**Understanding Prayer: Pray With Understanding**

These are my notes from a teaching by Ted Fellows

Prayer is something that is to address every single area of our lives. The question has never been what should we pray about but how should we pray today, in this dispensation of the grace of God. How is it that our prayer life should function today? Prayer is a vital issue to the individual believer.

(2 Timothy 2:15 KJV) Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Most people pray "The Our Father", "Ask and you shall receive", "If two or more agree on anything" and find these methods do not work. We need to take a dispensational position and the conclusion it brings concerning how God works today and then apply that to the subject of prayer.

Most people have learned how to pray by listening to other people pray and that is not necessarily the best source to have.

Now, try to set aside traditions and preconceived ideas and discuss the issue of prayer from a dispensational viewpoint.

(1 Corinthians 14:15 KJV) What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

We see two ways to pray in this passage:

* with the spirit
* with the understanding

We are to pray with understanding. To understand something is to have the same idea as the person who is speaking. The idea of understanding has to do with there being a common grasp of information. We should have the same ideas and the same meaning as the individual who is speaking to us. The Apostle Paul wants us to pray intelligently, knowing what God has said.

**Pray With Understanding**

1. We need to pray with understanding the dispensation in effect.  
   Prayer is a dispensational subject.   
   There are three time frames: Time Past, But Now, and Ages to Come.(see Ephesians 2:11, 13, 7)

(Ephesians 3:1-7 KJV) For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, {2} If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: {3} How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, {4} Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) {5} Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; {6} That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: {7} Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

We cannot go into Time Past and get doctrine for our prayer life today. We can learn about praying, persistency and consistency in prayer from reading about how people prayed in Time Past. But the people in Time Past prayed for different reason and expected certain things to happen when they prayed. Prayer will always function in accordance with the program that is in effect.

* 1. In Time Past, blessings were promised for obedience and curses for disobedience.

(Deuteronomy 11:26-28 KJV) Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; {27} A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: {28} And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.

In Deuteronomy 28, we can see more clearly that physical blessings were promised for obedience and curses for disobedience. These were promised under the economy of the Law.

* 1. In Time Past, sin separates Israel from God.

(Isaiah 59:1-3 KJV) Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: {2} But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. {3} For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

(Psalms 66:18 KJV) If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

(Proverbs 15:29 KJV) The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

This will also be true in Ages to Come:

(Micah 3:4 KJV) Then shall they cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings.

These verses speak of sin restricting the prayer life of a believer when it is to function in accordance with the Law. This is not the case for you and I today. Now there is absolutely no time when our prayer life will be hindered before the Lord because of sin. This is because you and I, in the age of grace, have something people in time past never had: a standing in grace, total forgiveness, acceptance of God in Christ.

* 1. In Time Past, confession and obedience were necessary for answered prayer.

(Leviticus 26:40-43 KJV) If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; {41} And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: {42} Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. {43} The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes.

When Israel confessed and acknowledges their sin, blessing and fellowship with God was restored.

(2 Chronicles 7:13-14 KJV) If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; {14} If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Physical blessing was in response to Israel's prayer life and physical judgement because of their sin.

Israel was to pray in a certain manner. See 2 Chronicles 6:19-27. Verses 20, 21, and 26 say they are to make their prayers "toward this place", they were to pray toward the temple because that is where God dwelt. This explains why Daniel, in Daniel 6:10, prayed toward Jerusalem. He prayed and confessed his sin (Daniel 9) and the sin of his nation. That is the way prayer was to function at that time. Daniel would never have thought to pray to have his inner man strengthened as you and I pray today (Eph 3:16). Daniel did not have the Holy Spirit of God residing in him as we do today. Moses would not have prayed that way either. So why should you and I pray the way they prayed in time past? We are in a different situation with different circumstances.

* 1. In Time Past, there were specific prayers and specific results immediately.

(Genesis 20:17-18 KJV) So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. {18} For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

(Judges 16:28-30 KJV) And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. {29} And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. {30} And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.

