

A Soul That Glows

1. Warm up question: On Sunday, we explored the story of Jesus' transfiguration, which takes place on a mountain top. What's the most majestic mountain top you've ever experienced?
2. Before we jump into the transfiguration story, let's make sure we understand the background to the story. Read Matthew 16:21-28.
 - a. Clearly, Jesus and his closest advisor, Simon Peter, strongly disagreed about what direction Jesus' ministry should take. Why do you think Peter so strongly objected to Jesus' vision of where things were going? Why do you think Jesus was so sure the path of suffering was necessary?
 - b. Given what Jesus has just told his disciples about his fate, and the argument he and Peter just had, what do you think would have been Jesus' state of mind as he moved into the transfiguration story? How do you think Jesus was feeling?
3. Now read Matthew 17:1-8.
 - a. Mountains seemed to be Jesus' go-to place to pray. What's your go-to place for prayer? Do you think the setting for prayer matters?
 - b. The parallel passage in Luke says, "While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white." Luke 9:29. Suppose you had been there, describe what you imagine you might have seen?
 - c. Moses and Elijah were great prophets who themselves had faced great stress and opposition. What may have been the purpose for them appearing in this story?
 - d. Verse 5 indicates that God spoke from a cloud, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" Why was this affirmation important to Jesus? Why was it important to the disciples?
4. Usually, the transfiguration is seen as a miraculous sign meant to confirm and demonstrate the greatness of Jesus. In other words, this story is typically seen as being all about Jesus, not us. It would never occur to us that we might experience something similar. But Jeff pointed out that the same Greek word here translated "transfigured" – metamorphoo – is applied elsewhere to us as ordinary believers.
 - a. Read Romans 12:1-2. Here we're told that we should be "transformed" (metamorphoo). What might that mean? Transformed in what sense?
 - b. Read II Corinthians 3:18. Once again here we're told that we should be "transformed" (metamorphoo). What do you think this verse means? Paraphrase it in your own words?

5. The foregoing verses imply that our souls are supposed to take on the same glow as Jesus had. But for that to happen, like Jesus, we have to take time out of our incredibly busy, pressure-packed schedules to spend quality time communing with God. Jeff suggested three steps that can help us get better at that. **Step 1: We have to regularly remind ourselves of the power that flows from prayer.**
 - a. Tell us about a time when you've witnessed a powerful answer to prayer.
 - b. Prayer is not just about changing outer circumstances; it's also about changing our inner state of being. To illustrate, Jeff told a Lee Eclov story about a time Lee prayed for Two-Phone Joe, an incredibly aggressive, stressed guy. Lee's brief prayer had an incredibly calming effect on Joe. His whole countenance changed. Have you ever experienced that in prayer? What is it about prayer that makes it such a powerful mood-altering force? How would you explain it?
 - c. Given the potential power of prayer, why do we devote so little time to it?
6. **Step 2: We've got to stop being afraid of God.** Even in the transfiguration story, Peter, James, and John end up being afraid of the presence of God (vs. 6).
 - a. Where does that fear come from? How much of that fear do you carry with you?
 - b. Rev. Craig Groeschel invites us to consider what name we customarily use for God in prayer and to ponder what that name tells us about our comfort level and intimacy with God. What's your favorite prayer name for God – and what do you think that name tells you about how you relate to God?
 - c. Could you see yourself referring to God as "Friend" or as "Abba," i.e., Papa or Mama? Why or why not?
7. **Step 3: We've got to start talking to God like a friend, conversationally.** We tend to think of prayer as a formal list of requests and praises. But prayer is so much more, especially the kind of prayer that has the power to "transfigure" us. The heart of prayer is simply making conversation with God. So let's practice that.
 - a. Prayer Exercise 1. Let's all take two minutes (timed by the leader) to silently pray. In this first prayer exercise, just review your day with God. Tell God what happened and how you felt about it.
 - b. Prayer Exercise 2. Now take two more minutes to silently talk to God. This time, talk to God about this question: In my life right now, what am I most afraid of, and why? (Other option: What am I most excited about, and why?)
 - c. How did those prayers feel? Can you see yourself regularly praying that way?
 - d. Jeff said, "Good prayer is like good therapy." What do you think he meant?