

George Fox
(1624-1691)

George Fox was born and raised in the turmoil of seventeenth-century Puritan England. He became the founder and most prominent leader of the Quakers (the Society of Friends). He was a bold and passionate man who acted with the certainty of one who knows God firsthand, not by hearsay. He was quick to confront those who "did not possess what they professed." He laid bare pomposity and pre-tense. He also called thousands to a direct, intimate knowledge of Christ, who was present to teach and empower them. For his witness he was thrown into prison numerous times.

Fox's *Journal* initiated a new literary genre and is the first of a long line of religious journals, *The Journal of John Wesley* and *The Journal of John Woolman* being among the better known.

The selections that follow, taken from *The Journal of George Fox*, focus on his early prophetic "openings." Notice the ways in which these "openings" interface with the theme of Christian simplicity. There is something amazingly clear-cut and simple (in the best sense of that word) about true prophetic ministry.

THE JOURNAL OF GEORGE FOX

The Lord Opened Unto Me

At another time, as I was walking in a field on a First-day morning, the Lord opened unto me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ; and I stranged at it [i.e., thought it strange] because it was the common belief of the people. But I saw clearly, as the Lord opened it to me, and was satisfied, and admired the goodness of the Lord who had opened this thing unto me that morning.

Then I Heard a Voice

Now after I had received that opening from the Lord that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not sufficient to fit a man to be a minister of Christ, I regarded the priests less, and looked more after the dissenting people. And among them I saw there was some tenderness, and many of them came afterwards to be convinced, for they had some openings. But as I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy... And this I knew experimentally.

Great Openings, Yet Great Troubles

Now though I had great openings, yet great trouble and temptations came many times upon me, so that when it was day I wished for night, and when it was night I wished for day; and by reason of the openings I had in my troubles, I could say as David said, "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." And when I had openings, they answered one another and answered the Scriptures, for I had great openings of the Scriptures; and when I was in troubles, one trouble also answered to another.

But my troubles continued, and I was often under great temptations; and I fasted much, and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible and went and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night walked mournfully about by myself, for I was a man of sorrows in the times of the first workings of the Lord in me.

An Ocean of Light and Love

The Lord shewed me that the natures of those things which were hurtful without were within, in the hearts and minds of wicked men... The natures of these I saw within, though people had been looking without. And I cried to the Lord, saying, "Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit those evils?" And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I also saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings.

A Great Shaking

In the year 1648, as I was sitting in a Friend's house in Nottinghamshire... I saw there as a great crack to go throughout the earth, and a great smoke to go as the crack went, and that after the crack, there should be a great shaking. This was the earth in people's hearts, which was to be shaken before the Seed of God was raised out of the earth. And it was so; for the Lord's power began to shake them, and great meetings we began to have, and a mighty power and work of God there was amongst people, to the astonishment of both people and priests.

A Living Hope Arose in Me

One morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me, and a temptation beset me; but I sat still. And it was said, "All things come by nature"; and the elements and stars came over me so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But inasmuch as I sat, still and silent, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope arose in me, and a true voice, which said, "There is a living God who made all things." And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all, and my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.

A Briery, Thorny Wilderness

And on a certain time, as I was walking in the fields, the Lord said unto me, "Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life, which was before the foundation of the world"; and as the Lord spoke it I believed, and saw it in the new birth. Then, some time after, the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world, which was like a briery, thorny wilderness, and when I came in the Lord's mighty power with the word of life into the world, the world swelled and made a noise like the great raging waves of the sea. Priests and professors,

magistrates and people, were all like a sea, when I came to proclaim the day of the Lord amongst them and to preach repentance to them.

A Great People to Be Gathered

At night we came to a country house; and there being no alehouse near they desired us to stay there all night, where we had a good service for the Lord, declaring his Truth amongst them; for the Lord had said unto me if I did but set up one in the same spirit that the prophets and apostles were in that gave forth the Scriptures, he or she should shake all the country in their profession ten miles about them...

And the next day we passed on, warning people as we met them of the day of the Lord that was coming upon them. As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see a-top of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered. As I went down, on the hill side I found a spring of water and refreshed myself, for I had eaten little and drunk little for several days.

