



# STORIES **AND** RITUALS

## LESSON 23

### Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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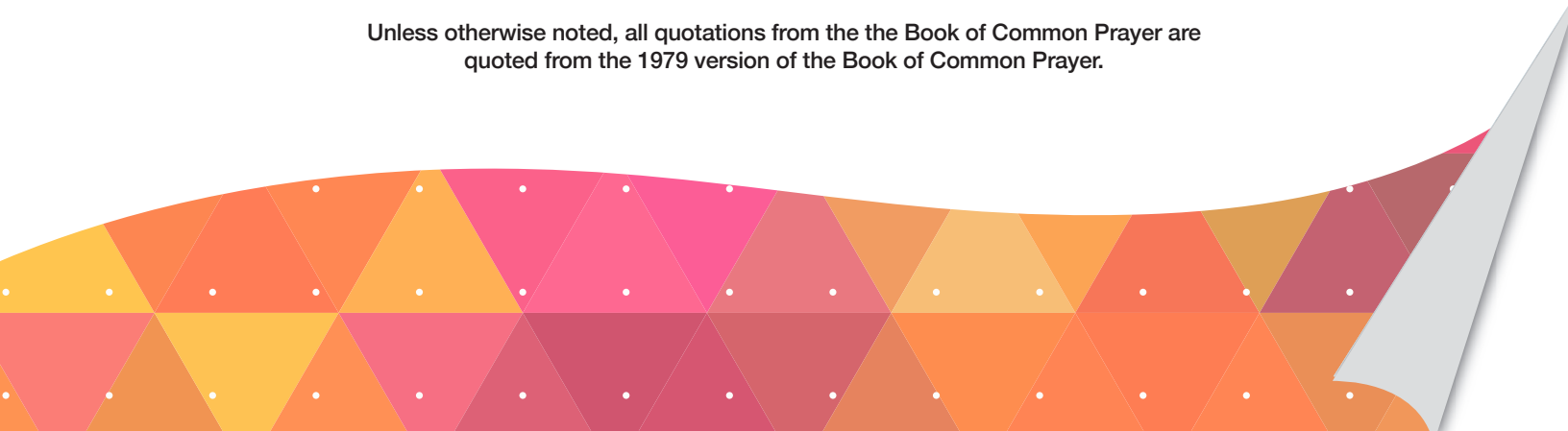
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# The Transfiguration

Texts: **Matthew 17:1-13**

Big Idea: **God's wonders are all around us.**

## Lesson Objectives

### Participants will:

1. Formulate an understanding of transfiguration by playing a game.
2. Recall the story of the Transfiguration by an engaging re-telling of the text from Matthew.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of the transfiguration by identifying the wonders of God's glory through a prayer ritual experience.

### ACTIVITY (TIME)

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Dive In (10 minutes)  
**Group Check-In**

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Community Builder (15 minutes)  
**Transformers**

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The Story (15 minutes)  
**The Transfiguration**

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The Ritual (15 minutes)  
**God's Wonders**

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Dig Deeper (10 minutes)  
**Making Old Things New**

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Wrap it Up (5 minutes)  
**Closing Prayer**

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### MATERIALS NEEDED

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- Nothing

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- Costumes, old clothing, or other objects to transform participants' appearance

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- Copy of Lesson Sheet 23.1

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- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- White balloon or light ball (such as a Nerf ball)

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- Dirty, old pennies
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Large containers with lids
- Salt • Vinegar • Water • Towels

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- Nothing

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# LESSON OVERVIEW



## What's the Story?

The story is found in Matthew 17:1-13. It is the mystical experience of Peter, John and James when they witness Jesus' face and clothing change and become a dazzling white. What began as prayer became a vision of heavenly glory. Although we do not know exactly what happened, we know that the disciples were overcome with emotion and wanted to build shelters of commemoration. They also heard a voice telling them that Jesus was the beloved Son of God.

For a brief moment, the disciples witnessed God's glory and power. Jesus' transformation on the mountaintop changed his followers, too.



