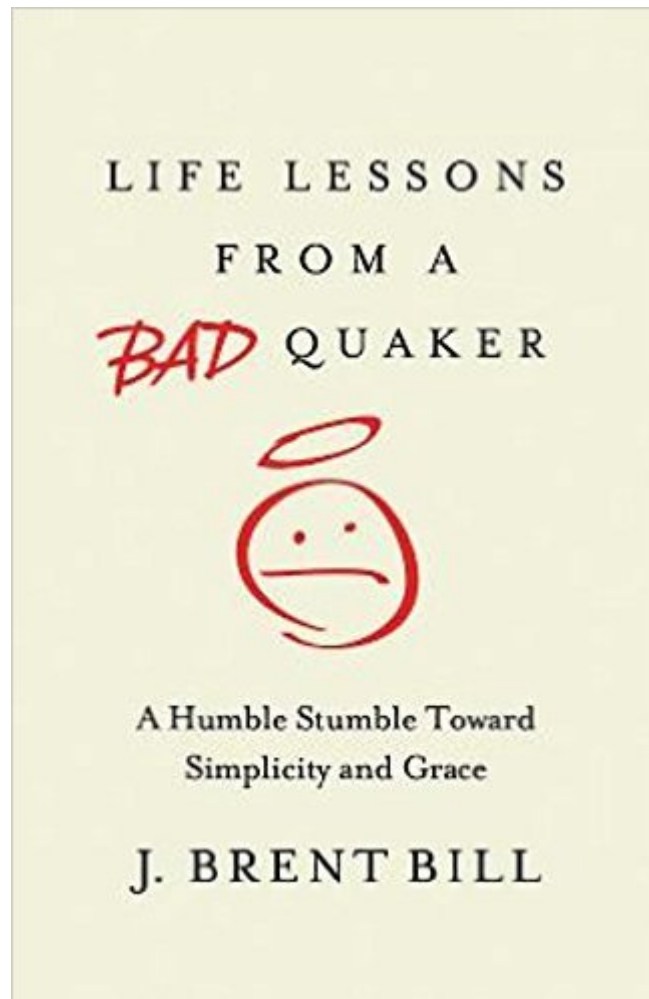


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Life Lessons From A Bad Quaker: A Humble Stumble Toward Simplicity And Grace



Synopsis

“When someone asks me what kind of Christian I am,” says author and Quaker, J. Brent Bill, “I’ll say I’m a bad one.” His book, *Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker*, is an invitation to a more meaningful and satisfying life to all who are bad at being good. Although the Quaker lifestyle is characterized by the qualities of peace, solitude, and simplicity, Bill explains that, while he’s got the belief part down, it’s in the practice of it in his everyday life where he runs into trouble “and he knows he’s not alone. Use the complementary and downloadable study guide to help the members of your small group joyfully explore the idea that perfection is not required as they stumble along the path of their faith journey.

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Customer Reviews

I thoroughly enjoyed "Life Lessons From A Bad Quaker". J. Brent Bill is hilarious. He is witty. He is honest. He is raw. He is not afraid to tell it like it is. "Which is one reason I'm a Quaker today. I need to be. It challenges me. It rubs up against the parts of me that need smoothed out." Let me share a few lessons that J. Brent Bill learned that resonated with me. "I have learned that growing deep in the life of the Spirit doesn't take me out of the life I'm living." Yes. This is so true. In order to truly live, one needs to go deep in the life of the Spirit. The outer life is only as good as the inner life. This will take time! We need to keep at it. "Busy outwardly, centered and silently inwardly. Speaking from experience, it's not gonna happen overnight." "So even though God speaks to me constantly, I'm just not listening. That's why I need silence." If we want to hear God speaking, we need to shut up. I think J. Brent Bill would agree with

me saying it so bluntly. "We believe that God always has something to teach us about being people of faith in our current times. So we ask lots of questions hoping to find out how to live godly lives." Quakers ask lots of questions. I loved all of the questions that were sprinkled throughout each chapter. I often found myself reading a question and then taking five minutes to meditate on my answers to this question. I jotted down multiple one sentence answers to each question. Questions help us grow. I grew as I read this book.

"Cumbered" is how early Quakers referred to the way the things we own (or think we own) weigh us down and steal attention away from the life of the Spirit." I found myself wondering the same thing. What is taking me away from the life of the Spirit? Is it my iPhone or iPad? Is it Facebook and or Twitter? Perhaps it is being annoyed at others, the traffic jam I am stuck in or being bogged down with the never ending household chores that seem to always pop up?"

