Dallas Jenkins’ decision not to go all Hollywood, all glitz and glam, all high tech and sparkly in the depiction of Jesus. It is all too easy for us to get lost in the hype and to miss out on the true meaning of the message.

To that point, further reading suggests that the three disciples, overawed by the transcendence of the Transfiguration, *were not* *profoundly changed* by witnessing the Transfiguration. They still did not fully grasp the divine nature of Jesus or his role in the redemption of humankind. For remember, it is *after* the transfiguration that James and John ask Jesus to be seated on his right and left when Jesus comes into his glory, showing how they misunderstood the nature of Jesus’ kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). It is *after* the transfiguration that Peter denies Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62), a self-preservation response based in Peter’s fear that Jesus would not be able to complete what he set out to do. Witnessing the transforming light of the Transfiguration did not fundamentally change the disciples’ faith in Jesus.

Peter’s proposal to set up three shelters, one each for Elijah, Moses, and Jesus, and to stay on the mountaintop reveals Peter’s desire to stop time and live in the radiance of that moment. Peter misses the true meaning of being a follower of Jesus. Discipleship means leaving the glory of the mountaintop and heading down into the valley of the shadow of death. Discipleship means moving forward, not staying still, loving the people Jesus places in front of us to serve. Discipleship means forgoing our own safety and risking everything for the hope of the Gospel.

If seeing is believing, then Peter, James, and John did not see what God meant for them to see. If the proof is in the hearing, then Peter, James and John did not hear the message God meant for them to hear. That being so, I want to propose that the primary audience for the Transfiguration was not the disciples, but Jesus himself. Moses and Elijah talked to Jesus during this radiant experience, though it does not tell us what they said. I think it likely that Moses and Elijah prepared Jesus for the suffering and death he would soon face in Jerusalem. God’s voice, the same voice Jesus heard at his baptism, confirmed for Jesus that he was indeed God’s Son, with all the glory, pain, and responsibility inherent in that relationship. Given that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) following this encounter, the Transfiguration clearly had its intended effect on Jesus.

Nonetheless, when God spoke on that mountaintop, God addressed both Jesus and the disciples. When God said, “This is my Son, my Chosen,” it confirmed for Jesus his divine identity; but God’s addition of “listen to him!” was an obvious direction for the disciples. In the Bible, the word “listen” implies trust and obedience, faith and action.

If we were to stop the sermon now and if you were to take seriously what I’ve said to this point, we would all go home feeling guilty that we are not better listeners or that we have selective hearing when it comes to listening to God. But an Old Testament passage helps us understand that God is a partner in the listening process. The prophet Isaiah credits God with providing the ability to listen: “Morning by morning [God] wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear…” (Isaiah 50:4-5). Our English version says, “*opened* my ear,” but the force of the original Hebrew word is more intense: “The Lord God *has caused sound to flow* to my ear.” If we want to hear what Jesus has to say to us today, our prayer should be “Open my ears, Lord, help me to hear and to pay attention.”

At railroad crossings across the world, there is a distinctive x-shaped sign that alerts motorists that a train could show up any minute. The form of this sign is a saltire, or Saint Andrew’s cross. It bears three words: “Stop, Look, Listen.” In some cases, when tracks cross a road, railroad crossings are equipped with automatic gates that make it physically difficult for drivers to cross the tracks when a train is closing in. Flashing red lights provide another level of warning.

But at many rural railroad crossings, there are neither automatic gates nor flashing red lights. The “Stop, Look, Listen” sign is the only piece of safety equipment. Rural drivers learn to approach railroad crossings with caution, heeding the three-word warning. They *stop* their vehicle at the edge of the tracks. They *look* down the tracks to the right and to the left. They *listen* for the howl of the train’s horn. If all three of those safety tests prove negative, they carefully proceed over the tracks.

“Stop, Look, and Listen” is a warning Jesus’ disciples largely failed to heed at the Transfiguration. First, they should have *stopped* rather than bustling around trying to build shelters for the three glowing figures. Second, they should have *looked,* fully soaking in the wondrous spiritual sign they were granted to experience. Third, they should have *listened* to the command spoken from the heavens: “This is my Son; listen to him!” The voice was an interruption, the kind of interruption that occasionally breaks into our lives, stops us in our tracks, and arrests our thoughts. Don’t build monuments to honor Jesus. Listen to him and follow him.

