



*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -*

**Matthew 15:9**

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## **Conversing with Jesus**

Last week Elkanah's family came for lunch after church. This is a regularly scheduled gathering that I have come to enjoy. It gives me a chance to show off my skills as a self-trained chef.

For dessert last week I decided to serve apple dumplings which are scrumptious when served hot. Since I no longer attend church I was available to pop those things into the oven at noon which meant they were finished baking just about the time we were ready for dessert.

On Friday I did as much as I could in advance which was simply to prepare a large batch of pie crust. The apples were large and each one took about enough dough for an entire pie. And for this family, that's a plus.

When Elkanah left for church at 10:45 on Saturday, I began working on those beautiful and huge Granny Smith apples. I washed then partially cored those 7 apples, leaving the fruit in its original shape but also leaving a small amount of the core at the bottom. This made a well in the center of the apple. Next I grabbed a bowl, placed sugar and apple pie spice (available at Kroger) into it and stirred, making sure they were mixed thoroughly. Then I placed some of the sugar and spice mix into the hollowed-out core of each apple.

I then tossed a stick of real butter into the microwave and melted the thing. When it was good and runny, I poured butter into the hole of each apple, covering the sugar and spice mix with the butter. Then I poured heavy cream into the core of each apple, almost, but not quite filling the hole.

OK, it was time to go to work on that large bowl of pie dough that was in my refrigerator. After rolling out enough to make a large pie, I turned a plate upside down and used it as a guide to cut the dough out in a large circle. I made 7 of these circles, one for each apple. Then I placed one of the stuffed apples on the middle of one of those sheets of pie dough, pulled the dough up around the apple, and completely covered the apple. I did this for all 7 apples. The next thing was to place the dough-covered apples onto a baking sheet that was big enough to hold them all without them touching. I basted each apple dumpling with melted butter, then sprinkled it with a generous helping of the sugar and spice mixture.

At noon those dumplings went into the oven. While we were eating lunch we could smell the aroma of those baking apples. They smelled scrumptious! The house smelled so good! And the aroma lingered in the air for several hours.

When we were finishing up our lunch we heard the timer go off telling us that those dumplings were ready to eat. Elkanah and his sisters got up, grabbed our dirty plates, then went to the kitchen where they pulled those apples out of the oven. In just a few minutes they returned to the dining room bringing us each a clean plate that had an apple dumpling on it.

Having experienced the aroma of those apples baking while we ate made our mouths water. And we weren't too polite about waiting for others to be ready to start on their dumpling. The anticipation of what was producing that wonderful smell being put into our mouths was just too much. Mmmm..... We didn't wait.

But something was terribly wrong. That morning I had misplaced my glasses so when I prepared those apples, I hadn't been able to see them very well and I didn't notice that they were rotting. Not only were they unfit to eat, two of them had become the habitat of a worm! When my vegan mother-in-law cut into her rotten apple and discovered a worm, well, the word that came out of the mouth of that preacher's wife wasn't what was expected.

And now I admit that this story was an allegory. It didn't really happen. While it is true that Elkanah's family regularly comes here for lunch after church, and his mother is vegan and married to a retired pastor, the rest of the story was false. The truth is that last week Elkanah's sister brought apple pie and a sugar-free blueberry pie. I had nothing to do with the desserts unless you call my Bandera style cornbread dessert. That cornbread recipe calls for sugar but when I prepared it I only used half the amount it suggested.

In the group that gathers here for lunch after church there is only 1 that eats

sugar. Preparing something like those apple dumplings would be ill-advised. Elkanah and I ate the cornbread but that isn't something we're in the habit of doing.

There was a bit more about the story that was truthful and that was the recipe. If you're into cooking you might want to try out those dumplings. It's been a long time since I've made them and I wrote the recipe by memory so I don't guarantee the results. If you like to cook them play around with the information I gave you and see what you can come up with.