My good friend Connie taught me what she calls the SOB prayer. I use it a lot: "God, give that SOB everything I would hope for myself to be made happy, whole, and free." It is a fact. We are not going to like everybody we come across. I am sure there are plenty of people that do not like me. However, that person is still a child of God. God loves them just as much as God loves me. I still need to pray for them. I still need to love them. "God loves everybody as much as God loves me? If that's true, I'd better start treating people better."

"There are plenty of things I could do. The issue is what is God calling me to do." I pulled this out of the chapter, "Gods Good Green Earth". If I get quiet, I just might hear what it is that God is calling me to do to take better care of mother earth. We and this includes me, forget and take for granted that God has blessed us with this beautiful earth. We and this means me, need to take better care of it. What is God calling me to do? Read "Life Lessons From A Bad Quaker". Take the time to meditate on the questions sprinkled throughout each chapter. Is your faith challenging you and rubbing up against the parts of you that need to be smoothed out? Quiet yourself! What actions is God calling you to take?

Rich Lewis
SilenceTeaches.com

The basic value of simplicity in Quakerism belies its complexity. How can a denomination with no dogma or creed, sometimes without a minister, be understood and practiced? A Quaker minister, Brent Bill, examines the foundational values and practices of Quakerism and poses the important questions that people must ultimately find answers to from within. Brent supports the process of this discernment with examples of his successes and failures at living a Quaker life, sharing the perspective that the journey toward Christian ideals need not be all or nothing, but is a life-long, joyful, often bumpy process. Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker, a deeply insightful and learned book written with warmth and humor, is illuminating to those who seek to understand this often

misunderstood faith, and encouraging to those who have encountered struggles in its practice. A must for any Quaker bookshelf.

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Friend and friend Brent's brand-new book (released just yesterday!) brings us a panorama of a few more or less typical days in the several and varied lives of a Bad Quaker hoping to become better by following Jesus more closely. Not too long, easy to read, fun to read, yet packed with probing questions about Jesus' clear examples and our own lifestyles. Technically Brent is a birthright Quaker or cradle Quaker, someone literally born into that expression of Christianity. Early in the book he explains how he still needed to assess and claim the Quaker tradition for himself because there's an element of human choice and decision to follow a particular style of Christianity with the broader Way of the Nazarene Jesus. Brent tells us why simply living as Jesus' Friend is best for him. What church tradition or denomination has God called you to at this time? And why? "No one right answer," as Brent reminds us in the quick questions sprinkled through this book.

Most Americans have some awareness of the rotund guy in a black hat featured on packages of Quaker cereal products. Per the Quaker cereal website, he "is not an actual person. His image is that of a man dressed in the Quaker garb, chosen because the Quaker faith projected the values of honesty, integrity, purity and strength." Some people confuse Quakers with other Christian groups who aim to live simply, whose worship is less formally liturgical—although some Quaker worship is programmed. Amish, Mennonites, Church of the Brethren also come to mind as examples of simple Christianity; Restoration Movements in the USA during the 19th century also attempted to reclaim a more basic, foundational, New Testament Christianity. Most of my own church and Jesus experience is solidly within the theological and liturgical traditions of the Protestant Mainline, and that means an emphasis on sacraments and on scriptural scholarship, with wonderfully effective histories of social and political activism. Like myself, many within the Mainline Churches USA are not especially adept at being quiet and waiting on the Spirit to move among us. In fact, I tend to be as much of a human doing as I am a human being.

Similar to at least a half-dozen books I've read in the past year or two, *Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker* by J. Brent Bill encourages me to observe the world around me, assess how I relate to the people in that world, to keep asking "what would Jesus do," cuz as trite as that question sounds by now, in the Spirit of Life God calls us and enables us to be Jesus here and now, to do what Jesus would do, even to say the words Jesus might choose.

The Quaker faith still projects values of "honesty, integrity, purity and strength" with each individual's life totally immersed in the very sacramental "holy ordinary" that happens to be the title of one of Brent's blogs. Maybe surprisingly, The Society of Friends does not celebrate sacraments or ordinances in the orderly programmatic sense those of us in more mainstream mainline church bodies do. Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker brings us much more of the practical than of the theoretical. Did I mention what a human doing I naturally tend to be? That's right, I did, but in spite of that tendency, my drive to do needs a whole lot of refinement and some redefining. I'd benefit a whole lot by creating my own Life Lessons journal of some days in my own life. Maybe you would, too? Popularized by the majorly successful Godspell, Richard of Chichester's prayer pleads "May I know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, follow Thee more nearly." Brent's newest book just may lead you to know, love, and follow Jesus with more simplicity and more grace.

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