

From Glory to Glory

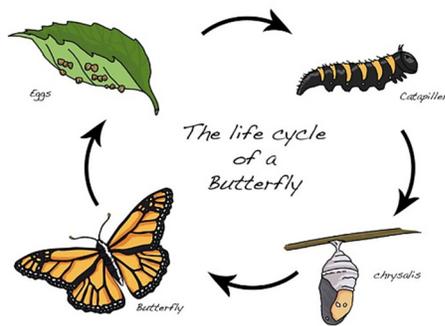
by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

Lord God,
may your Word be a lamp to our feet
and a light to our path
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Background

The Greek word for transfiguration is literally *metamorphosis*. *Meta* means 'change' and *morphis* means "form."



Jesus' form was totally changed at the transfiguration.

Like a caterpillar is transfigured into a butterfly.

Like a flower bulb into a spring daffodil.

Like a tadpole into a frog.

Like crucifixion into resurrection.

The Transfiguration is a foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection glory—before the passion. It's God's affirmation and exhortation for Jesus to stay on the path to the cross—that glory will emerge from the shame. The Transfiguration also reminds us of something very important—what happens to Jesus, happens to us.

The heart of the gospel is *transformation*, even transfiguration. God accepts us as we are, but he doesn't leave us as we are. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Let's hear now from our gospel reading from:

Matthew 17:1-9 (NRSV)

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – From Glory to Glory

Jesus needed to get away to pray. He needed a mountain retreat. He was on his way to the cross.

Jesus didn't go alone on this journey—he took with him three of the twelve disciples—Peter, James, and John. Jesus took them and led them to a high mountain—either Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon. Jesus always takes us with him in the upward journey of transfiguration. Sometimes it's an open invitation—"come to me." Other times Jesus has to grasp our hand and drag us along. Either way, we're never truly alone on the journey of transfiguration. "Father, is this your will? Must I go...*there*? I want your will, not mine. Show me what to do."

Jesus' answer from God was a resounding YES!

Miraculously on that mountain, Jesus' face shown like the sun and his clothes dazzled as light. Then two new characters appeared on the journey—Moses and Elijah.

Moses gave the Law. Elijah was the greatest of the Prophets. Both the Law and the Prophets testified to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

All three men had mountaintop experiences: Moses received the 10 Commandments on a mountain. Elijah heard the still small voice on a mountain. Jesus taught on a mountain, was transfigured on a mountain, and would be crucified on a mountain.

Then Peter—*thank God for him*—ever the man of action, filled the mystery with mansplaining,

Wow this is cool! Moses and Elijah! Let's ... build something!!!

While Peter's jaws still flapped—a bright cloud appeared and overshadowed the six of them. This bright cloud was none other than the shekinah glory—the very presence of the living God.

A resounding voice of affirmation spoke from it:

This is my Beloved Son in whom I delight.

My favor rests upon him.

LISTEN TO HIM!!!!

Boom—they hit the ground—flat on their backs. The presence of our Holy and Almighty God will scare spitless any man, woman, or child.

When Peter, John, and James recovered, they LOOKED UP. When they RAISED their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus alone. Yes, we love Moses and Elijah—we study their stories in Scripture. We look up to them—they inspire us. But at the end of the day, JESUS STANDS ALONE—head and shoulders above the rest. Jesus stands above us, but he doesn't stand against us. Jesus goes to us and stands by us. He gets closer, kneels down, touches us, and lifts us up. Rather than a pointing finger, he offers a hand up.

"Stand up. Don't be afraid. Get up."

Metamorphosis—change is scary. Life is always changing—just sometimes we're more aware of it, than others. There are changes we make. And changes that are made for us or to us. Changes of gain. Changes of loss. Neutral changes. Needed change can be discombobulating. Even good change can be frightening. Change is scary because we're entering unfamiliar and mysterious terrain. We like the comfort and predictability of the status quo—even if it's miserable. At least we know what it is. But change has a way of putting us flat on our backs—just ask the disciples.

I just read one of my favorite books of all time—*The Choice*. It's written by Dr. Edith Eva Eger, a psychologist and Auschwitz survivor. *It's a modern classic. Read it.* She says that in the face of fear we think our only response is either fight or flight. But at Auschwitz—neither fight nor flight were a choice.

Edith did choose another path however: FLOW. It was this choice to flow that helped Edith get her through her living hell and not stop until she found healing and forgiveness, back at Auschwitz when she revisited the site fifty years later.

"Get up! Don't be afraid," Jesus says. We can stand up, not fear, and FLOW. Flat on our backs we pray to Jesus standing over us:

I want to be transformed and transfigured into your image. I don't want to be stuck in my old ways. Help me to adapt. To grow. To learn. To change. Life is different and I need to be different for this new stage of life.

Hear the good news Immanuel: Our God is a God of the mountains. Both the Mount of Transfiguration and The Mount of Crucifixion. Mount Taber and Mount Calvary. These are two very different mountain top experiences. And God is there at both mountains. God uses both mountains to grow us, to transform us.

On one mount, God is revealed in glory, on the other, God is revealed in shame.

On one mount, Christ's clothes dazzle, on the other, Christ's clothes will be ripped off and gambled away.

On one mount, Jesus is surrounded by Moses and Elijah, on the other, Jesus is surrounded by two thieves.

On one mount a bright cloud appears, on the other, darkness descends.

On one mount, Peter blurts out the wonder of things, on the other, Peter denies Jesus.

On one mount, the voice of God declares that Jesus is the Beloved, on the other, the voice of a Roman soldier declares,

"Surely this man was the Son of God." Mark 15:39 (NIV)

This is our hope of transfiguration—believing that God is in it all—the laughter and the tears, the shame and the glory, the pain and the joy, the victory and the defeat, the despair and the hope, in life and death. In due time, this can be revealed. Sometimes you have to wait for the right timing, as Jesus said to wait until he rises again.

Through all this, God is changing us, growing us—using it all to fashion us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to the next.

As Jesus says in Matthew 13:43 (NIV):

The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' destiny and our destiny are intertwined.

Make the stewardship from glory ... to glory.

Amen.

The New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](http://www.biblica.com)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.