Now let's consider what was going on while you were reading that little story of an apple dessert turned to a fiasco. Where was your brain? What was it doing? Unless you have some sort of brain damage, then as you read that you were envisioning the preparation of those dumplings. You may have even salivated a bit when you read the recipe and wished you were here to help us eat them. You may have even imagined the smell of those dumplings as they baked and filled my house with the aroma. Then when you read that the apples were rotten and wormy, you pictured in your mind a sweet, little old lady slip and say a naughty word.

Our brains are active. They are filled with snapshots of things we have experienced in the past, and things we anticipate in the future. They are also filled with things that will never happen. Our thoughts run at high speed going from subject to subject, seemingly having no boundaries on what they will imagine. And this is especially bad when we are trying to pray (more about this later).

There, I said the word. Imagine. Or, Imagination. Our imaginations are a gift from God. When we are feeling ill or blue, we can imagine ourselves feeling well and happy. This will tend to make us feel better and for many people it will lighten their moods.

Try this one. When Elkanah came home a few days ago, he saw me sitting in the den and instead of closing the door, he told me to come see what was out there. Mia was anxious to go outside and she ran out the door and dove under the car. But it was cold outside so she didn't stay, she was ready to come right back in. Mia wasn't what Elkanah had found that he wanted me to see. What he found was a small snake.

The step up to get into the house at the carport door is too high for me to comfortably make. When we bought the house Elkanah noticed I was having trouble getting into the house so he took me to the local building supply and let

me pick out a concrete step. We took it home and placed it in front of the door where it has served me well for the past 15+ years. When my leg swelled up I began having difficulty lifting it high enough to make that 7-inch step. Elkanah took a couple thick boards, nailed them together, and placed them on the carport right in front of that concrete step. That has been helpful. And this little snake seemed to also like it because it slithered up underneath those boards.

What was interesting about this snake was it's coloring. Never before had I seen a lime-green colored snake that had purple spots on it.

Gotcha again. Yes, the steps to get into the house are accurate, and Elkanah did find a snake out there, but the coloring wasn't a lime-green and it didn't have purple spots. But when you read that most likely you were imagining what it would be like to get into my house by way of those steps. You may have envisioned my swollen leg and my failing attempts to access my house because I can't lift that leg high enough. You may have been startled at my claim for the coloring of the snake, but you probably also imagined a lime-green snake with purple spots.

Imaginations are what have inspired inventors throughout the ages. Things would not have been created if someone hadn't first imagined it. Having and using our imaginations is not a satanic act. There are people who fear to hear any teaching that encourages the use of imagination. But you've got to wonder why. What are they afraid of?

This week I noticed that YouTube was suggesting that I watch some sermons dealing with imagination. The speakers were people that I respect and put a lot of credence into their teaching so I have been listening to some of their talks on imagination. This morning I heard Dr. Greg Boyd talking about why people fear imagination. He said that it stems from the new age movement. People are imagining themselves going out into some other realm, on a different plane, or something. If you want to hear for yourself what Dr. Boyd said I've placed a link to his sermon at the bottom of this document.

When I discussed this article with Elkanah he suggested that people fear anything that isn't reality. They have a fear of books and articles that tell fiction. And he explained why they have this fear but with my failing memory I don't have a clue what that reason was. Sorry.

But I do have a memory from way-back. When I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade there was a book in the classroom's library. I found it and read it several times. The teacher found it also and removed it from the library because it was a fantasy. It was the

story of a toy that fell off a shelf and landed on a globe. When it hit the globe it had an adventure in what to it was another world. Charlotte's Web was also in the classroom's library and it also was removed.

I can remember my disappointment when the teacher told us that she had taken the book and thrown it out in the trash. None of us believed that it was a true story. Toys don't have an awareness and when they fall onto a globe they don't experience an adventure on another world while they try to find their way back home. Disappointment wasn't the only thing I experienced when that book was removed. I don't remember the teacher's wording, but when she told us the reason for removing the book, I also felt shame for having enjoyed the book.

God gave us our brains and he created them to function with an active imagination. Just try turning off your thoughts. Try it. Within 2 seconds you'll imagine yourself saying, "Hey, you're doing pretty good at not thinking." To not think means that you don't have an awareness. To not have an awareness means you don't have life. You're nothing better than an inanimate toy on a shelf.

