

Responses from the Jewels of Quakerism Internet Survey

6-29-09 to 7-02-09

What is your idea of what the phrase Gospel Order means? If you don't know, feel free to guess at what it might mean.

To me, Gospel order is when people love God with all their hearts, minds and souls and love their neighbor as themselves. It is the right ordering of our lives so that we are available should Spirit call us to act, speak or be. Cornel West says, "Justice is what love looks like in public." I think Gospel order is just that, justice and generosity and friendliness, all informed by a love of God and a willingness to love one another into our own best places.

Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY

Obviously it will mean different things to different people. But so far as "gospel" was originally about "Good news, we've got a new world ruler," it should refer to something like Jesus' announcement that "The Reign of God has arrived. So "in gospel order" would have meant "in accordance with God's intentions," which I believe is the gist, whatever differences might exist as to how this should best be implemented.

Forrest Curo

When we are one with the Living Christ, following the order inherent in His Good News.

Martin Kelley. Affiliation: "It's complicated"

Gospel Order? Hmmm. It would mean in one sense a Biblical way of conducting church governance or affairs, of dealing with one another in Christian community. It goes deeper than that, of course; it means realizing true discipleship as a community and waiting on God to direct our actions in business and in life. The 'gospel' part would indicate a large measure of grace; the order part would indicate time-tried wisdom in terms of process.

Seton Hill Worship Group / Homewood Friends

Gospel order is right relationship that comes out of our guidance from God. It's most often used to describe the way a local Friends meeting operates and seeks the right way forward together. As we relate to each other and work together as He calls us to work together, then we find our way to gospel order. There are Quaker traditions and books of Faith and Practice to guide us to that place. There are scriptures and the wisdom of Friends who've been called to lead in particular ways. But most important are the inward leadings of the present Christ.

Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM

Kin-dom, an ordering and quality of our individual relationships and social structures that brings G-

d into greater Presence within, between, and among us. G-d grants us our unique gifts as partners in this work. Some signposts by which we recognize Kin-dom include integrity, equality, dignity, peace. Some ways by which we approach Kin-dom and bring it into greater realization among us: listening, discernment of our gifts and work, simplicity that frees us to focus on what is most essential, justicemaking.

Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group

Humanity is trapped in systems of oppression and domination, yearning for liberation and empowerment. Some will receive a vision of a new world where liberation and empowerment has come. Jesus called this new world the kingdom of heaven, Buddha called it the Pure Land, Marx called it Communism, and others call it the New Age. This desire for complete reconciliation and transcendence of conflict is the heart of healthy religious aspiration. Those who receive the Light of the World to Come, are drawn towards both a desire to live with others who have seen the Light, but also to share the light with those who are still in darkness. Gospel Order is the living out of the principles of the New World in this present. It is the application of faith and hope in the world to come to our immediate reality.

Northside Friends Meeting Chicago ILYM

The gospel is the power of God. Gospel order is living one's life under the ordering of the power of God.

Lu from Rochester, NYYM

Gospel Order is that harmony among all the aspects of Creation that God intended from the start. Jesus taught and demonstrated how human beings can live in Gospel Order with each other and the rest of Creation; the Holy Spirit enables us to do so and guides our efforts.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, Rich Square MMtg

Gospel Order is a short phrase for a process that can take a long time. Essentially it is a processing of meeting with someone that you have a disagreement with with the hopes that the problem can be cleared up. You can go first by yourself, then with one or two other, and then you can involve the Meeting as a whole. It is not a magic solution and if done out a need to control and not out of love matters can get worst. If if done in the right way it has limits. It may be that one will have to move beyond Gospel order as the story of the Footwashing at Marlborough illustrates:

(<http://www.quaker.org/chestnuthill/marlborough.htm>)

Anonymous

Gospel Order means being under the Order of Christ. We are the church after the second coming. Jesus is here, teaching us himself. We have to be transformed by his Life in us to live as the solution. We have to meet all challenges with prayer, rejoicing in God's power moving through us and outwards into the world. All of our lives are washed through with Jesus's blood from his sacrifice for us on the cross; we are made new in his covenant, to live redeemed lives in the transformation of that Holy power.

