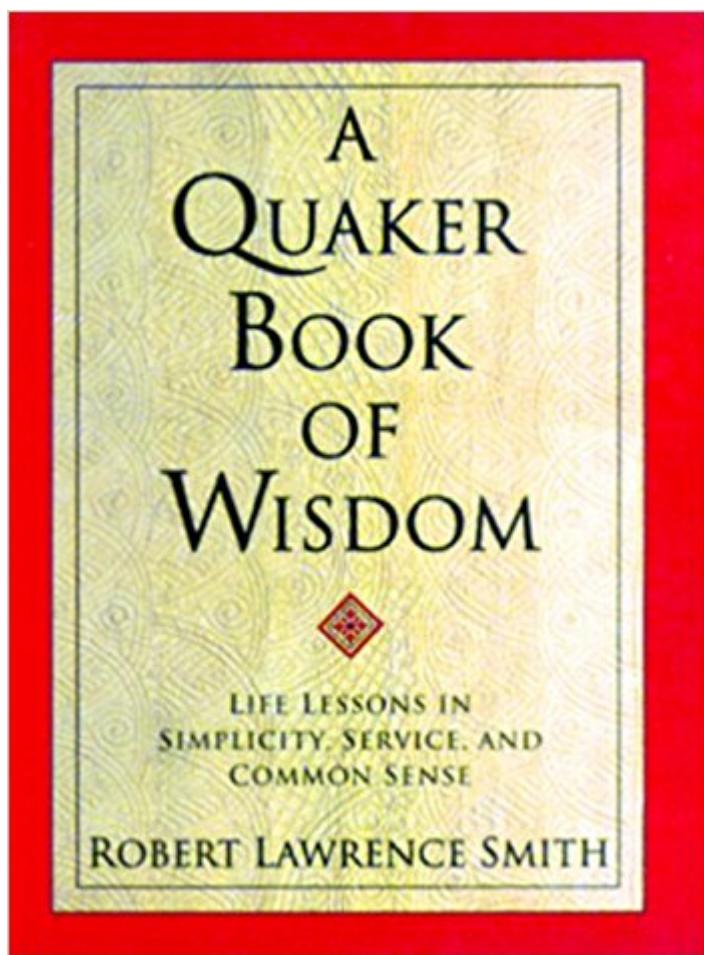


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# A Quaker Book Of Wisdom: Life Lessons In Simplicity, Service, And Common Sense (Living Planet Book)



## **Synopsis**

"The most valuable aspect of religion," writes Robert Lawrence Smith, "is that it provides us with a framework for living. I have always felt that the beauty and power of Quakerism is that it exhorts us to live more simply, more truthfully, more charitably." Taking his inspiration from the teaching of the first Quaker, George Fox, and from his own nine generations of Quaker forebears, Smith speaks to all of us who are seeking a way to make our lives simpler, more meaningful, and more useful.

Beginning with the Quaker belief that "There is that of God in every person," Smith explores the ways in which we can harness the inner light of God that dwells in each of us to guide the personal choices and challenges we face every day. How to live and speak truthfully. How to listen for, trust, and act on our conscience. How to make our work an expression of the best that is in us. Using vivid examples from his own life, Smith writes eloquently of Quaker Meeting, his decision to fight in World War II, and later to oppose the Vietnam War. From his work as an educator and headmaster to his role as a husband and father, Smith quietly convinces that the lofty ideals of Quakerism offer all of us practical tools for leading a more meaningful life. His book culminates with a moving letter to his grandchildren which imparts ten lessons for "letting your life speak."