Umm.... since I can't seem to think of anything more to say at the moment let's change the subject. What's a better subject to talk about than Jesus? Now that's one fantastic man to talk about! And he's someone that we can only find nice things to say about. Whoo! Gurrlll.... That is one fine man! And I seem to have found my silly bone again. Sorry.

This afternoon I was thinking about how Jesus prayed. And I compared it to how I pray. What I was taught was that the devils can hear us but they can't read our minds. That has led me to fear speaking out loud when praying. I don't want those demons that harass me to know what I'm thinking. They are so evil they would find delight in taking my fears and innermost thoughts and finding a way to turn them against me. This fear has led me to pray silently, without even moving my lips. Those buggers can probably read lips too.

So I pondered how Jesus prayed. I know that he would spend entire nights in prayer. He would get up way early in the morning to spend time alone with his Father. Let's see if we can find some text that will shed a light on how Jesus prayed.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" – Mark 1:35-37 NIV

This text indicates that Jesus prayed alone. In fact, people didn't know where he was, they were looking for him. But was this an isolated case?

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" – Matthew 26:36-46 NIV

This passage gives us a bit more information. Jesus took three disciples with him to pray, but when it was time for him to pray, he told them to stay where they were while he went off by himself. He sought solitude to commune with his Father. But there is something else here that we need to notice and that is that Jesus must have prayed out loud. If he prayed without speaking, how would those who wrote this story have known what he said. And I say those who wrote because this same story is told in the book of Mark, chapter 14.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."  
– Luke 3:21, 22 NIV

This one brings in another aspect of Jesus's prayers. He prayed at his own baptism. While he was praying His Father came to him and spoke to him.

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. – Luke 5:15, 16 NIV

This passage shows that even though Jesus was sought by crowds of people who were wanting to be with him, he often took the time to be alone so he could pray alone.

Luke 6:12 – Jesus went out to a mountainside and spent the night in prayer

Luke 9:18 – Jesus prayed in private while in the presence of his disciples

Luke 9:28-36 – Jesus went up on a mountain to pray and took 3 of his disciples with him. While he was praying his glory became visible. This glory was blindingly bright. Peter began to babble and while he was speaking a cloud covered them and the three disciples were afraid. A voice came from that cloud proclaiming, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

John 17:1-5 – Jesus prays, asking to be glorified.

I think that's enough. From the texts we've examined we should be able to deduce that Jesus:

1. Prayed often
2. Prayed alone
3. Prayed at night
4. Prayed out loud
5. Asked for things
6. Was glorified when he prayed

We can learn from Jesus's prayer experience.

Praying often is an activity that we need to turn into a lifestyle. The term is “pray without ceasing.” That doesn't mean to place yourself in a cloister, never coming out into the world, and spending all your time in prayer. We need to live our lives as normal, but we need to develop the attitude that Jesus is with us always. And since he's with us then we should feel free to speak to him whenever we want or need. We should speak to him constantly. This is a way of acknowledging his presence is with you.

You can argue that it's the Holy Spirit that is always with us, not Jesus. Jesus gave up his omnipresence when he took on humanity. I don't buy that one. Logically it is illogical. Yes, the Holy Spirit is with us always. No problem there. But consider this text. Jesus is speaking to his followers after his resurrection from the dead.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. – Matthew 28:16-20 KJV

Jesus said that all power had been given to him. He also said that he would be with them, now us. He cannot be with us all if he is confined to singularity-presence. We are expecting to spend time with Jesus in heaven. If he is bound to singularity-presence then how often do you expect to see him? We are his bride. He is coming to take us home with him to be with him. What kind of relationship will we have with him if we only get to spend a few moments with him once every few millennia? No. I choose to believe him when he stated that all power had been given to him. I plan to spend eternity with him beside me.

Jesus prayed alone. This one is obvious. There are things that he needed to say that people weren't prepared to hear. Also, being around others causes distractions. He needed time alone with his Father so he could commune without interruptions.

