

Living in Glory

Pascal wrote, “keep something beautiful in mind.” Beauty is one way we understand God’s glory. Beauty calls us into greater clarity, depth, and balance. It beckons us to continue on the path of becoming. It is an image of the divine that calls us to become more like the *imago dei* inside each of us. In Luke 9:29, Jesus tries to inspire the disciples into seeing the true nature of divine love within him and the divine love to which they were called? Taking time to see and feel the glorious can sustain us when we are on the frontlines – healing the sick, advocating for change, navigating conflict.

Focus scripture: Luke 9:28–36, (37–43)

Peter, James, and John journey with Jesus to the top of a mountain to pray. The name and location of this mountain are not certain. As Jesus is praying, the appearance of his face changes. Jesus is transfigured.

Moses and Elijah appear to talk with Jesus about his upcoming death. The words used for this refer to Jesus’ departure, from a Greek word that may also be translated as exodus. Among the Jewish readers of this gospel, exodus would be a powerful symbol of the journey Jesus would take through the events of his final days in Jerusalem.

The disciples do not hear the exchange between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah because they are asleep. When they awaken, they see Moses and Elijah begin to depart. Eager to capture the glory of God revealed in this place, Peter suggests building a dwelling for each one. Glory is not something to be captured or preserved; it is something to be experienced in our living.

Jesus performs three actions in this account of his transfiguration. He reveals the glory of his true self, rebukes his closest students for their narrow-sightedness and half-heartedness, extends himself with compassion. These three actions are the actions Christ offers as the path of faith: Accept the glory. Open up our minds and senses. Extend compassion. Glory. Openness. Compassion. “And all were astounded by the greatness of God” (v.43).

Psalm 99 depicts God enthroned upon cherubim. The very thought of him causes tremble in human hearts and earthly ground. The heights on which God sits – a throne of angels, a holy mountain are not the extent of God’s glory. The psalmist praises God for being a “lover of justice,” an establisher of equity, and executer of righteousness.

When Moses came down from time with God on Mt Sinai in **Exodus 34:29–35**, “the skin on his face was shining,” and the people were afraid to come near to him. It’s a humorous scene. We might imagine something embarrassing is on his face, but no one dares to tell him so, and they avoid him. Except, it is not something gross or embarrassing that make people avoid Moses, it is his undeniable radiance. Verse 29 explains the glow is a direct effect of his talking with God. What is so intimidating about radiating God’s love? Why are we afraid of being shunned by showing the truth and depths our hearts? Why are others afraid to receive us this way?

The church in Corinth is afraid of hiding from glory. **2 Corinthians 3:12–42** accuses, perhaps unfairly, Moses and the people of Israel of numbing each other to God’s glory until they were lost to it. What is important is not the why and the how of the response of Moses and Israel, but the desire of the Corinthian church to live openly in God’s glory and freedom. Verse 17 boldly proclaims that glory is not merely reverence, it is the path to freedom. “Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom.”



As we draw closer to God and absorb God’s commandments to love, our countenance shines on others. This glimpse of glory is not to wield power over others but to free all of us of the limitations we put on our hearts, our bodies, and our social structures so we may follow Christ into the resurrecting power of self-giving love.



Focus scripture
Luke 9:28–36,
(37–43)

Additional scriptures
Exodus 34:29–35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2

Holy God, your glory, and power energize our lives. Bathe us in the warm glow of your love and faithfulness. Transform us each day to live as part of your story. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



The Focus for Adults

Glory is something we witness or experience in the face of God's fullness. We need to be open to finding beauty in nature and the everyday. We need to be ready to be overwhelmed by glory and expect awe in the most mundane or routine of days. Glory is also something that we reflect as individuals and a community.

Transfiguration Sunday provides an opportunity to remember those times when we encounter God's presence in astounding ways. Some people will have had mountaintop experiences that transformed their lives. But for many others, God's presence is subtle and comes to them in smaller ways. Others may be sceptical or cynical about religious experiences that are different from their own or that defy

human explanation. How can you help others recognize and name the presence of God's glory, the More in their lives?

After the account of Jesus' transfiguration in Luke 9:28–36, Jesus delivers harsh words. This portrayal of Jesus may be disturbing. Help participants understand the context of these words. When we do not remember who we are, beloved and chosen by God, we do not act in faithful ways that bring healing.

As you lead, strive to accept the varied experiences group members bring, affirming the many ways that God's glory and presence may be made known among us. Pray that all group members will hold within themselves the presence of Something More that will empower us for the journey into Lent.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Luke 9:28–36 (37–43); Exodus 34:29–35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 85).
- To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit www.seasonsonline.ca and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- Set a worship space with white fabric, an open Bible, and a candle.
- Bring Bibles, matches, and [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 5) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 5), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- Bring, if possible, the song "All Is Wonder" (p. 7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

Engage

- Bring copies of resource sheet "[Secret Affairs of the Soul](#)."

Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- Dig deeper:** copies of resource sheet "[God's Glory](#)"
- Art response:** art supplies (construction paper, chalk, pastels)
- Music reflection:** hymnals and songbooks used in worship services
- Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** nothing extra required

Bless

- Bring, if possible, the song "Go" (p. 22–23 in *Seasons Songbook Seasons*, Vol. 5; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).
- Bring copies of biblical background material for March 10 (p. 3 of the Lent, Easter 2019 resources).



Living in Glory

Scripture

Luke 9:28–36,
(37–43)

FOCUS To celebrate the many ways God's glory is revealed in our lives

Gather

Welcome participants and introduce any newcomers or visitors.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space and light the candle. Point out the different colour in the worship space and explain that this week is celebrated as Transfiguration Sunday, a special day in the church calendar.

Pray Form two groups to read **Psalm 99** as an opening prayer, alternating verses.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "All Is Wonder" (p. 7 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 5; #17 on

Seasons Music CD, Vol. 5). Pause for a few moments of silence afterwards, inviting the Spirit to be present with the group during this time.

Moving into the theme

In this week's readings, we observe various responses to God's glory. The psalmist's response is to praise and proclaim. Moses response is to veil himself, while Israel holds back. The disciples' response is to hide and control.

■ **What responses to beauty, glory or unbelievable kindness have you witnessed?**

Engage

Setting the context

Recall that during the past two weeks we have explored Jesus' teachings in the synagogue and his reception in his home town (Luke 4:14–30). In this week's focus passage, Jesus has taken three of his disciples to a mountainside for prayer.

Exploring the texts

Invite a volunteer to read **Luke 9:28–36**. The Transfiguration feels like a moment of magic in an otherwise human life. Up to this point, Jesus has been remarkable for his compassion, his power to heal, and his courage to speak truth to power. While extraordinary, these actions feel like models we can strive to reach. The Transfiguration changes that. Jesus becomes otherworldly. And yet the message of the story about what makes Jesus glorious is still one for us to emulate. We can still be clear in our identity as followers of Christ, bold in our rebuke of ignorance and injustice and courageous in our compassion.

■ **Imagine you are with Peter, John, and James and Jesus has rebuked you. How would you respond?**

■ **Imagine you are the father of the tortured son. How would you prepare to go back a second time and ask for help?**

■ **If you were Peter, John and James, what would you hope your response would be when you saw the father and child?**

Ask group members to share words or phrases in this story that raise other questions for them. What words or phrases seem most important?

■ **Why do you think Jesus took only three disciples with him to the mountain?**

■ **Who were Moses and Elijah? What do you think is the significance of the presence of Moses and Elijah?**

"Don't just do something, stand there" is a quote variously attributed to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Clint Eastwood, Elvis Presley, and Lewis Carroll's White Rabbit, among others.

■ **To what extent do you give yourself time to reflect on encounters with mystery or glory?**

This story is in two parts. One part takes place on top of a mountaintop, and the second part takes place on a city street, at the bottom of the mountain. God is with us both on mountaintops, and in the valleys below. Consider "mountaintop" experiences of God's presence, as well as times of encountering God in one of life's valleys.

■ **What is the experience of God like in each place?**

■ **In what ways is this metaphor used in the two stories read today?**

Ask a volunteer to read the last part of the focus passage: [Luke 9:37–43](#).

■ **What seems to cause the tension in this scene?**

Making life connections

Reflect on these words spoken by Martin Luther King Jr, January 27th 1965: “I must confess that I have enjoyed being on this mountaintop and I am tempted to want to stay here and retreat to a more quiet and serene life. But something within reminds me that the valley calls me in spite of all its agonies, dangers, and frustrating moments. I

must return to the valley.”

■ **Next is the beginning of Lent. Are you eager to move into Lent, or more eager to be through Lent and beyond? Why?**

Theologian Richard Rohr says, “God [is] more a verb than a noun, more a process than a conclusion, more an experience than a dogma, more a personal relationship than an idea.” (From *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, p. 23). Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[Secret Affairs of the Soul](#)” and invite group members to read the article and reflect together on their own experiences and how they were changed as a result.

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- ❑ **God’s glory** Scripture writers speak of God’s glory in many ways that might shape our celebration of it. Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[God’s Glory](#).” Read through the introductory information together, then form pairs and divide the readings. Compare notes and wonder together about the ways you might describe God’s glory to people using modern language and symbol.
- ❑ **Art response** Distribute art supplies and invite group members to consider how they might use these to create their own abstract images that speak of God’s glory and presence.
- ❑ **Music reflection** The music and lyrics of hymns and songs used during worship can help us experience God’s presence and glory. Invite group members to look through the hymnals



and songbooks your church uses in worship and identify hymns, songs, liturgies, or prayers that express God’s glory most powerfully for them. Sing several of these hymns or songs together. If time permits, invite group members to reflect further on God’s glory by writing a personal verse for one of the pieces of music.

- ❑ **Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** *Lectio divina* or “holy reading,” is an ancient practice of meditating on scripture. Invite participants to engage in a reflection on the following passage. Read [Luke 4:18–19](#). Rewrite these verses as a prayer for your life and for the life of your congregation. Offer this prayer, and be in prayerful silence afterward, listening and trusting. If time is limited, encourage them to use this discipline to guide devotion time at home.

