

Finding Our Purpose Through Prayer: A Four Step Approach

Contributed by Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd on May 7, 2021

Scripture: John 15:16, John 18:11, John 17:1-8, Psalms 130:5, Proverbs 3:5, Psalms 37:7, Habakkuk 2:1, Acts 9:6, Proverbs 19:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 1:11, John 18:37, Colossians 1:16

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: Our prayer life can look like a roller coaster. One way of stabilising our prayer life to use prayer to find our purpose in life. This four step approach can work.

Finding our Purpose through Prayer: A Four Step approach

Pastor has finished a series of sermons on the theme of prayer a few weeks back. So and let us review and meditate on that topic today. We all know the importance of prayer, and we are taught to pray through the scriptures, through fellowships, through parental or peer guidance, through sermons etc. Yet, many a time, our prayer life is like a roller coaster ride. At one end of the continuum are the times when we immerse ourselves in prayer, we fast and pray, we rend our hearts, we cry out to God. We are generally in this end of the continuum generally when we are in trouble, or anguished, or anxious; either for ourselves or for our loved ones, or the church or the nation etc. At the other end of the continuum are times when we just go through the motions of prayer, just because we might feel guilty if we do not pray. Some of us believe that we should pray about everything, and some of us are of the firm belief that we should pray only for very important things and not for "trivial things". Most of us are somewhere in between these two extreme ends of the continuum in our prayer lives.

The Lord has placed upon my heart to examine with you, few ways to bring some consistency on our prayer lives. This quest led me to the fact that we are more likely to stick to a prayer routine, if we find purpose in our lives through prayer. So that is the topic of today's message. How do we find our purpose in life through prayer?

But first let us answer the question, can our life's purpose be really be found in God? through communication with God? Through prayer?

Colossians 1:16 (MSG) For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him. The word is clear. Everything around us, including us, is created by Him for Him and hence we cannot find our purpose outside of Him. Ephesians 1:11 (MSG) reaffirms this: It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. So that should settle the question on whether we can find our life's purpose in God. And if we can find our purpose in Him, the only way to understand that purpose is to constantly communicate with the Lord. That is precisely what prayer is. A constant conversation with God. It does not matter, which end of the continuum we are in, we as Christians are asked to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). Fortunately for us, Bible does give us enough examples of long immersive prayers (King Solomon is one example) as well as short arrow prayers (Nehemiah is an example) and then several examples of people in between. So the good news is that immaterial of our style of praying, it is a way of conversing and communicating with our God. Whether you use the ACTS model of prayer or just the conversational mode of prayer, it is way of conversing with our personal God. And it is through those conversations that we find our purpose in life.

So how can we use prayer to find our purpose of our lives? My studies reveal that there are four steps we need to follow , if we wish to understand the purpose of our lives through prayer. They are as follows.

1. Seek God's will
2. Wait in faith for an answer
3. Obey His instruction when it comes
4. Be at Peace with the outcome

Step 1: Seek God's will through Prayer

Thanks to our fallen nature, all of us have our own self-will. Some of us have it very strong, and some of us probably to manageable levels. So it is natural that we wish to push our agenda in front of God, even before we start to pray. We have made up our minds about what we need to do and then we continue to pray to seek a confirmation for the same. In short, we end up seeking approval from God for our plans. But the Bible tells us Proverbs 19:21 (NKJV) 21 There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD'S counsel--that will stand. I don't want to be mistaken here. I am in no way saying that asking God for what we want, bringing our needs in front of God is wrong. It is absolutely not. While we have the freedom to ask for what we want, we also are reminded multiple times, that we are also to surrender our wishes to His will. Jesus exemplified this in the garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed for the bitter cup to be taken away from Him, but immediately surrendered the want to God's will be affirming, "Not my will but yours". It is the center piece of the Lord's prayer that we so often repeat, but fail to notice several times. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.." Paul's question in Acts 9:6 is loud and clear. "Lord, What do you want me to do?" Can we make that our prayer?