Listen to Jesus. Remember what he said. Remember how he described God and God with us. Remember how passionately he directed us to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. Do not forget the poor, the hungry, those who weep. Face their difficulty as if it were your own, for it is. Do this in remembrance of me. Love their enemies and do good to those who hate you and forgive them. Give to anyone who begs from you. Do to others as you would have them do to you, expecting nothing in return. Remember how he loves you; how you feel in his presence, like somehow you are being transformed little by little, even becoming like him which felt more like yourself than yourself.

Listen to him. How do you authenticate such a call. From the thinnest silence. The only way is by your response. It is the response to such a call that makes the call real. It is our response to such a call that makes real the history of God. We are the ones who make existent God’s insistence. (Borg)

The world is filled with shiny lights and dissonant voices that draw our attention away from the One, True Light and Voice. Innumerable Jonas Nightengales will seek to divert our gaze from the Way of Jesus and deaden our ears to his teachings. When it comes to spiritual life, few people, absorbed in the daily routine of life, bother to stop, look, and listen for any reason. Fewer still actively look for signs of God’s presence in the world. Only a small number who *do* stop and look are willing to truly listen to what Jesus is saying. We are not The Light or The Voice, but through faithful looking and listening, we can put ourselves in the way of its beam and tune our ears and open our hearts to hear what it says.

Prayer: Gracious God, You have given me an abundance of awesome experiences, a surplus of praise worthy moments, and boundless beautiful blessings. I am grateful beyond words for all your gifts. But sometimes my overflowing world spins me into a frenzy. Sometimes my head becomes overstuffed with frazzle and my heart flooded with a swarm of disorder and disarray, making it difficult to hear your voice over the world's constant noise. Forgive me for allowing the world to distract me from you and your guiding light. I desperately want to hear your voice above all voices. I want what you want for my life. Lord, clear my head of the clutter and open my heart to hear you better. Help me replace my thoughts with your thoughts. Help me see clearly. Help me see *you* clearly. Thank you for your voice and thank you for your Word always available to lead me, guide me, and refresh my soul. In Your Son’s Abundant Name, Amen. (by Keri Eichberger)

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**Stop, Look and Listen to Jesus**

Sunday, March 2, 2025 [Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3a28-36+(37-43)&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Back in 1992, Steve Martin starred in a movie called *Leap of Faith.* It’s a quirky film about a con man named Jonas Nightengale, a traveling evangelist who uses faith to prey upon the unsuspecting. In one scene, Jonas comes out on stage under a circus tent, wearing a white jacket. The lights go down, and in the darkness, he pulls off his jacket and turns it inside out. When the spotlight returns, it’s as though a thousand beams of light shoot off in every direction. The coat is covered with shiny sequins. Nightingale is transformed into something like a walking version of a disco ball.

Unfortunately, Nightingale is not pointing to God. He is pointing to himself. He is in the evangelism game for money and fame. To Nightingale, a congregation gathered in humility and hope on a hot summer evening underneath the revival tent is nothing more than several hundred suckers waiting to be fleeced. Nightingale’s light shines brightly, but it is a false light. Some lights will point us in the wrong direction. Other lights point us to a greater light. We need to know how to tell the difference.

There is currently, a popular video streaming series about Jesus: *The Chosen*. The series is capturing the hearts and minds of a loyal audience; many people contribute money for the ongoing production through a crowdfunding arrangement. Viewers feel invested in the show more than just financially; they want to see the story of Jesus told on the screen in ways that emphasize not only his humanity, but also his divinity.

Dallas Jenkins, the show’s creator, writer, and director recently surprised fans when he mentioned in an interview that he did not plan to portray the Transfiguration of Jesus. Previously, Jenkins stated that the series would faithfully support Scripture; but in this interview, Jenkins stated that showing the face of Jesus glowing, as the transfiguration scene would require, seemed like too much sci-fi to him. Jenkins is not skeptical about the Transfiguration, but he is not convinced that depicting it visually would contribute to either the cinematic or faith goals he has for the series. Fans pushing for the inclusion of the Transfiguration say the scene is important because when God says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” it confirms Jesus’ divinity for the three disciples who were there; they believe that it would confirm Jesus’ divinity for the viewers of *The Chosen* as well.

But, as Steve Martin’s Jonas Nightengale proves, shiny lights and authoritative voices do not always point us to the truth. We need to be discerning and not distracted. I appreciate