## What's the "Big Idea?"

The big idea of this story is that *God's wonders are all around us*. The disciples went away with Jesus to pray. This ordinary event became extraordinary right in front of their eyes! It is the same with us. On a glorious bright blue-sky day, we might be aware of the beauty in this world and the many gifts freely given to us. On a cloudy day, that awareness is harder to come by. The same is true in our personal lives: when things are going well we can feel that God is with us, but when things are not going well we can feel as if God is not present. God's wonders are all around us all the time. We just need to have "eyes to see and ears to hear". (Ezekiel 12:2)



## What's the Symbol?

Our transformation comes through the cross. Find a good size cross to place on your altar and tie some greenery or flowers to it, or place them around the base. Find transformed items and place them in or around your altar area. Some examples of items that "transform" from one to the other might include: balloons (an un-inflated to an inflated one), water (to ice), blocks (to something built from them), a jar of sugar (to cotton candy), etc. There are many more, so be creative!



## What's the Ritual?

Participants will consider the times they have seen God's glory or wonder in nature or in experiences that have had, and then share it with others in the group through a structured circle ball toss. After each sharing they say "Thanks be to God" and toss the ball to someone else until every person has had a turn. Through a shared witness, participants identify how we see God's glory in our lives and in the world.



## Setting Up Your Space

Consider your usual altar area and find ways to "transform" it. You may want to move it for this session; or you might have a "normal" altar with a curtain behind it and drop the curtain to reveal a second space that is covered in transformed items; or use a different table or the floor and put on a different color and material altar cloth and change up how the area looks so that it is "transformed". Adorn your cross with natural items like greenery and flowers. If you are doing the Community Builder activity, gather supplies for the game.

## DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

### Group Check-In

#### *Materials:*

- Nothing

#### During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:  
**Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?** Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

### Transformers

#### *Materials:*

- Costumes, old clothing, or other objects to transform participants' appearance

#### Before the session:

- Find costumes, old clothing, jewelry, shoes, hats, and other items that can transform participants' appearance. Find a wide variety of items. Be creative!

#### During the session:

- Divide participants into two groups, with one group seated on the floor and the other standing in front of them.
- Ask the seated participants to observe those standing and note their appearance. Encourage them to really study what they see!
- The standing group then leaves and “transforms” their appearance using the items provided. You can be elaborate here and provide costumes, disguises, and other material or just have people “transform” their appearance in more subtle ways such as taking off a watch, or switching an article of apparel with someone else. Allow participants to be creative – just supervise to ensure no personal items are lost or accidentally misused!
- The standing group returns and the seated group try to guess the changes.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- The teams swap places to give the seated group a turn at being transformers!
- After the group has taken turns transforming their appearance, ask the following questions:
- **Was your transformation visible to the group? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
- **If it was not, what was it like to be “transformed” and have no one notice?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: sad, surprising, exciting, happy, etc.]*
- **What did it feel like to transform your appearance?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: exciting, fun, different, unexpected, etc.]*
- **Can you think of events in our lives that “transform” how we look and feel about ourselves?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: a new haircut, growing or shaving a beard, an injury that results in a cast or bandage, the death of someone close, a move to a new house or different city or different school, etc.]*



# THE STORY

## (15 MINUTES)

# The Transfiguration

### Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 23.1

### Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 23.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

### During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 23.1.
- After the story ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God surprises us, God's love makes us different people, God has different plans for us, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: we experience Jesus, God's beloved Son, on earth with us; when we are touched by God, we want to remember it; God can also cause us to be afraid, etc.]*
- **What is the story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: the world is still in need of transformation, the world has forgotten many of the lessons Jesus taught the people in his time, the world cannot always recognize the wonders of God around them, etc.]*
- **God's wonders are all around us, yet many people live unaware of these gifts that are freely given to us. This was true in the time Jesus lived, and it is true in our time today. It is up to us to seek God's grace and grow in relationship with Jesus so that we may see these gifts and be transformed by them.**

# THE RITUAL (15 MINUTES)

## God's Wonders

### Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*) • Method for playing music (*optional*)
- White balloon or light ball (such as a Nerf ball)