Step 2: Wait in faith for an answer

We live in a world that seeks and wants instant gratification. Recognitions should be instantaneous. Healing should be immediate. This instant gratification mentality has gotten into our prayer lives as well. We want immediate answers or else, we think the answer is not getting answered. The Bible teaches us to wait on the Lord. Habakkuk did that after his strong complaints to God. Habakkuk 2:1 (NKJV) 1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

Psalms gives us the way in which we must wait for answers after our prayers. Psalm 37:7 (NKJV) teaches us to wait patiently. 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; ... Psalm 62:1 (NKJV) teaches us to wait silently 1 Truly my soul silently waits for God;.... Proverbs 3:5 (NKJV) teaches us to wait trustingly. 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,..... Psalm 27:14 (NKJV) teaches us to wait courageously. 14 Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD! Psalm 130:5 (NKJV) teaches us to wait with our hope rooted in the Word of God. 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.

Step 3: Obey His instructions when it comes

When we pray, we seek God's will, and when that will is revealed to us, what are we supposed to do? The answer is obvious, isn't it? We are expected to obey. Instead, how many times have we resisted His

answers? How many times have we been tempted to say that there might be a mistake? Obedience is not always easy. Many of us are like Jonah. When God asks us to go in one direction we go exactly the opposite direction. What God expects us to do is to obey His instructions when it comes to us. Even when the instruction is not to our liking. Jesus prayed for the bitter cup to be taken away from Him, but God's will was different. Jesus went ahead and obeyed God to the full extent and went through that excruciating crucifixion, so that you and I might be saved.

Step 4: Be at Peace with the outcome

Once we have followed the three steps above, our work is actually done. It is then upto God. And we should be able to accept that as it is. We know that God's answers to our prayers might be Yes, No, Not-Yet or Are-you-Kidding? Whatever it is, once we receive the answer we need to have the strength to accept it and not keep cribbing about the same. We generally praise God when God answers with a Yes. Can we do the same when God answers with a No, or Not-yet or Are-you-kidding? That takes a lot of faith. David prayed fervently for his illegitimate child to be saved. But when God's answer came, he accepted it and found peace in the answer. Paul prayed for his thorn-in-the-flesh to be taken away, but when the answer came, he found peace with it.

So there we have our four steps to finding our purpose through prayer. To illustrate the steps further, let us look at the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. In verses 1 to 5, Jesus is affirming that he has sought and fulfilled God's will in His Life. God's will was that Jesus glorify God, and Jesus is now reporting back to the father that He has done that. That is our step 1: Seeking God's Will. In verses 6 to 8, He is confirming the fact that His time has come. You will notice that several times in the past, Jesus has told His time has not come (John 2:4, John 7:6, John 8:20, John 7:30) . He had waited for God's time to come and He confirms in these verses why He believed that His time had come. That is our step 2: waiting in faith for an answer (God's time). After this prayer, we see in Chapter 18, Jesus going out and revealing himself to the people who came to arrest Him. He does that thrice in verses John 18:5-8 . He confirms his utter obedience by chiding Peter and asking him John 18:11 (NKJV) 11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" . This is our Step 3: Obey his instructions when it comes. And finally when Jesus is continually questioned He demonstrates that He is at peace with whatever is the outcome. He tells Pilate John 18:37 (NKJV) 37 "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." That is our step 4: Be at Peace with the outcome.

So, this morning, let us examine our prayer lives once more.

- Do we use our prayer life to find and fulfill our purpose in life? Or do we use our prayers to manipulate God's will and maneuver around obstacles until we get our way? If we do that we need to realise that we will be placing ourselves outside God's will and have to live with the negative consequences of that.
- Are we tempted to quit praying, when our prayers don't get answered quickly enough or in a manner that we want it to be answered? If we are, let us realise this morning that some of the best things requires for us to wait, and also to acknowledge that God knows what is best for us.

Instead, let us remember the four steps for finding our purpose through prayers. Seek His will, wait patiently for an answer, and obey the answer when it comes.

Let me close with a testimony. When I first became a Christian, I was a very proud person. I was proud that I made the right decision. I chose the right God. I joined the right group of people etc. It was all about how I did the right thing. My initial days as a Christian was all about proving to others that I did a right thing. My prayers were around that objective. Even through that faulty outlook, God spoke to me through John 15:16 (NKJV) 16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. This verse was a solid hit on my head. It humbled me. It punctured my pride bubble. It actually opened my eyes and gave me a life purpose. My initiation of a ministry, the career shifts I made, the salary cuts I took to teach in a seminary, the company that I set up for spreading Servant Leadership, all were then guided by this verse.

Shall we pray that God will reveal His purposes to us through Jesus Christ?

You can watch a video of this sermon at https://youtu.be/_g6SAstqtx0