

Dear beloved Friends,

May I share with you some things I earnestly believe to be true?

God loves us and wants to transform our Yearly Meeting.

Transformation often entails some discomfort.

I want to cooperate with God in God's work of transformation.

We all want to cooperate in that work, but sometimes we reach a point when we don't know what to do. And we all say we want to love each other, but we don't always know how. I would like to offer three things we can do that will lead to immersing ourselves in God's transforming activity. I feel confident to recommend these three actions because God graciously calls us to do them, and as God's children and with God's help, they are possible for us to do.

Forgive and be forgiven by each other. It doesn't matter whether a brother or sister has actually harmed us, or merely takes a different view—we can still find ourselves painfully separated. Or we ourselves may have created an offense—the result is still separation. The effect of forgiveness is to heal that rift. Action steps: Identify one brother or sister whom I need to forgive. The forgiveness may need to begin between me and God, unless and until God gives an opening to express it directly and kindly. And identify one brother or sister whose forgiveness I need to ask. Seeking forgiveness is wholehearted and without self-justification. It may look something like this: "You and I think differently about something important, and so I have thought badly of you in my heart. I want to repent of this and ask you to forgive me."

Respect each other. The word "respect" expresses an attitude the Bible calls us to display toward each other. When Paul says, "in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others," this is what I mean by respect. At its core, respect means I acknowledge the other person as valued by God, with God-given gifts. The effect of respecting another person is to restore the basis for continuing relationship and community. Action step: Say to one I disagree with, "You and I disagree a lot, but I want you to know that I respect and honor you." And then I will act on what that respect leads to, as God shows me.

Give thanks for each other. The Bible tells us that God's will for us in Christ Jesus is to "rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances." Rejoicing, praying and giving thanks: how God means for us to live. In his letters Paul repeatedly gave thanks to God for his brothers and sisters, even when he had serious words to say to them. The effect of thanking God for another person is to align our spirit with God's, and say "I agree with You that this person has infinite worth, and is a precious gift to me." The effect of thanking the other person is to give the gift of appreciation, to encourage and to build up. Both kinds of thanks will nourish in us the habit of gratitude, which displaces resentment and disdain. Action steps: Say to one I'm having trouble with, "You are a gift to me, and I thank God for you." Say to God, "Because of the hope you give, I thank you for this brother or sister, and for these circumstances, as I know you are working all these things together for our good."

And of course, always pray.

In praise to the One who is transforming us from within,

Tom Stave, Clerk