(1 Samuel 1:10 KJV) And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.  
(1 Samuel 1:27 KJV) For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

(James 5:17-18 KJV) Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. {18} And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (See 1 Kings 17:1, 18:42-46)

God indicated to them their prayer life would change the weather but God does not indicate that to us today. In Time past, signs of the weather was an indicator the nation Israel could look to and measure whether or not they were obedient. Israel's crops, military endeavors, and physical circumstances were indicators of their relationship and fellowship with God.

Prayer is a dispensational topic and prayer will function in accordance to the dispensation that is in effect. So we are to pray with an understanding that we live in a different dispensation than the people we read about in Time Past.

1. We need to pray with an understanding of the nature of our dispensation.

(Romans 5:1-2 KJV) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: {2} By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" is a reference to the work of the cross, what Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

(Philippians 4:6-7 KJV) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. {7} And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The nature of our age is we have a standing in grace which results in peace with God.

(Romans 5:3-4 KJV) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; {4} And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

Tribulation, suffering and problems today are not a sign of God's displeasure with us. They are a part of the nature of the age in which we live; because of the way God equipped us tribulations, sufferings and problems can be productive. They are never a sign of God's love being withdrawn or the absence of God's favor.

(Romans 5:5-8 KJV) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. {6} For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. {7} For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. {8} But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ died for us while we were ungodly, sinners and enemies God reconciled us. He loved us even in our lost sinful condition.

(Romans 5:9 KJV) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

If God loved us when we were lost, think about how much more He loves us now that we are saved. God proved His love for us once for all when He gave His Son to die on the cross. Your situations, circumstances, trials and afflictions are never an indicator of God's love for you. The greatest indicator of God's love was through the cross of His Son. God's love was demonstrated once and for all through the cross of Calvary.

(Romans 5:10-11 KJV) For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. {11} And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

(Romans 5:17 KJV) For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

God desires us to reign in life, not to be under the circumstances. We should not let the circumstances of our life bring us down.

We have an abundance of grace. The nature of our relationship with God is that we have peace with God. Our prayer life is not affected by our sin because our sin has been completely and totally dealt with on the cross and we now have a standing in grace.

1. If we are to pray with understanding we need to understand the nature of our life on earth:

(Romans 8:18-23 KJV) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. {19} For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. {20} For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, {21} Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. {22} For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. {23} And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

There are two categories of our life:

* 1. The way things are now - suffering
  2. The way things will be in the future - glory

Our bodies in this age are in bondage to corruption. Sin is working in our members and bringing forth fruit unto death. Death is a process that is actively at work and we are not going to escape that bondage no matter how hard we try.

In Time Past and especially during the earthly ministry of Christ, that process of death was occasionally suspended and healing took place in individuals. This was done as a sign to Israel to confirm a message and that a person was sent from God. But now, we have the completed word of God and God is no longer sending men with a new message that needs to be confirmed. So there is no one man that is going around healing people to confirm a message.

The nature of our age today is one of corruption, suffering and sickness. God does have a program to deliver us but that is in the future. There is suffering now and the glory is to come.

(Romans 8:24-25 KJV){24} For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? {25} But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

We are saved by hope; this is not saved from the penalty of sin but saved from the despair and discouragement of being part of the groaning creation. Our deliverance from depression and discouragement is based upon something that we do not see. Our physical deliverance is NOT something we see. It is something that is out there in the future that we are look forward to obtaining.

Many times an individual looks for deliverance in the here and now and is greatly disappointed. This is because they are looking for and desiring the wrong thing. The nature of our age is that of suffering, sickness, disease and tribulation. However, this does not indicate God's love for us.

(Romans 8:35-37 KJV) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. {37} Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God because His love for us is linked to His Son. Although we are subject to death, God's design today is to give us victory IN our circumstances, trials, etc. It is God's design that these trials and tribulations be productive in our lives and work patience, experience and hope.

God wants us to be more than conquerors; He wants us to reign in life. God wants us to have victory in our circumstances and situations.

(Romans 8:28 KJV) And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

God fixed it so whatever happens to us in life we can be productive and positive: if we walk according to His purpose, if we allow His to work in our lives in accordance to His will.

In our dispensation, God has not promised physical safety, protection and/or provision. We are not told to expect or demand these things; we are told to expect suffering, hardship and difficulty.

