Have you ever had an experience that you never wanted to end? Maybe it was a joyous time, like a wedding, surrounded by all your friends and family, held at a beautiful location, with lots of merriment; or a vacation, maybe somewhere in the tropics, at one of those all-inclusive resorts. Melissa just showed me a picture of such a resort in the Maldives, it was beautiful with all the blue water and palm trees, the guest accommodations were huts built out upon the water. It reminded me of a book that I read when I was young, Ernest Hemingway's *Islands in the Stream*. All I wanted then was to get myself a fishing boat like his and live my life on the water fishing. Maybe your idea of an experience that you never wanted to end would be less of an outside thing, but a long stay in a fine five star hotel complete with room service, fine linens and services. Maybe you are young or young at heart and your idea of an experience that you did not want to end would be a trip to Disney World? Yet it seems that those experiences always have to come to an end...

Sometimes we have spiritual experiences that we never want to end. I remember going on an OCF retreat my first year in the Naval Academy. I had not been a very good plebe, and neither was I a very good academic. My grades were bad and my time in Bancroft was bad. So on the first Martin Luther King weekend I went with OCF to their retreat center, White Sulfur Spring in Mann’s Choice, PA. It was a spiritual high for me. Our time was filled with worship, fellowship, having a lot of fun, getting to know people in a way you can’t chipping the halls of Bancroft. I remember climbing to the top of a ridgeline and having a quiet time. And there on that Mountain Top – I didn’t want to come down, I didn’t want that time to end - I didn’t want to return to the Naval Academy; I didn’t want to return back to the dark ages of winter at USNA. I didn’t want that experience to ever end.

**Peter’s Mountaintop**

Peter also had a mountain top experience that he did not want to end, Christ’s Transfiguration. In fact it was not just the transfiguration that had Peter on a mountaintop but the build up to it. Luke chapter nine opens with Peter and the other disciples being given power over demons and the ability to cure diseases. They were sent out to the countryside alone to continue Jesus’ ministry. Can you imagine being sent out like that? Can you imagine the lack of confidence that they must have felt, the overwhelming fear? But soon after casting out their first
demon their fears would have melted away, and after their first healing they would have felt empowered, even victorious! They returned rejoicing in their newfound power and reported everything they did to Jesus; excited like a young child learning a new trick...

They then witness the great miracle of feeding the 5000 after which Peter boldly declares Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, the Chosen one of God. And then they had this mountain top experience, the Transfiguration, and Peter didn’t want that experience to end. Peter wanted to stay on the mountaintop. Peter said to Jesus in verse thirty three, *Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli’jah*—not knowing what he said.

But Peter and the other disciples couldn’t stay on the mountaintop either. They had to come down into their valley and face the realities of ministry there. They once again had to experience failure. For we continue reading in Luke nine the account of a man who’s son was being disturbed by an evil spirit. The disciples were begged to cure this boy but they could not. Their faith failed them, and at the point of their failure Jesus issues his greatest rebuke, “*O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?*”

Jesus’ rebuke was not aimed at the father of the boy, but at the many assembled there – Peter and his colleagues who failed. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the heartbreak they must have felt after being so victorious and even seeing their Lord transformed before their eyes? Peter went from the mountaintop deep down into the valley below and his faith failed him. The man who proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, who wanted to stay on that mountaintop... His faith failed him in the valley!

**Evangelist’s & Missionaries**

I am reminded of the testimonies delivered by evangelists and missionaries that always seem to be the stories that come from the mountaintops but never from the valleys below. So often we hear of success but never of failure, even though we know it must be so. We do need to give them some grace however... many people in ministry have to raise their own support, they have to give a good account to their supporters or they will lose their funding. But the result is a false presentation of the difficulty of ministry and the challenges of living faithfully when life’s challenges beset you.
It is best when we enter ministry, and when we support it, that there is a faithful representation of its challenges. For God did not call us to live on the mountaintops but in the valleys below. He calls us to live this life in conflict with the world and its many ills. If we are truly going to continue our Lord’s work we need to see our ministry from the perspective of Christ.

**A Different View from Christ:**

In Luke chapter 9, Jesus twice foretells to his disciples, that he cannot stay on the mountaintop. He twice tells them the need for his ultimate humiliation – his need to come down into the valley.

