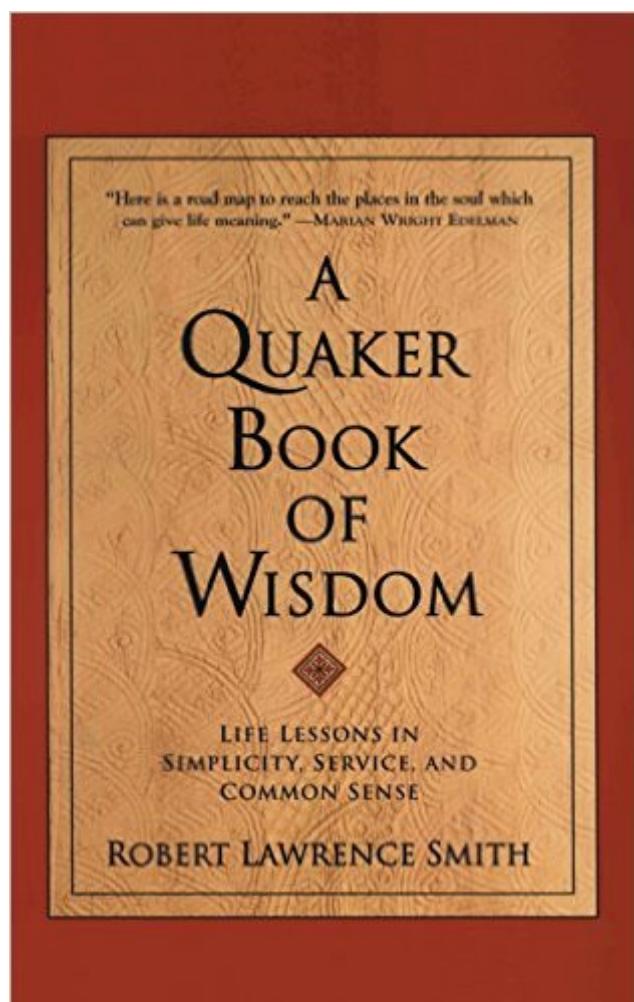


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A Quaker Book Of Wisdom: Life Lessons In Simplicity, Service, And Common Sense



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

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.

This book is not a bad book per se (I'd give it three and a half stars if that were possible), but it definitely leaves out A LOT of information. I'm taking it upon myself to give the rest of the information the book should have given, in four major points:1) This book represents just one type of Quakerism, namely the Liberal Quakers, and the author himself is from the liberal end of the Liberal Quakers. That's not a bad thing in and of itself, but it should have been pointed out on the book, or somewhere in the description. Most Quakers in the world today are Christian and we always have been a Christian Society. Many of the values this book discusses are debatable at best and do not represent Quakerism as a whole. That's why I think it could have been called "A Liberal Quaker Book Of Wisdom" or "A Hicksite Quaker Book Of Wisdom". If that's what one is looking for, great--but it should be made known before the book is purchased, I feel.2) The "life lessons" in this book are actually just essays (more or less) loosely on different topics by the author. The book kind of portrays itself as a whole volume, i.e., one that is more "solid", but it could have been published as a bunch of little books as well.3) The school that the author used to head, Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., is one of the most expensive day schools in the country (and probably in the world). Mainly politicians' kids and children of important public figures go there--precious few Quaker kids could ever afford it. That isn't mentioned at all in the essay on simplicity and it really should have been. His former status of head of the school is used as a selling point of the book, but

in my view, it doesn't tell the whole story for those not familiar with Sidwell Friends School.

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