### During the session:

- Gather around your altar area. If desired, begin playing soft, instrumental music.
- Draw participants' attention to the altar area and show them the items of transformation. **Which objects interest you? Are there any surprises?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
- Ask participants to gather in small groups of two or three people each.
- Ask participants to think quietly to themselves of times they have seen God's glory or wonder in nature, or in experiences that have had that changed them or made an impression on them in some way. (Some examples could be: a particularly beautiful sunrise or sunset, watching a full moon rise; witnessing the birth of animals; witnessing weather extremes, etc.)
- After two minutes, ask the small groups to quietly and quickly share what times they identified – not the whole experience, just a brief synopsis like “a sunrise” or “a storm” or “flowers in my garden.”
- After another minute, ask participants to gather together and form a large circle in front of your altar area. Give a white balloon or light ball to a volunteer or selected participant. They share the time when they saw or felt God's glory or wonder.
- At the end they say “Thanks be to God” and toss the ball to someone who has not had a turn. This is continued until every person has had a turn.
- To conclude the ritual, ask the group to stand in a circle around the altar holding hands.
- **Let's close this time together by giving thanks to God with a “popcorn prayer.” I will start by naming something that has made me grateful in 2-5 words. Then, I will squeeze the hand of the person to my left. They will name something for which they are grateful and when they are done, squeeze the hand of the person on their left. When you feel your hand squeezed – it is your turn! You can opt to “pass” by saying nothing and just squeezing the next hand, but see if you can just name one thing like “Sunsets” or “butterflies”. Look to the altar for inspiration!**
- Begin the prayer: **Let us pray. Thank you for...** after sharing your thanksgiving, squeeze the hand of the person to your left.
- When the last person has squeezed your hand, conclude: **Let's all say “Amen” together. AMEN!**

## DIG DEEPER

### (10 MINUTES)

# Making Old Things New

### Materials:

- Dirty, old pennies (one per participant)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Large containers with lids
- Salt
- Vinegar
- Water
- Towels

### Before the session:

- Set up your work area by covering it with protective plastic or newspapers.

### During the session:

- Give everyone a dirty penny.
- **Sometimes our lives can be a little bit like this penny, dirtied and tarnished by neglect, by the wrong choices we have made, or by things we wish we had or had not done.**
- **If we ask Jesus to help us, he will. Jesus loves us right here, right now. Be changed by that! Understand that like Jesus, you are a beloved child of God!**
- Then tell participants that you will make old things new. Ask for 1-2 volunteers to mix 1 tablespoon of salt and ½ cup vinegar by putting it in the container with the lid. Carefully swirl and shake a little to mix.
- Then, ask all participants to drop the pennies into the vinegar and salt mixture. Watch them change and allow for discussion to happen around being made shiny new by God's transforming love.
- Pour off the salt vinegar mixture into a second container and place the pennies in the water to rinse them off.
- Take the pennies out of the water and dry with towels.
- Give each participant a shiny penny. **What is written on the side of the coin that has Lincoln's profile?** *[In God We Trust.]*
- **Keep the penny with them as a reminder to trust in God. Look for God not only in nature, but to look at pennies they might find on the street or floors. Pennies are commonly found because they aren't seen as valuable! When you see "In God We Trust," let it be a reminder to you that God speaks to us in many different ways and be changed by it!**

## WRAP IT UP

### (5 MINUTES)

### Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

**Lord, your wonders are all around us! We are transformed by your love! Keep our eyes and ears open to discover more of your loving wondrous ways. Amen.**



# Lesson Sheet 23.1

## The Transfiguration

### **A story from Matthew:**

Jesus went high up a mountain and took Peter, James and John with him to pray together. They were alone and as the disciples looked at Jesus, his face became bright like the sun and his clothes were a dazzling white!

Out of nowhere, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. The disciples stood there, just stunned, hardly able to believe their eyes. Peter broke their silence and spoke to Jesus saying that they were glad to be there and he would build one shelter for him, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

While Peter was still talking, a cloud that was glowing brightly came over them and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." That was too much for the disciples and they fell to the ground in fear. But Jesus came to them and helped them up, telling them to not be afraid. And when they looked up, they were alone again.

As they came down the mountain, Jesus told them to not tell anyone about the vision they witnessed until after his death. They asked him, "Why it was said that Elijah must come first?" Jesus told them that Elijah had already come and restored things, but the people did not recognize him and were mean to him. Jesus warned them that he would be treated the same way.