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

During a traditional Quaker meeting, the Friends sit in silent meditation. No one speaks unless they are moved to do so through the "still, small voice" of God within. As a result, spoken words are often

spare, clear, and wise. A Quaker Book of Wisdom reads like the voice of a Sunday morning meeting. Author Robert Lawrence Smith is a lifelong Quaker and former headmaster of the Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. (Chelsea Clinton's former alma mater). Reflecting on topics such as silence, simplicity, business, and family, Smith offers guidance on how to "let your life speak"--an important premise to the Quaker life of service. Smith's humble self-disclosures make this slim book especially endearing and accessible. In the chapter "Conscience," he divulges battlefield horrors that rival those in Saving Private Ryan--images that still haunt him long after he chose to fight fascism during World War II instead of becoming a conscientious objector, as many Quakers did. In the next chapter, "Non-Violence," Smith writes of an eye-opening shopping trip to Toys R Us where the action-figure warmongers are far more attractive to his grandson than the checkers game they were planning to purchase. In the final chapter, Smith offers "Ten Life Lessons" that he wishes someone had shared with him when he was growing up. Indeed, these lessons are even more valuable and certainly more provocative than the ones we learned in kindergarten. --Gail Hudson

Beginning by invoking his Quaker grandfather, Smith, former headmaster at Washington, D.C.'s Sidwell Friends School shows how to "let your life speak" for your character and beliefs. He plainly and elegantly introduces us to an often misunderstood faith, in his short and gently funny history of the loosely Protestant sect and its 17th-century English founder, George Fox. Smith shows Quakerism to be neither archaic nor beset with odd ritual: "its moniker came from those who mocked the first sectarians, saying they trembled or quaked with anticipation as they waited for God to speak to them." ("And they probably did," Smith playfully adds.) In chapters like "Silence," "Worship," "Business" and "Education," Smith blends remembrances of childhood worship in Moorestown, N.J., family history and more recent experiences with his recollections of the difficult choices he faced as a result of Quakerism's pacifism when confronted with WWII. He also engages in some philosophical speculation on the practical nature of truth, humility and steadfastness. Amidst the torrent of slim inspirational volumes being published, Smith's book is notable for its quiet strength and for the case it makes, by example, for the virtues of the considered life. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I would not have read this book, except that it was loaned to me by a member of our book club with her enthusiastic endorsement. Neither of us is a Quaker, but the "life lessons" presented by Robert Lawrence Smith, if followed by all of us, would make the world a more peaceful, happier place to

live. Some examples (all direct quotations): One of the fruits of aging is the realization that our greatest possession is what we know about life. The truth will make us free--free from meaninglessness, free from lovelessness, free from the emptiness and frustrations of egocentricity. We cannot withdraw from the process of living while we make up our minds how to live. The most precious gift life offers us is choice. There are dozens of other "nuggets," but it is the overall sense that the author lives his beliefs that makes this such a valuable read. His search for truth and meaning has lasted his whole life. From his unusual (for a Quaker) decision to enlist in the army during World War II to his years as headmaster of a Friends school, he has followed his conscience, always looking for the light and "that of God" in each person. Inspiring.

As a new Quaker, I found this book to be a wonderfully helpful introduction to the Religious Society Friends by broadening my understanding of Quakerism and its rich history. While my Meeting and personal beliefs are Liberal Quaker, this book is an excellent resource for any and all Quakers or for those who simply want to learn more about Quakers. The author does an excellent of summarizing Quaker history and wisdom into a compact, compelling, and readable format. Well Done!

real spiritual wisdom

A Quaker Book of Wisdom is a delightful, simply worded, autobiography of a Quaker. Smith explains through the recounting of his life what it means to be a Quaker. As a very small minority within the religious landscape, Quakers are misunderstood by the mainstream and few Americans understand the great contributions they have made to our society. The prohibition of slavery, the humane treatment of the mentally ill, the advocacy of the rights of prisoners, opposition to war, and opposition to the death penalty are all manifestations of the Quaker faith which have helped shape our world. Smith conveys his personal experiences and insights on what it means to be a Quaker in simple words, gentle prose, and honest introspection. This book is an enjoyable read for people of all faiths and non-faiths alike.