Bless

Gather around the lit candle again. Invite group members to share what they will remember from this session and from the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Thank them for their participation in the group this season. Share any necessary information about the sessions beginning next week for the seasons of Lent and Easter.

Pray the prayer on the [biblical background](#) page (p. 85).

Sing, listen to, or read the words of, if possible, verses 3 and 4 of the song “Go” (p. 22–23 in *Seasons Songbook Seasons*, Vol. 5; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 5).

Distribute the biblical background materials for the first Sunday in Lent, March 10 (p. 3 of the Lent, Easter 2019 resources).

Reflect

As this is the final session for this season, reflect on your experiences with the group during this season. In what ways has the group grown in their relationships with each other and with God? Please take time to fill out the evaluation form at the back of this resource (also available in the Library on the *Seasons* website).



GOD'S GLORY

At the time of Jesus' transfiguration, Peter was eager to capture the glory of God that he saw revealed in Elijah, Moses, and Jesus. Peter's reaction places him in a long line of biblical writers trying to comprehend and honour God's splendour and magnificence. Writers, artists, preachers, poets, and musicians continue to wrestle with ways to express God's glory among us.

Of the nearly 25 Hebrew words translated as "glory" in the Bible, one of the important ones is *kabod*, meaning "weight" or "importance." In this sense, to have glory is to have importance and significance to others.

What do you learn of God's glory from these texts?

	About God's Glory
Exodus 24:12-17	
Psalms 148	
Isaiah 60:1-3; 19-22	
Luke 2:8-14	
John 1:14-18	
John 17:1-5	
Romans 5:1-5	

■ When have you experienced the splendour or magnificence of God's power – God's glory?

■ What does it mean to be open to the many ways God's glory is revealed?



Secret Affairs of the Soul

Ordinary People's Extraordinary Experiences of the Sacred

Most spiritual traditions hold that transforming moments, religious experiences, theophanies, mountaintop experiences, holy instants, soul affairs, whatever they are labeled, are only genuine if the person's life demonstrates virtues that were previously lacking. However, like all human behaviour, the display of a positive change is a continuum, a bell-shaped curve, with obvious dramatic "saintly" change at one end of the spectrum, little noticeable outward change at the other, and the bulk of the population falling somewhere in between. This was evidenced in [a study done by the Religious Experience Unit, Oxford University, England], where almost three quarters of the respondents said that the longer-term outcome of their experience was that it changed their attitude on life to some extent.

However, attitudinal change is sometimes hard to measure. With soul affairs, it is even more difficult due to the deep natural humility that accompanies most experiences. This ensures that even if we *do* operate in a more virtuous manner, it is highly unlikely we would point it out. Besides, to self-claim virtuous behaviour immediately discredits its legitimacy. Even if changes are evident, we will tend to be coy about the reasons, knowing that soul affairs carry little credence and, when expressed in the wrong forum, run the risk of being ridiculed or dismissed. Also, the changes initiated by our [mountaintop experiences or

soul affairs], especially those credited to an unseen guiding hand, are likely to be slowly evolving rather than instant and dramatic, the effects seen only in hindsight. Like the small spurt of a spaceship's retro rockets, a slightly altered trajectory at one point puts us into an entirely different orbit. For these reasons, the good we do, just like our soul affairs, is generally kept secret.

Many people I spoke to admitted that [as a result of] their soul affair something definitely changed. Often they couldn't define it, couldn't say, "Well, before I was like this and now I am like this," or point to their joining the Peace Corp or becoming a street worker. Rather, it was as if they'd had a new operating system installed. Outwardly, they showed little difference, but inwardly the change was profound.

The overriding impression I got from those who'd had a soul affair [or mountaintop experience] was that above all else it was the way they viewed life that had changed...how that altered state might manifest itself is as individual as each one of us. However, one thing I did detect in many soul affair veterans was an absence of longing. When speaking about their soul affairs, many did so with a quiet certainty. There was a lack of drivenness, a simple peacefulness. Although they were more than willing to talk, many were disinterested in explaining or justifying their experiences. It did not seem to matter what others thought. It was

their own experience, their private moment, their secret. The experience itself was enough.

One accusation that is often leveled against those who have had transcendent soul affairs is that the recipient dwells on the soul affair as an end in itself, seeking the experience again and again for its intrinsic pleasure. Although undoubtedly there are some individuals who do this, I found no basis for believing this to be a general pattern. I met no one who actively re-sought the experience for the thrill they might get. Although many admitted it would be wonderful if it happened again, they seemed to instinctively understand it was not their call. Most treated their secret affair as a special gift.

Some said their religious convictions had been confirmed and strengthened. Some said it affirmed their faith, making it deeper but less well-defined. Others completely rejected a religious explanation. Regardless of the individual interpretations, the overwhelming majority felt they were better people because of their experience. Feeling good about oneself may sound selfish and inward looking, but *in gaining inner peace and contentment they found they were freer to think less about themselves and to look more towards others.*

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