Alice Yaxley, Britain Yearly Meeting

order created by reading, understanding and living the holy words of the gospel.

Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting

To me, "Gospel order" simply means practical application of the principles of love in relationship within our community. It may be following a specific example of conduct such as the process for trying to reconcile a difference with another member of the community in which the person is first approached privately, then with witnesses and then before the whole body, or it may be following processes that have been worked out over time within a body of believers, or it may be a new examination of how things are done in an attempt to bring processes into better alignment with the principles. In all cases it is the practical application that is being addressed.

Nate Swift

As I understand Gospel Order it is living in right relationship with God and all of creation. Or, expressed another way, to live so that the outer manifestations of my life in word & deed are consistent with my inner condition/awareness of what God requires of me--to live Love in the world.

Anonymous, Rich Square Meeting (NCYMC)

I understand Gospel Order to mean living in harmony with God's kingdom; or with God's vision for the world. I think that vision is revealed clearly in the Gospels and in Jesus' life and teaching (as well as other places that I don't know as well, perhaps). It also means that I turn to God in all things. Ideally, that would also be what we do corporately as well as individually.

Mary Kay Glazer, Ticonderoga NY Worship Group

It means doing things as God wants them to be done. Sometimes this is misunderstood to mean following some old Quaker tradition. The old Quaker traditions are good but gospel order embraces the new and unexpected as well as the old and familiar. When things are in gospel order you can feel it.

Anonymous, NCYMC

Oh, Gospel Order. Difficult. Visionary. Beautiful. Derives from Matthew 18:15, and expands out to fill a community. It's how the Beloved Community runs. Is it the same as the kingdom of God, the time when the world runs the way God would run it?

So, going back to Mt. 18:15, anyone can get a start at living in Gospel Order by solving their conflicts with others by bravely dealing with them directly, or directly with help. However, in the Quaker tradition, it means much more. All the arrangements for living together, for community, for relationships thin and thick... arrangements that let us live in the light of love, those would be Gospel Order.

Frederick Martin; Monadnock Meeting, New England

How do you "test" ministry in the Meeting for Worship? How do you know when you are supposed to speak? What is the process you go through to make sure you know it is time to stand?

I have very physical cues -- heart pounding, stomach full of butterflies.... I can't NOT speak. I review what I have heard several times, and eventually my legs lift me up, I breathe and I speak.

Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY

There is no specific "test" that might be applied without making that test itself a form of idolatry. Every time, I need to wing it, seldom sure how much will reflect God's intention & how much might be "just" mine--and of course these are not mutually exclusive, but we all know what a pain it is listening to someone's unredeemed conceptional verbiage. I may or may not have been thinking about the content of the message beforehand. But there is this feeling of "I need to say this," which rightly or not, makes the issue moot.

Forrest Curo

Discernment in ministry is like discerning any situation. I think plainness was an almost hackneyed first step in ministry for 300 years because it opens up the can of worms of ego vs service that any Friend needs to wrestle with.

Huge Barbour's "Five Tests of Discernment" is a handy checklist that helps us get away from the me-ism of modern culture into the listening model of (early) Friends.

BTW, Reading "Infant Ministry" (Chap 4?) of Bownas' "Description of the Qualifications" can work in a small group situation--amazing experience at a AYF retreat a few years ago.