I certainly enjoyed the book a great deal, but I also walked away from it with the feeling that I was short changed, or at a minimum, was expecting way more than I got. In this book you will hear stories, phrases, and reminiscing of the authors past, but very little that gives you a clear idea of what Quakerism is, where it is going, their practices, or any of the other details hat I was looking for.

This book speaks for me, a relatively new Quaker without the family support mechanisms birthright Friends might take for granted! My own friends and family members ask me why I chose to become a Quaker; acquaintances and curious visitors sometimes ask me what Quakers believe. The former is easier to answer than the latter, but this little book explains Friends in a welcoming manner that is easy to understand. Robert Smith touches on the history of Quakerism, his grandparents and growing up in Moorestown, New Jersey. He wrote the book because he believes there is a need in the world today for what he calls the compassionate Quaker message. The author voices his belief that "Quaker values of simplicity and silent contemplation, truth and conscience, seem more important now than ever before." He explains further. "To Quakers simplicity does not mean turning the clock back on progress or rejecting the benefits of modern science and conveniences of modern technology. Nor does it mean casting off one's possessions and embracing a life of poverty. And it certainly does not mean casting off joy." With all the currently popular books on Simple Living and spirituality, Smith's book stands out, speaking briefly and clearly in chapters titled Silence, Worship, Truth, Simplicity, Conscience, Nonviolence, Service, Business, Education and Family. In these brief chapters, he covers more issues than I can fit into this review -- Quaker history, his own military part in World War II, intermarriage, the internet, and more are within these pages. He weaves in quotes from Jesus, Martin Luther King Junior, Shakespeare, Rabindranath Tagore, as well as those from Friends past and present. The chapters fit together like quilt squares. Any one could be read and comprehended by itself, but as pieces of a whole, they reveal much more. A simple lifestyle, not necessarily "forsaking worldly goods" is connected with silent worship, bare walls, and simple folks. He tells us of his own childhood, of Quaker cousins who had more toys and possessions than he had, and of his own 'un-Quakerly jealousy.' A trip to Toys 'R Us to buy a checker set with his grandson brings them down the action toys aisle, and leaves us to guess which his grandson found more appealing. He recognizes that there are increased difficulties these days when trying to sort out for children -- and for ourselves -- what is necessary from what is desired. The answer is the same as it has always been. "'What do I need?' is simplicity's fundamental questions, a question that rubs against our natural proclivity for acquiring things, a question few of us feel ready to address. America's favorite weekend activity is not participating in sports, gardening, hiking, reading, visiting with friends and neighbors. It's shopping." (pg. 54) He does not preach or focus on the Bible, but writes in an open and inclusive way about the variety within the Religious Society of Friends. "But for all their differences, Meetings for Worship are fundamentally the same. At each Meeting, a group of individuals gathers and, open to the word of God, waits in attentive, expectant silence for a spark of the divine in their midst. Sometimes it comes in words; sometimes in silence.

The language of truth can often be heard in silence, if only we know how to listen." (p. 29)He closes the book with Ten Life Lessons, with explanations of each: Seize the Present; Love Yourself, whatever faults you have, and love the world however bad it is; Stop talking and listen to what you really know; Play soccer; Accept the fact that our lives are only partly in our hands; Believe in the perfectibility of yourself and society; Make your love visible in the world through your work; Seek justice in the world, but not in your own life; Look for the Light of God in everyone; Let your life speak."

I have to say, I grabbed this because I was curious about Quakerism and saw that the reviews were very high. Glad I read as it gives you a very clear understanding of Quakerism, its history, values, and principles. Beyond that, however, Sloan gives offers very practical guidance and wisdom--grounded in quaker values--that could be used by anyone wishing to cultivate a life of compassion and service (despite religious and/or spiritual beliefs). A good read (and a quick read too!)

I love this book. It is one man's long lifetime experience of being a Quaker. He writes clearly and compassionately. It is a beautiful testament to a life well lived. He makes Quaker practice clear and understandable. I gave it to a Protestant friend and she said, "If I were going to invent a religion this is the one I would invent."

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