources. Stewardship is required to care for our resources so that all life can be nurtured in equitable and just ways.

A steward is a person who looks after or protects something that belongs to someone else. In the Old Testament Joseph was the steward of Potiphar’s household. Because he was a faithful steward, eventually he became an overseer for all the grain stores of Egypt during a time of draught preventing a famine in the land. 1Peter 4:10 says, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

A Quaker meeting in Washington D.C. Explains Stewardship as: Assuming a proactive role in caring for the environment and human community. Shaping individual and community choices to support human and ecosystem health.

I looked for a passage that summarizes the essence of our values, and I think I found one in Romans 12:9-21. I will close with those words.

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[d] says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^[e]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.