Martin Kelley. Affiliation: "It's complicated"

It's trial and error. I've been told I have a gift for vocal ministry and yet it has seemed for years to rankle more than inspire, or so it seems. The first question is this: why do I need to give this message? If I need to give it, then it's of me and not of God. I really have to fight my ego. I try to allow messages to leave me and if they come back I pay them more mind. I also try to feel how my body is reacting; usually if I'm too comfortable, then it's probably me again wanting to say something and not of God. If it is of God, then it clearly needs more seasoning. If I'm really speaking for God, then I shouldn't have a casual reaction to what I'm experiencing! I also have to check myself for my frame of mind: whatever the content of the message, is my heart one of love and charity? If not, then I do some serious praying because the message may very well likely be for me and not for the group. I learned a long time ago that when I offer ministry in a place where I feel love for myself god and neighbor, then the messages are generally well-received even if they aren't easy to hear or offer. You know what they say about the road to hell and good intentions Eventually, I end up feeling pushed to speak, and I say a short prayer of assistance from God to be faithful in delivering it and I try to offer what is given to me.

Seton Hill Worship Group / Homewood Friends

How do I feel inside? Am I:

*excited on my own account,

*do I simply have some good ideas from my own brain, or

*is this an unquenched calling that comes from somewhere that feels more transcendent than either of those?

Does this fit with my understanding of Friends' faith? Does it answer other ministry that has already been shared? Would it help others, or is it something that I should keep in my own heart, at least for now?

The process of testing ministry has been a many year process for me. I'm coming to understand that following leadings and understanding openings is as much a matter of feeling my way to truth in an ongoing relationship with Christ as it is a realization of soul shaking internal experience. So I'm coming to experiment with ministry. I'll lower the standard for a message--going ahead and speaking it without a full understanding that it's perfect for the day. I can check how it felt after or ask some of my spiritually sensitive Friends, who are often also the appointed elders (members of the Committee on Ministry & Worship) their experience of what I said.

Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM

I wait with the message. Does it pass? Does it remain? Does it change? Does someone else deliver it? If the message is insistent, is it meant for me or for the gathered body? Along with these questions, I feel for a visceral sense that the message demands to be spoken. After speaking (if true), I come into a deep sense of peace and work accomplished. I've also had the experience of messages I've not spoken, followed by a sense of a moment missed, regret.

Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group

Each time I am led to speak is different. Sometimes it is with trembling, or "quaking." At others it is a simple confidence that I have ministry. The word ministry for me means that I am not speaking to receive personal recognition, but that I am seeking to give to others from the Light have seen.

Northside Friends Meeting Chicago ILYM

Varies, and this feels difficult for me...still a bit amorphous. Sometimes there is a message that has been building in me before MfW. I try to test whether the message is coming from ego. Am I at peace? Is there energy? I seem to be clearest when I have a visual image that is connected to the message...so that it's less me talking, teaching than me describing, inviting...

Lu from Rochester, NYYM

This is a matter of spiritual discernment, not intellectual evaluation. When one is surrendered to the Holy Spirit in meeting for worship, the Holy Spirit itself (our immediate and perceptible Guide) informs us of what to share and when to share it.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, Rich Square MMtg

Being centered and calm is important, Asking the questions: is this message for others, is it for those gathered here, must it be spoken now and waiting for the answers is a key.

Anonymous

We are told what the fruits of the spirit are, and Christian discipleship is all about getting to know the Teacher's voice – Christ speaking to me. I feel very humble when I am meant to speak to the meeting, tender-hearted and confident of God's grace, hoping for the Meeting to receive the words. There is a solid ground within me which the Holy spirit has prepared by its work on me. I cannot go on living ignorant of the destruction of God's Holy world. I must act, reaching for God's grace through my prayers. That sure knowledge is what impels me forward into action. I believe it is God speaking through me, saying NO to the sinful life I was born into in the media/cultural soup and expecting other people to save us. It is God who can save us and I must put my faith in God and do as I am bid. I think it is a fault of liberal meetings to get too obsessed with whether to speak and not enough obsessed with the saving power of God's grace. I would rather have anyone speak or sing or pray who is in need of God's grace than the whole group sit in a silence which sometimes is not meeting anyone's needs.

Alice Yaxley, Britain Yearly Meeting

i am told to. my head fills up with a huge "you will say this". if that isn't present, what ever message i receive is always for me and not meeting.

Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting

I hate to have to say that I sort of resist an impulse to ministry, but it is true that one "test" seems to be that the impulse overcomes that reluctance to "put myself out there." I'm not sure whether it may be rationalization sometime in that resistance, but I do ask myself if this is a message that should be shared, that will be of value to the community.

Nate Swift

Sometimes ministry drops into me unexpectedly and other times it rises gradually. I "test" it by sitting with it, listening, conversing and debating with God--not this message, not me, not now, give me some words--until I finally surrender and stand, heart pounding, sometimes quaking, praying to let go so completely that the message can simply come through me and I will faithfully put spoken words with the inner knowing. The stillness that comes affirms my faithfulness in this one instance and I am grateful.

Anonymous, Rich Square Meeting (NCYMC)

I used to think that when I felt my heart pounding heavily and other physical sensations, that meant I was to stand and speak. Now, when something comes to me, I hold it in prayer for as long as I am able. If my heart starts to pound and/or I notice other physical signs, I see them only as a pointer: it is time to pay more attention to whatever I'm being given. I pray, asking God to help me to know whether to speak, and, if so, when.

Usually, what is given to me to say is said over and over in my head many times before I stand up. I try to see if what is given to me is just for me or if it is for the gathered community. I also try to lay before God any biases or judgments I might have about the vocal ministry and how the meeting for worship is going.

Mary Kay Glazer, Ticonderoga NY Worship Group

I do not have a gift of vocal ministry so I don't speak at Meeting for Worship.

Anonymous, NCYMC

Getting those butterflies... the rush of heat... agitation; quaking, you might call it. That's usually how it feels when it's right. And I usually "test" by trying to center back down, away from the thoughts I think might be ministry; if they come back, that's a good sign too. Makes sense... if I still have them when I'm centered, it's more likely they're coming from the Center. So, I'll wait a while after I have the first impulse, to test it. Also, if I have to word-smith it too much, or explain it to myself or argue about it in my head, that's a bad sign; that's me wrapped up in my thinking. Sometimes, I've waited too long, though, and realized afterwards that I ought to have spoken. It takes courage!

Frederick Martin; Monadnock Meeting, New England

Fox and Friends from then to now describe receiving powerful realizations and divine revelations that they called Openings. Often these Openings had a profound effect on the life of the person who experienced it. Do you feel like there was ever a time when you had an experience of receiving an Opening? Where did it happen and what was the realization/revelation/experience?

The first Opening I ever had was during a private meeting for worship with my husband to be and his grandmother. I heard distinctly and with absolute authority, "Marry him. It won't be easy, but it's the right thing to do. We had two beautiful children together and then he became quite ill. It is clear to me now that I am called to be his advocate, and that I was called to that work, though I didn't know it at the time, the day we married.

I have had other insights, but none that were as clear and clean and unexpected as that one. I take the unexpectedness as a sign that it wasn't me tricking myself into some insight.

Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY

Since I'm an intellectual kind of guy, this happens a lot. The first I remember well was long ago, the time I was in my room asking God, "You don't really torment people for not believing this stuff, do you?" & strongly realizing the simple, obvious truth that my idea of mercy was God's, that there was no way that God could fall short of it.

Forrest Curo

It was Seventh Day I believe and we had been going in conference mode for awhile. I needed a break. I put my jacket on and found a sunny bench overlooking a barn at the bottom of a sloping dell. I turned to my current reading, *Job Scott's Essays on Salvation by Christ* and read this line:

Men may do many works, which, as to the outward act, are good, or which would have been truly so had they been works of the new creation, and wrought of God in Christ, and which yet have no part in the great work of true justification.

The line spoke through me in a way that writing it here won't explain. I knew that the Source was trying to teach me using this paper, through the words and the ministry of a long-dead Friend. I was being told to be patient and to continue returning returning returning to prayer for guidance. The Spirit used these words to remind me to root all action in Christ's fertile soil.