1. We need to pray understanding the nature of our service.

(Romans 12:1-2 KJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. {2} And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

What do we do with a sacrifice? We kill it. Our lives are to be living sacrifices. The issue of our service is not our comfort, ease or convenience but our responsibility to do God's will.

(2 Corinthians 4:11-12 KJV) For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. {12} So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

The issue of a sacrificial service is the issue of our Christian life.

1. We need to pray with an understanding of God's will.

(Ephesians 5:15-17 KJV) See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, {16} Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. {17} Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

We are responsible to understand God's will, not search for it. There are many books that are written on "How to find the Will of God". However, the will of God is found in the Word of God:

(Romans 12:2 KJV) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

(Colossians 1:9 KJV) For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

(1 Thessalonians 4:3 KJV) For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

(1 Thessalonians 5:18 KJV) In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

(1 Timothy 2:4 KJV) Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

The will of God is not God predetermining every single thing that happens.

(Ephesians 1:11 KJV) In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

This seems to say God controls everything and causes everything. But this would also have to include the sinful acts of man. ALL things would then include ALL things, including the sinful acts of man as according to God's will. This is not the case.

The issue of the counsel of His will is the things God said He would do, it is not the manipulation of circumstances and every single event. When you pray, "Lord, if it be thy will to heal someone, have safe travels, etc.; you are thinking that God controls and manipulates all events. A verse like this is used to support that idea, but this verse is not talking about God's will in individual events; it is talking about the eternal purpose God has revealed to us.

(Ephesians 1:9 KJV) Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

God has revealed His will to us.

(Acts 21:4, 10-14 KJV) And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. ... {10} And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. {11} And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. {12} And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. {13} Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. {14} And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

The will of God cannot refer to individual events. Paul was told that he should not go to Jerusalem, not that he was forbidden to go. Paul was told what would happen if he went and he decides to go despite what he is told will happen. They then ceased to pray, "Thy will be done."

It would appear that Paul's going to Jerusalem was contrary to what the will of the Lord is. How can Paul's friends say he is doing the will of the Lord if he is going against what the Spirit said through a prophet. The answer is that Paul, as he goes, is going to be doing the work of the ministry: Paul will preach the gospel, he will try to finish his course with joy and testify of the grace of God. So, Paul will be doing the will of God as he goes and preaches the gospel. The will of God is to preach the gospel. The will of God is not the outcome of events but rather it is doing the work of the ministry.

1. We need to pray with the understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

(Ephesians 5:18-20 KJV) And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; {19} Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; {20} Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

We know that today the filling of the Holy Spirit is not done as on the day of Pentecost. How are we filled with the Spirit today? There is a parallel passage in Col 3:16-17,

(Colossians 3:16-17 KJV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. {17} And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

How are we filled with the Spirit today? By letting the Word of Christ dwell in us.

(Acts 20:32 KJV) And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

The word of His grace is able to build us up. The Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives as we think about our prayer life is in accordance with being filled with the Spirit and having the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

(Ephesians 3:14-21 KJV) For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, {15} Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, {16} That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; {17} That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, {18} May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; {19} And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. {20} Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, {21} Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The Holy Spirit's ministry today is to strengthen the inner man (v16). As we let the word of grace dwell in us richly then the Spirit will strengthen our inner-man and Christ will dwell in our hearts, that is, He'll be able to live and function, He will live His life out of us.

Notice:

* 1. verse 16- Holy Spirit in you
  2. verse 17 - Christ dwell in you
  3. verse 19 - filled with the fullness of God

Today, we have the triune God residing in us in a way that no other believer in another dispensation had.

(2 Corinthians 4:9-11 KJV) Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; {10} Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. {11} For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Dying of the Lord Jesus, that is the sheep being brought to the slaughter, the living sacrifice; that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

God desires for Jesus Christ to live His life through you and me for His honor and His glory. How does this happen? By the word of Christ dwelling in you richly and the Spirit of God strengthening and empowering you to live your life for Him. The result then is Ephesians 3:18-19:

(Ephesians 3:18-19 KJV) May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; {19} And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Remember, we want to pray with understanding. We do not want to guess, assume, or pray on the basis of tradition. We want to pray with understanding what God wants to do.

(Ephesians 6:18 KJV) Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

(Philippians 4:6 KJV) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.