We see it first recorded in verse 22, Jesus said: *The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*

And again in verse 44 he reminds them vigorously: *Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men.*

Jesus centers his ministry upon the truth of the coming of the Kingdom of God – the ultimate mountaintop experience... But builds this teaching upon the foundation of the lowest valley, the valley of the shadow of death – his passion: his death, burial and resurrection. Even when he was upon the mountain talking with Moses and Elijah the point of the conversation was his upcoming departure, *his Exodus.* Moses, the man who led God’s people out of Egypt, speaks to God’s chosen one about His Exodus, his need for a departure, his need for going to the cross and becoming the promised sacrifice for us.

But when they came down from the mountain, to continue the work of the Lord, the disciple’s faith proved too fragile for the valley below. They came face to face with their inability when they were unable to heal a small boy. Jesus responded to their failure in verse 41: *O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?*

If the disciple’s mountaintop faith could not last into the valleys below how can we keep our faith either? How can we keep our faith, strongly held on our mountaintops, while we yet live in this life with all its valleys of desperation & despair? In these dark days of winter can our faith remain firm in Christ? When we fail, can our faith remain resolute?
We Are To Listen

The answer to keeping our mountain top faith even in the valleys of life can be found in our Luke passage. God’s voice proclaims a clear directive in verse thirty-five: And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (Luke 9:35)

This command is a clear fulfillment of prophecy and the promise of God to the people of God at Mount Horeb during the Exodus. When the people heard God’s voice coming from the cloud, they protested to Moses and said, You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die. (Exodus 20:19). God agreed and later proclaimed through Moses: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

You may ask how do we in this age listen to the words of Christ? The answer is simple through daily reading of scripture. You must ask yourselves: How can we have faith if we do not feed that faith? How can we know what God has done if we do not daily remind ourselves of what he did? Will we not be like the man that James tells us about who looks into a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like?

Are we to forget what God has done in the midst of our pain? Or shall we look to scripture for what Christ says and remember it in our pain? Are we to deny the truth of his promises when we suffer? Or do we hold fast to those promises and believe in faith what he said is true.

But we are not just to listen to him we are all called to pray.

We Are To Pray

Even Jesus prayed on the Mountaintop before the transfiguration and he prayed in his valley below, the Garden of Gethsemane, before his exodus, before his suffering and passion.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us to Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. This is what he tells us to do and we are to listen. We are to pray constantly, rejoice always, giving thanks in all situations.

Another passage calls us to not be anxious about anything but does not leave us to contend with our anxiety alone; it tells us how to combat our anxiety through prayer. Philippians 4:6-7 says: Have no
anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Here we have a promise for our practice of prayer - we have been given the promise of the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. And what peace is that but the peace that is remarkably present even in the most taxing situations. Peace that defies rational thought, peace that perseveres in a Christian but is never present with those who lack faith. Here we have a key to our strength of faith in the valleys of life, our prayer, rejoicing with thanksgiving and a sure promise of peace... hope for our lives despite our circumstances!

Yes we are to Listen to our Lord, we are called to follow his example, to pray, and are even given a promise of peace. But this is not all that we are to do for we are first required to come to him by faith.

**We Are To Come To Christ By Faith**

The father in our passage desperately brings his son to Jesus, even after the disciples had failed. His need to find hope for his son reminded me of another father also desperate for his child’s healing. We find this broken hearted man in Mark chapter nine coming to Jesus by faith, and equally desperate that his faith be strengthened in the midst of his need.

Mark 9:23-24 Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

Here scripture records for us how we too can come to Jesus, even when we struggle with doubt. We can come to him and cry out even in our darkest valley saying “I believe; help my unbelief”

Do you have doubt? Do you struggle in your faith? Have you not yet come to a place where you can implicitly believe in Christ not only on the mountaintop but in life’s valleys below? Do you struggle in your faith when the strain of life crumbles around you? Come to Christ in faith, whatever faith you have - however small, and declare your faith to him and ask for that faith to be strengthened. The Lord will honor that prayer and see you through your difficulty, and you will be able to rejoice in him; on the mountaintops and valleys below.