As I turned away from the bench and looked out across the snow-covered lawn in front of me, I understood that the consultation was another part of the great ongoing work of Quakerism, and the even greater ongoing joy of Spirit breaking out into the world. All the action plans and agendas that would come out of this talk meant less to God than my simple obedience and trust: right here and now and forever and everywhere. I knew it with the certainty that came from having the hand of that greatest of Comforters resting lightly on my shoulder, saying "hush, all's well, this is where you should be."

The unseen hand lifted and over walked a young Friend (who reads this blog, he can tell me whether I'm making too much of this moment). We had what we Friends call an *Opportunity*, that crazy turn of events when the Spirit is close enough where we can talk directly of its presence. After a few minutes, this too passed and two young Friends came stepped out of the old barn and looked up at us. We walked down and ended up playing four-person volleyball. "Idle games" in form, perhaps. But an hour or so later one of the players, a High School Friend, testified that our

friendly game was the day's most important in-breaking of the Spirit, as she had been terrorized by competitive volleyball-playing as a sophomore. As we played together, she felt a warmth and acceptance in all of our goofing off and in the loving comradeship and joyful ineptitude of our serves and volleys.

It's not about the program. It's about the love. It's about the obedience to follow the Spirit's prompt out of book, into a conversation, then onto a makeshift volleyball court. We never truly know how we are being used. I share this testimony not to encourage volleyball use but to sing aloud the Spirit's beautiful unknowingness. What joy to know we can shake ourselves of our over-active agendas and know the Spirit experimentally!

Martin Kelley. Affiliation: "It's complicated"

I have received an opening. There have been a few, but the latest was about Jesus and the resurrection. My partner had died and had spoken to me in my sleep, shouting for me to wake up because of something that was happening. I dismissed it as a dream until I later learned the warning was an accurate one. An acquaintance told me to write it down as I'd later rationalize it away. While doing so, it came to me that writers of the gospels and Acts did the same thing. They put down their experiences for probably many reasons, but it seemed clear to me anyway that if Russell could appear to me after his death, then certainly so could Jesus (I had had a previous experience of a vision of Christ 8 years prior, but had already begun to rationalize it away as God who came to me as Jesus because I'm a Christian, and could have been another figure if I was of another religion). It became quite clear to me that Jesus was present and alive in my life, that it wasn't myth.

Seton Hill Worship Group / Homewood Friends

I find that openings on what to do or how to do things are a daily or hourly occurrence, if I'm open, caring and looking for them to be my guides. By no means am I open and faithful every day, yet.

Or am I minimizing your question? There are in my life a few great opening experiences, as well.

Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM

My experiences of Openings is cumulative. I have a real sense of G-d being Present and my understanding of G-d opening more fully when I put myself in a place to listen or act in alignment with the Kin-dom. Discernment of how to do this is a daily process, in ways large and small. Some experiences: Praying for a woman stretched to the utmost in childbirth. Sitting at the side of a new mother whose boyfriend has been deported. Accompanying a friend of a friend who has been picked up Immigration and is in prison, thinking over his life and the road ahead. When I am in alignment in this way, I find I am given the gifts and community to understand or do what I alone would not have been capable of.

Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group

A devoted spiritual life will have several "openings." At age 20 I was led to move my small new family from Texas to Illinois to live in a Christian intentional community. At age 34, I was led to leave that community to become a Quaker. These are a couple of the "big ones" but there have been many others. I can't name a simple commonality of all of them, though the ones I continue to view as important are those that changed how I view the world in profound ways.

Northside Friends Meeting Chicago ILYM

1) at a Quaker workshop, seeing the way threads of my life were connected & whole when I had been experiencing them as disconnected & separate; 2) at SOTS: knowing that Spirit knows me whole & will lead me into that wholeness; 3) in my meeting: being told by Spirit that if I believed there was that of God in all then I had to believe that there was that of God in Christ & in the writers of the Gospels!

Lu from Rochester, NYYM

Multiple times.