Think of it this way. Do you want the phone to ring in the middle of an intimate moment with your partner? Do you want your partner commenting on things that are happening at work while you are in the middle of “the act”? I don't think you want that. Neither does God. Neither does Jesus. Jesus wanted and needed



that uninterrupted communicating with his Father.

It was interesting that the Bible made several references to Jesus praying at night. I can only speculate why he would do that. I write at night because I can't sleep during the day. I doubt that Jesus had that problem. My suspicions are that night was the best time to get the time alone with his Father that he needed.

Can you imagine spending the entire night in prayer? I would run out of things to say. But if you put a keyboard under my fingers and let me type my prayer then I just might be able to pull off an all-nighter. But Jesus didn't have a keyboard. They hadn't yet been invented.

Jesus prayed out loud. I have recently learned that there is a reason for doing this. It's done as a protection from a wayward brain that cannot be controlled and insists on scampering about hither, thither, and yon.

When you pray in your mind only it goes something like this:

Dear Jesus, Thank you for all that, oh yeah, I've got to be sure to put potatoes on the shopping list. And hey, did you see what Montague was wearing today? Where did he get those shoes? Oh, I'm supposed to be praying, sorry. Dear Jesus, I'm sorry. I don't like that my mind wanders like this and I'll try to do better. I'll try to train it to what was that noise? Is there a cat at the door? It's so cold outside. I'd better go check to see if Topsy is wanting in.

And while all this gibber-jabber is going on Jesus is hearing it. All of it. He's patiently waiting for you to collect your thoughts so you can speak with him but he also knows that you won't be able to pull it off. Thankfully we have the Holy Spirit to intervene and make some sort of sense out of what we've got racing through the gray matter.

This week I learned that praying out loud is important in that it helps to prevent the mind from playing bumper cars fueled by speed. When we speak our prayers out loud, our mind is occupied trying to make the lips move and the sounds come out but there isn't enough "juice" in the brain for it to be going full throttle through the daisy patch. It keeps on track.

Jesus asked for things. The Bible tells how he would pray for his disciples. He prayed for those he healed. He even prayed for himself. But his prayers were always in line with God's will. What he wanted was what God wanted.

When Jesus was transfigured he was glorified when he prayed. Perhaps we

should examine what it meant to be glorified. When he was glorified he became as bright as a flash of lightning. This indicated that he was Godlike. What is God's glory? It's his Character. When Jesus was transfigured his Godly character flashed out and the disciples described him as being as bright as a flash of lightning. He was glorified in this way to strengthen those who were with him and witnessing the event.

Know what? I've presented you with two different topics tonight. First I romped on you about using your imagination. Our imagination is a gift from God. We use it when we design patchwork quilts. We use it when we write thank-you cards. We use it when we look at our dirty kitchen and think of what we want that kitchen to look like when we're through cleaning it. Using our imagination is not evil.

If you read the article I posted a few days ago then you may remember that I said I was hoping to share with you something that I had just learned this week. Tonight I had Elkanah sit down with me and asked if he had ever heard of this and the response was a negative. I want to tell you about "praying through the Scriptures." To pray through the Scriptures we need to do two things. We need to use our imagination and we need to speak out loud.

Ah ha! So Hannah did in fact know what she was up to when writing all that stuff that seemingly had no connection. (Grinning mischeviously)

For us to pray through the Scriptures we will need to take a small passage of text. I have chosen John 10:22-30 for this exercise.

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." – John 10:22-30 NIV

When we read this passage we need to use our imagination and place ourselves into the situation that is described. This incidence occurred during a celebration. Since it was a celebration we can assume there were a lot of people in the area. It was also cold. People were bundled up and when able they were hovering around any burning fires in an attempt to be warm. Jesus was walking through the temple courts. He was also experiencing this cold weather and may have also wanted something to warm him.

He was being followed by people who were pestering him with the question of who exactly was he? Was he the Messiah or not? When was he going to admit it?

You can almost hear impatience in Jesus's voice as he spoke to them. He did admit that he was the Messiah, but he told them that he had already told them but they weren't listening.

Now that we've placed ourselves into this picture. We need to go to a private place and reread this passage but only a few words at a time. As we read through this again, we need to pray out loud. And remember this is God we are speaking to so we can say whatever we want.

