

HOW ABOUT THOSE MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCES?

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KEY VERSE:

Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"— not knowing what he said — Luke 9:33

FAITH STORY:

Luke 9:28-36

FAITH FOCUS:

This is the story of the transfiguration of Jesus. Peter, James and John go up on the mountain to pray with Jesus. His face changes and his clothes become dazzling white. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appear with him. Peter tells Jesus it is good that they are here, and that he wants to set up three places of shelter for them to sleep in that night. As he is talking, a great cloud comes, and the voice of God says "This is my son, my chosen, listen to him." Then Jesus was alone with the three men, and they went back down the mountain.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students understand this "mountaintop" experience" for the disciples, and consider their own mountaintop experiences and what happens to them spiritually after that experience.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Students will study the story of Jesus' transfiguration.
- Students will list spiritual "mountaintop highs" in their life.
- Students will identify responses to the spiritual highs in their life.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Paper and pencils for everyone
- 2 Bibles
- 3 Persons from congregation willing to share some of their spiritual highs in their life.
- 4 Newsprint or dry erase board and marker

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (7–10 minutes)

Invite students to share a time in their life when they were "high" on life. It could have spiritual connections but it doesn't have to. When have they felt most alive? Most connected to God?

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Say: Jesus and several of his disciples had their own mountaintop experience—in fact, you might say it was the ultimate mountaintop high. Let's take a look at it.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10–20 minutes)

Read Luke 9:28-36 as a group. Then read it again, verse by verse, and ask students to help you make two lists: one that states what happened in that verse, and one that notes any questions they may have about that verse. You might encourage students to state their question as a statement that begins with "I wonder..."

APPLY: (10–20 minutes)

Share this mini-lecture with students:

For the disciples, Peter, James and John, the transfiguration of Jesus was a huge spiritual experience—something that they could hardly comprehend but as they did, they loved every minute of it. In fact, they wanted it to last longer—Peter suggested setting up tents and "camping out" for a while. For us, we might have a spiritual high at an amazing worship service, a retreat weekend, a youth convention, while listening to music, reading the Bible or another spiritual book, or during some personal time with God.

Sometimes we want to "camp out" in that spiritual high for a while longer, like the disciples suggested. That's natural, because it feels so good. But what we need to do is remember that "It's not about me, it's about God." Just like a cloud overshadowed the disciples, our personal feelings need to be overshadowed by our worship of God. And just as God said, "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him," we need to also give our ears and hearts to what God is saying. Spiritual highs are all about praising God, not about us.

When the cloud leaves and Jesus and the disciples are alone again, they head down the mountain and they keep quiet about what's happened. They may have kept quiet for several reasons: 1) The experience was so amazing and so awesome they didn't know how to talk about it—they didn't know how to communicate it with others. 2) Jesus told them not to talk about it until after his Resurrection, when people would better understand that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Our situation today is different. Yes, sometimes our spiritual high is so amazing that we don't know how to share with others about it. But many times, a mountaintop experience is a time when we should not keep quiet. Our faith is meant to be shared in service and ministry to others. Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive in our hearts, and God wants us to spread that good news.

Invite your guests to share about the spiritual highs in their lives and what they did "after the fact." Did they keep silent or did they share it with others? Why or why not?

Hand out the cards and pens to students. Ask them to spend some time recalling the spiritual highs in their lives and writing them down, along with what happened when they came "down from the mountain."

RESPOND: (7–10 minutes)

Say: I would like to share some words with you from a man who said he'd been to the mountaintop. These words are from Dr. Martin Luther King in a speech he gave in Memphis, Tennessee on April 3, 1968.

"I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

Say: Dr. King was assassinated the next day. But his mountaintop experience lived his. His dream did not die with him. Listen to how he described his dream:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

"I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day."

Ask students if Dr. King's dream has come true, and if so, why?

What does it mean to make a dream happen?

It means not keeping quiet about it. It means work and sacrifice. It means giving up your life in small ways, and large ways.

Ask students to reflect on the mountaintop experiences they have had, or would like to have. How did they respond, or how would they like to respond? Give some time for silent reflection.

End in a time of prayer of thanksgiving—thanking God for the experiences and teachings that we have received. Ask God that we would not just hold them to ourselves, but just as Jesus said that they needed to go back down the mountain, we too need to serve others with our lives, sharing and doing the Good News.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Commentaries suggest that there are several reasons for Moses and Elijah to appear in Jesus' transfiguration vision. Both are associated with the messiahship in Jewish belief, and according to certain traditions, both were taken up into heaven, just as Jesus was soon to be taken up. In addition, Luke associates Moses with the Law and Elijah with the Prophets, so having them at Jesus' transfiguration confirms Jesus' messiahship.

It may seem strange to read that the disciples were admonished not to talk about what they had seen and experienced. In Mark's account of the transfiguration, the disciples are told to say nothing until after the Resurrection, because only after the Resurrection will the full messianic status of Jesus be realized by his followers.

Another reason it may have been appropriate for the disciples to keep quiet was that there are several ways to respond to something that is amazing and nearly incomprehensible. One response is to shout and exclaim, like the shepherds did after seeing the baby Jesus. Mary, on the other hand, "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." Silence may mean the absence of words, but it can also mean the presence of meanings too deep for words.

WORKS CITED:

The Interpreter's Bible, Abingdon, Nashville, TN; 1952