Once when I was weighing a job change that would require changing cities and making other significant shifts in my life, I heard a Voice advising me what to do.

Once, after witnessing to my faith in Christ in a difficult circumstance, I had a vision of Christ in which he lifted me from my knees to my feet, embraced me, and let me know that my ministry and witness were acceptable to Him, and that I should continue.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, Rich Square MMtg

I have had the experience of way opening. Once a Friend laughed at me when I said that I was not an elder. That laugh took me to a place where I realized that without trying that I had become an Elder to my Meeting

Anonymous

Yes!

I have been so burdened by the bad stuff – war, hatred, global poverty, the unsustainable nature of lives in the my country (the U.K.) – and I had to let go of my ability to act rationally for good, because I could not see where to go forward. I was not able to sort my own life out in my own power, let alone help anyone else or get off the backs of the oppressed folk.

I was at home. It came to me that God could live the answers through me if I were willing to allow that deep power to live in me. I want the good to come so earnestly that I am in the process of putting my whole life into God's hands; I am not sure that anything less can save us as humans and the many creatures we affect.

Alice Yaxley, Britain Yearly Meeting

last sunday, before meeting, while i was arranging flowers, i was told not to be less because others are not more.

Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting

Almost all incremental changes in my perceptions leading to what I hope is a better understanding of the Light and how we live in it have been from the ministry of others, whether oral or through my reading. My one major shift in that way came in a sermon in a community church administered through the Episcopalian faith tradition structure long before I became a convicted Friend, and which was probably the root of that conviction. The speaker shed new light on the familiar passage, "I am the Way..." by saying that it had been interpreted through most of institutional Christianity as EXclusive; that one had to believe in Jesus specifically in order to come to the Father, but the speaker felt that it was intended to be INclusive; that anyone who came to the Father had come in the Way embodied by Jesus. When I found the "the Doctrine of the Light," I recognized it immediately.

Nate Swift

Yes, there have been times when I've experienced "Openings" or aha moments when the divine has revealed so clearly an answer, a direction, a Truth. One of the Openings I experienced while walking a labyrinth early on a cold winter morning struggling with inner resistance to an opportunity before me when the "inner jukebox" began to play, "Unchain My Heart" and I knew the message was to free the Spirit and allow it to work within me. The opportunity was a gift of service, an opportunity to do God's work and once I realized that, the way forward became clear. Surrender and accept.

Anonymous, Rich Square Meeting (NCYMC)

While I had not been looking for a relationship with Jesus (in fact, Jesus did not seem important to my faith life), I have been given powerful encounters with him in prayer. The first was as part of lectio divina with a group in which we prayed with a scripture passage where Jesus healed someone. I imagined myself as in the crowd, on the edges, and Jesus came to me after he healed the person who had asked for it. This has led to continuing encounters with Jesus, even though I don't know what I think of who is in relationship to God. Still, I now regularly look to him and to the Gospel stories to learn about how to love God and love my neighbor.

Mary Kay Glazer, Ticonderoga NY Worship Group

Sure I have. The most common time for these experiences is during long walks but I have also had them in dreams. The common theme of these openings for me is to show me that I am too proud and to show me ways that I can serve others in humility.

Anonymous, NCYMC

As a matter of fact, no, I don't really think I have. I believe other Friends' reports about them; and I would love to have some (one?) of my own; but my experience has been more gradual. I've had times in meetings for worship (maybe speaking, maybe not) that felt like divine revelations, but little ones, not big picture-whole life ones, let alone now-I-understand-the-whole-cosmos ones. But the little ones build up to big-picture, you know.

As I think about it, perhaps my first time speaking in meeting could count as a little Opening. (I was not raised Quaker, and attended meeting for three years before I first spoke.) I did feel like part of my soul opened up, and something outside opened to/for me. What I said wasn't the memorable part for me; but the realization that even I could be connected with the divine... that was pretty life-changing...

Frederick Martin; Monadnock Meeting, New England