I'll go first so you can see how it feels.

Text:

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.

Dear Jesus: This text is just another place where we learn that you became a human and lived here with us. Thank you for caring enough to do that for us. The more I study and learn about you the more deeply I fall in love with you. The more deeply I fall in love with you the more willing I become to trust you implicitly.

You experienced the chill of winter without central heating, or the heat of summer without air conditioning. We have become so spoiled. It reminds me of the teaching that those who have the least here on this earth will receive the most when we reach heaven. I used to resent that but I don't anymore. I'm spoiled. So many people have had to face the trials of this life without the amenities that I've had. They deserve something better.

I look forward to the day when we will no longer suffer from being too hot or too cold. – Amen

Now it's your turn. You know how it works. Go somewhere you can be alone and read through this passage then talk to God using your voice. Say to him whatever it is the Holy Spirit brings to your mind.

Let's do some more.

Text:

The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Dear Jesus: Again, it's me. I read this passage and marvel at the unbelief of the Jews. And yet, it isn't just the Jews of Bible times, I see it happening here in the world today. For some reason people don't want to know you. They want to worship a god that is angry and eager to commit the bloodiest massacre ever. I don't understand this mind set. I have such compassion for those who don't know you and don't want to know you. It hurts. I see people turning their back to you and it hurts deeply.

But what about you? If it hurts me so much and I only know a few people, how does this affect you? The pain you must be experiencing is incomprehensible. I'm so sorry. I wish I could do something to help carry your load but I know that I am a feeble, erring human who in the grand scheme of things is still just an infant.

I believe you. I believe you are the Messiah. I believe you are the Creator. I believe that you and our Father are just alike. I believe that our Father is just as wonderful and loving as you are. I say this from my heart, thank you, and I love you. – Amen

Now it's your turn. Again, speak with your voice and talk to God, saying whatever it is that comes to mind.

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

Dear Jesus: How this must have hurt you to recognize that these people weren't yours. You are fully God and God is the embodiment of Love. You loved those

people yet you had to experience knowing that they didn't return your love. They didn't believe you. I'm so sorry. I'm so filled with compassion for you. If it makes you feel any better, then know that I for one do believe you. And I love you. – Amen

Now it's your turn again. By now you should be getting the hang of it. Just say whatever it is that comes to mind.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Dear Jesus: You have acknowledged that there are people who believe and follow you. They know your voice. And we have your promise that you will give us life everlasting. It strikes me that you stated no one would snatch your people out of your hand. But I have to marvel at this and wonder why anyone would want to be out of your hand. Given the option of following the devil who wants to destroy us and does all in his power to make us miserable, or following you when all you want for us is the best and to shower us with your love, why would we want to be anywhere other than in your hands? As for this lady, there are times when I find it difficult to hold on, but when those times come I know that you are hanging onto me. Thank you.

And as for the eternal life thing, thanks but I don't see that as important. For me it isn't an issue. What's important is being able to be with you. That's the most important thing of all. I said it before, I'll say it again. I love you. – Amen

Now it's your turn. When you're done with this one we have one more to go.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Dear Jesus: I'm reminded of the prayer you taught your disciples. It began "Our Father". By that teaching then I can believe that your Father is also my Father. And you and our Father are the same. I am so safe. Life on this planet is dangerous and sucky but I am so safe. I know that you love me. I know that when I experience the trials of life that you are right here with me and experiencing the trials with me. I look forward to the day when I can see you face-to-face and know that nothing will ever try to part us. Thank you again. – Amen

That's the last one. When you get that one done you'll have successfully

completed this crash course on praying through the Scriptures. And when you pray like this, you'll find that time passes. You may end up praying all night long without realizing it.

So, morning approaches. I've been working on this since yesterday. I spent a couple hours yesterday morning then all night long to finish it. Hopefully this will be beneficial to you and you'll find yourself growing even closer to God.

Happy Sabbath to all.

Lots of love,

Hannah

Dr. Boyd, "Imagining Prayer" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I7ZVGQgaHc>

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