

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting Annual Queries, 2007

It is recommended that meetings gather in the Spirit, to explore these queries in a worship-sharing format.

- *Do we keep our lives uncluttered by things and activities?*
- *What conditions of our lives overwhelm us?*
- *How may our habits and addictions be caused by things such as media, social expectations, or personal shortcomings?*
- *Do we accept commitments beyond our strength and light?*
- *How can we center our lives each day in awareness of the Light so that all things take their rightful place?*

Quotes and Advices

*Many of these quotations are taken from **Plain Living** by Catherine Whitmire*

1. "It may surprise ... us to hear that the first ... Friends did not have a testimony for simplicity. They came upon a faith, which cut to the root of the way they saw life, radically reorienting it. They saw that all they did must flow directly from what they experienced as true.... In order to keep the knowledge clear and the doing true, they stripped away anything which seemed to get in the way. ...It is this radical process of stripping for clear-seeing which we now term simplicity."

– *Frances Irene Taber, 1985*

2. "One of the most spiritually nourishing things I can do for myself is to "shed". To shed more and more things...I have found with some amount of surprise, that each time I let go of something, I experience a sense of peace; my roots go down deeper."

– *Carin Anderson, 2003*

3. "I wish I might emphasize how a life becomes simplified when dominated by faithfulness to a few concerns. ... We get distracted by ... a thousand and one good things, and before we know it we are pulled and hauled breathlessly along by an over-burdened program of good committees and good undertakings. I am persuaded that this fevered life ... is not wholesome. Undertakings get plastered on from the outside because we can't turn down a friend. Acceptance of service on a weighty committee should really depend upon an answering imperative within us, not merely upon a rational calculation of the factors involved. The concern-oriented life is ordered and organized from within."

– *Thomas R. Kelly, 1941*

4. "God is always visible the moment the inner eye is clear." – *Rufus M. Jones, 1901*

5. "God is not far away from thee. Thou, like the inn of old, hast been full of other guests; thy affections have entertained other lovers, wherefore salvation is not yet come to thy house...." – *William Penn, 1682*

6. "Ye have no time but this present time, Therefore prize your time for your soul's sake." – *George Fox, 1652*

7. "According to the way we spend the minutes and hours we will find the Divine Spirit within us coming into possession or being crowded out of our lives."

– *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1927*

8. "I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, How to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, Which is what I have been doing all day. Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do With your one wild and precious life?"

– *Mary Oliver, 1990*

9. "Give over thine own willing,
Give over thine own running,
Give over thine own desiring
To know or be anything,
And sink down to the seed
Which God sows in thy heart
And let that be in thee,
And grow in thee,
And breathe in thee,
And act in thee,
And thou shalt find by sweet experience
That the Lord knows that
And loves and owns that,
And will lead it to the inheritance of life,
Which is God's portion." – *Isaac Penington, 1681*

10. "To pray about any day's work does not mean to ask for success in it.... It means to see "my" work as part of a whole, to see myself as not mattering much, but my faith, the energy, will and striving, which I put into the work, as mattering a great deal. My faith is the point in me at which God comes into my work; through faith the work is given dignity and value."
– *Mary F. Smith, 1936*

11. "...if we are to belong to the goodly fellowship of those who live the simple life, our business must be made an avenue of ministering to human life." – *Rufus M. Jones, 1927*

12. "... I continued to retail goods, besides following my trade as a tailor; about which time I grew uneasy on account of my business growing too cumbersome. I had begun with selling trimmings for garments, and from thence proceeded to sell cloths and linens; and at length, having got a considerable shop of goods, my trade increased every year, and the way to large business appeared open, but I felt a stop in my mind.
"... The increase of business became my burden; for though my natural inclination was toward merchandise, yet I believed truth required me to live more free from outward cumbers; and there was now a strife in my mind between the two. In this exercise my prayers were put up to the Lord, who graciously heard me, and gave me a heart resigned to His holy will. Then I lessened my outward business, and, as I had opportunity, told my customers of my intentions, that they might consider what shop to turn to; and in a while I wholly laid down merchandise, and followed my trade as a tailor by myself, having no apprentice. I also had a nursery of apple trees, in which I employed some of my time in hoeing, grafting, trimming, and inoculating."
– *John Woolman, 1756*

13. "Keep to the simplicity of the Truth. Seek for its manifestations in prayer, in reading matter, in the arts, and in all experiences of daily life. Shun the use of mind-changing drugs and intoxicants, of gambling, and of other detrimental practices that interpose themselves against the Inward Light. It is the experience of Friends that these drugs, intoxicants, and practices lead to a personal willfulness and inability to listen for the will of God. Avoid in daily work those involvements and entanglements that separate us from each other and from God. Keep your recreations from becoming occasions for self-intoxication and avoid those conventional amusements which

debase the emotions by playing upon them. These, too, lead to self-absorption and to forgetfulness that each person's humanity is shared by all persons. Live and work in the plainness and simplicity of a true follower of Christ." – *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1997*

14. "How easy it is to feel we are simple, peaceable, Spirit-led, faithful, when we may mostly be conventionally moral, thrifty, and shy of conflict. In the struggle to get past our comforting illusions, and reach towards a God of truth, whose love is also judgment, and whose Light both convicts and heals us to be stronger than we were before, a habit of grappling with the Scriptures at the levels of feelings, imagination, intellect, and prayer is a powerful help indeed." – *Brian Drayton, 2006*

15. "...[We] may use a variety of methods, using whichever one[s] seem appropriate at any given time. Yet, in spite of all this seeming variety and lack of a single practice, most of these approaches include three important qualities:

- The first is *desire*, a profound yearning to be in the Presence...
- The second is *focus*. Whatever technique or lack of technique people may use ... they all aim toward a relaxed, alert attentiveness in the presence of God.
- And the third is *trust*, a synonym of faith, for it takes trust to go out into the deep water; it takes trust to let go and rest or float in the Deep and Living Water of the Stream."
– *William Taber, 1992*

16. "Still another step toward simplicity is to refuse to live beyond our means emotionally. In a culture where whirl is king, we must understand our emotional limits. Ulcers, migraines, nervous tension, and a dozen other symptoms mark our psychic overload. We are concerned not to live beyond our means financially; why do it emotionally?" – *Richard J. Foster, 1981*

17. "Proceed as Way opens." – *Quaker saying*