

Love and loss

An invitation to Friends and meetings

*Seek to know one another in the
things which are eternal...*
(Advices & queries 18)



A photograph of a cemetery. In the foreground, a path of grass leads towards a wooden gate. To the right of the path, several large, rounded, weathered stones are scattered across the grass. The background is filled with dense green trees under a bright sky. The overall scene is peaceful and contemplative.

A time to talk

Are we able to contemplate our own death and the death of those closest to us?

What are our concerns?

What might help us in this exploration?

How can meetings support this?

Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. (Advices & queries 30)

Telling our stories

The chance to talk about our experiences can be a gentle way to begin exploring end of life questions together.

Bringing these experiences into the light may cause pain, but may also bring recollections of tenderness and joy.

Careful choice of setting and timing can make a difference and with mutual love and support, these conversations can continue as meetings feel led.

When experiencing great happiness or great hurt we may be more open to the working of the Spirit.
(Advices & queries 21)

When someone dies

Bereaved Friends have spoken of sadness, shock, numbness, guilt, anger, tearfulness, fear, terror, relief, calm and acceptance. Feelings may be overwhelming and confusing.

What does love require of us, and of our meetings?

Some Friends may be closely involved because of their Quaker role or individual relationships. Others can offer practical support or prayerful upholding.

Bereaved children and young people will need particular comfort and care.

When a member of our worshipping community dies, the whole meeting can feel bereft.

*In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve.
When others mourn, let your love embrace
them. (Advices & queries 30)*

Beyond bearing...

We may strain to find meaning when a child dies or when death is sudden, violent, or untimely.

Sometimes all we can do is be alongside one another, holding each other in love. Such faithfulness is costly, and may itself require support.

Quakers do have something very special to offer the dying and the bereaved, namely that we are at home in silence... We know something about sharing it, encountering others in its depths and, above all, letting ourselves be used in it...
(Quaker faith & practice 17.06)

Some practical issues

As Quakers we have always valued putting our affairs in good order. There are steps we can take to enable our wishes to be known if we become incapacitated, and to ease the way for those left behind when we die.

Have you talked about dying with your family and close friends?

Have you made a will?

Are your funeral wishes known to your meeting and your family?

Do you carry a donor card?

Have you arranged powers of attorney?

Have you made an advance directive about your future care?

If we find these things difficult, how can our meetings help us?

As far as possible, make arrangements for your care in good time, so that an undue burden does not fall on others...

Attend to what love requires...
(Advices & queries 28, 29)

We are resources for each other

The experience of loss can deepen our faith but can also shake it. Faith at the end of life may be a comfort but also a challenge.

Quaker faith & practice advises us to prepare practically for our own death. Are we prepared spiritually? Are there ways in which we can help each other to be prepared?

As individuals and as a faith community we have a responsibility to explore these questions in truth and openness.

We are asked to bear with one another and help each other up with a tender hand. This may not be easy: it will require courage and sensitivity.

Our meeting can be a channel for God's love...
(Advices & queries 18)

Further questions

The views of Quakers, and society as a whole, vary on a number of end of life topics including:

medically assisted dying

suicide

what happens after death...

We welcome the work of Friends already engaged with these questions; they are subjects we could all well explore.

We may not yet be in unity, but we can start the conversations with respect and trust, no matter how searching we might find them.

Doubt and questioning can also lead to spiritual growth and to a greater awareness of the Light that is in us all. (Advices & queries 5)

Published in April 2016 by Quakers in Britain. Please send any questions or responses to this leaflet to Michael Booth on michaelsb@quaker.org.uk or phone 020 7663 1023. For further copies or information contact the Quaker Centre: quakercentre@quaker.org.uk or 020 7663 1030. Large print editions of this leaflet are available; please email publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

Britain Yearly Meeting is a registered charity, number 1127633.