Many Great and Wonderful Things

After I was set at liberty from Nottingham jail, where I had been kept prisoner a pretty long time, I travelled as before, in the work of the Lord.

Coming to Mansfield-Woodhouse, I found there a distracted woman under a doctor's hand, with her hair loose about her ears. He was about to let her blood, she being first bound, and many people about her, holding her by violence; but he could get no blood from her.

I desired them to unbind her and let her alone, for they could not touch the spirit in her by which she was tormented. So they did unbind her; and I was moved to speak to her, and in the name of the Lord to bid her be quiet; and she was so. The Lord's power settled her mind, and she mended. Afterwards she received the truth, and continued in it to her death; and the Lord's name was honoured.

Many great and wonderful things were wrought by the heavenly power in those days; for the Lord made bare His omnipotent arm, and manifested His power, to the astonishment of many, by the healing virtue whereby many have been delivered from great infirmities. And the devils were made subject through His name; of which particular instances might be given, beyond what this unbelieving age is able to receive or bear.

BIBLE SELECTION

Acts 8:4-8, 26-31, 35-39 (NRSV)

Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. So there was great joy in that city.

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

BREATH PRAYER

(Inhale) "Be known to me, Jesus ..."

(Exhale) "... So that I may share your love."

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. Where do you observe indications of a Pentecostal spirit in contemporary life?
Consider how these manifestations align with your understanding of spiritual renewal and empowerment.
2. Can you identify examples of Pentecostal or prophetic ministries that you find disturbing? If so, what are the reasons behind your discomfort?
3. Optional Stretch Exercise: List examples of prophetic ministries, either contemporary or from the past 200 to 300 years. Consider the significant social changes that resulted from these prophetic events or ministries.

REFLECTIONS FROM RICHARD J. FOSTER

We have a tendency to think that, outside of the early church, true prophetic ministry is unique to us, with the early twentieth-century Pentecostal explosion or the slightly more refined charismatic renewal that broke out at mid-century in mainline churches. Basically this reflects historical ignorance combined with a touch of modern arrogance. Prophetic ministry has been going on all through the history of the Church in both healthy and unhealthy ways. Studying these sample "openings" of George Fox can yield useful insights into a more biblical and healthy form of prophetic witness. (Incidentally, as far as I know, describing prophetic insights as "openings" is unique to George Fox.)

One of the very first things we notice is how many of Fox's prophetic openings were tied to ethical and moral sensibilities. These insights were not centered on good feelings or personal spiritual goose bumps, but were a call to righteous living. In this Fox was standing squarely in the tradition of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos. And note how the message was first applied to the prophet himself. When Fox heard a voice saying, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," he understood this to be a call to Christian discipleship, to holy obedience.

Then notice that the prophetic witness focuses much more on "forth telling" than it does on "foretelling." To be sure, there is an element of predicting future events, as was true of Fox's experience on Pendle Hill, but being tantalized by the next revelation or end-times scenario is simply not the center of attention in any genuine prophetic ministry. No, the center of attention is always upon proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and calling people to turn and walk in holiness of life.

Third, prophetic ministry does not insulate the prophet from personal struggle. We see this especially in Fox's experience of "great openings, yet great trouble and temptations... upon me." Yet another example (which certainly has contemporary application) was his experience of being tempted by a kind of naturalism and how he was given to see that "there is a living God who made all things."

Finally, prophetic openings result in a call to mission. These openings are not merely for our own personal enjoyment or for our own private club. No, prophets are called out for the good of others. Following his vision on Pendle Hill of a "great people to be gathered" Fox launched into extensive preaching and teaching missions. One of these was "a-top of a rock" on Firbank Fell, a rock that to this day is known as "Fox's Pulpit." About a thousand people gathered around Fox as he was perched on a rock, and he preached for some three hours; "For the Lord had sent me with his everlasting gospel to preach... so that they might all come

to know Christ their teacher, their counselor, their shepherd to feed them, and their bishop to oversee them and their prophet to open to them, and to know their bodies to be the temples of God and Christ for them to dwell in." Consider also the tender ministry Fox gave to the distraught woman and how God "settled her mind, and she mended." Would to God that we could have a similar effect upon those around us.

Excerpts taken from *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin, Editors. Harpercollins, 2000.)