

26-0816a - Detailed Summary

26-0816a - *The Power of Prayer*, Tom Freed

Bible Readers: Kevin Woosley and John Kessler

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The Power of Prayer

Scripture Readings

1st Reading (0:04 - 0:33): Kevin Woosley

Matthew 7:7-8: Kevin opened the service by reading from the New King James Version of Matthew 7:7-8. The passage states: “Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

2nd Reading (0:38 - 1:03): John Kessler

James 5:16: John then read James 5:16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much.” He closed the reading with the traditional affirmation, “It’s the word of the Lord. Amen.”

Summary of Transcript (0:04 - 20:33), Preacher: Tom Freed

(1:08 - 2:30) Introduction: Prayer Is Not the Least We Can Do

Tom began by greeting the congregation and announcing that the morning’s sermon would address the power of prayer. He observed that believers often speak of prayer in a way that diminishes it. When someone faces serious illness, deep struggle, or a situation that appears beyond human help, people commonly say, “Well, all we can do now is pray.” The phrasing makes prayer sound like a last resort—the action taken only after every practical, medical, or financial option has been exhausted. Tom asked whether anyone present had ever felt that prayer was the least that could be offered once the “real” help had failed. He immediately corrected that mindset: the Bible never presents prayer as the least we can do for someone; it presents prayer as the most we can do.

(2:30 - 5:05) The Congregation’s Practice of Steady Intercession

Tom expressed deep appreciation for the prayer life of the West Side congregation. He identified the church’s commitment to intercession as one of its strongest attributes. The congregation maintains a substantial prayer list that is reviewed before every service; the list is never rushed. Tom joked that at times the prayer list seems larger than the attendance. During the morning prayer, the names are often lifted individually rather than in a hurried collective mention. Many members also take the list home and continue praying for each person by name. This quiet, steady work is unseen by most outsiders, yet the Lord sees it, and those being prayed for often sense its effect in ways that will only be fully known in eternity.

Tom then made the matter personal. The congregation had prayed for his mother for more than a decade before her death—an example of long obedience in the same direction rather than a brief

season of concern. His mother's name remained on the list week after week and year after year. The same faithfulness continues toward his father, whose name has been carried for several years and is still being remembered. The church does not treat names as temporary items to be checked off and quietly removed. Tom described this sustained intercession as a demonstration of real faith and real love, and he expressed gratitude that words could scarcely capture.

(5:05 - 9:09) God's Sovereignty and the Privilege of Prayer

Having established the practical importance of the church's prayer list, Tom turned to Scripture to show why prayer is among the greatest works available to God's people. He first affirmed God's complete sovereignty: the Lord does whatever He wills whenever He wills, without needing human input or permission. Psalm 115:3 declares, "Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases." Yet in His wisdom and grace God has chosen to involve the prayers of His people in the outworking of His purposes. Prayer is not a means of twisting God's arm or of informing Him of facts He does not already know; it is the means He has ordained for His children to participate in what He is doing.

Jesus Himself taught the disciples to ask. In the Sermon on the Mount He said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). He told the parable of the persistent widow specifically so that His followers would "always pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Paul commanded the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), urged the Ephesians to pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:18), and told the Colossians to "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). If prayer were a minor activity, the Lord would not have spoken of it with such frequency and intensity, nor would He have modeled it so consistently Himself.

The Gospels record Jesus rising early while it was still dark to pray (Mark 1:35), withdrawing to lonely places for prayer, spending the night in prayer before choosing the twelve, and praying in Gethsemane until His sweat became like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The Son of God, who needed nothing, nevertheless devoted Himself to prayer. How much more, then, do those who need everything need to pray? When believers bring the needs of others before the Father, they are not performing a minor duty; they are participating in the very means God has given for blessing, strength, healing, endurance, and the advancement of His kingdom. Prayer is therefore among the greatest privileges granted to the people of God.

(9:09 - 10:07) Elijah: An Ordinary Man Whose Prayer Accomplished Much

James points to Elijah as a concrete illustration. He is careful to note that Elijah was "a man with a nature like ours"—subject to the same passions and weaknesses that every believer faces. Yet when Elijah prayed fervently that it might not rain, the rain ceased for three and a half years; when he prayed again, the rain returned. The point is unmistakable: ordinary people of faith, praying according to the will of God, can see God accomplish extraordinary things. The congregation is not Elijah and does not control the weather, but the principle stands. The prayers of God's people have real effect. God hears, and God answers.

(10:07 - 13:18) God Hears and Answers in His Perfect Wisdom

Answers to prayer take varied forms. Sometimes the answer is immediate and dramatic. Sometimes it is slow and quiet, unfolding over months or years in ways that become clear only in retrospect. Sometimes the answer is “no,” “not yet,” or “I will give you something better than what you asked.” The prayer itself is never wasted. Heaven is not indifferent to the cries of God’s children.

Tom illustrated this truth from the book of Acts. When Peter was imprisoned by Herod and scheduled for execution the next day, “earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (Acts 12:5). The church did not organize a protest or attempt to bribe the guards; they prayed. God sent an angel, the chains fell off, the iron gate opened of its own accord, and Peter walked free. Later, when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the inner prison at Philippi, they prayed and sang hymns to God at midnight. Suddenly an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison and everyone’s bonds were unfastened (Acts 16:25-26). In both cases prayer was not a last resort after every other option had failed; it was the first and most powerful response.

Prayer changes things because the living God is the One who hears. Believers are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). First John 5:14-15 supplies further confidence: “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.” When names and needs are brought before the Father, the words are not spoken into the air; they are spoken to the Father who loves His children and acts on their behalf according to His perfect wisdom. He hears every request. He does not always answer in the manner requested, but He always hears, and when the request is according to His will, He answers.

(13:18 - 16:19) The Necessity of Persistent Intercession

It is relatively easy to pray once or twice for someone and then move on. It is far harder—and far more Christ-like—to keep praying when the situation does not change quickly and the need stretches across months or years. Believers are often tempted to conclude that nothing is happening and therefore to stop. Jesus specifically taught the value of persistent asking. In Luke 18 He told of a widow who kept coming to an unjust judge. For a while the judge refused, but at last he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice.” Jesus drew the lesson clearly: if even an unjust judge responds to persistent asking, how much more will the righteous Father respond to His children who keep bringing their requests to Him?

When the congregation prayed for Tom’s mother for more than a decade and continues to pray for his father, the act is not a small kindness. It is faith that refuses to quit and love that keeps carrying a burden long after novelty has worn off. The same steady intercession has been offered for many others in the body. Such perseverance reflects the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, who “always lives to make intercession” for those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Old Testament priests died and their intercession ended; Jesus lives forever as High Priest and never grows tired of praying for His people. How then can believers grow tired of praying for one another?

Paul told the Colossian church that Epaphras was “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers” (Colossians 4:12). The word “struggling” indicates earnest, ongoing labor rather than a casual mention of names. That is precisely what some members of the congregation do with the names on

the prayer list: they struggle for them before the throne of God, keep coming, and do not give up. That, Tom insisted, is the most that can be done for people.

(16:19 - 18:30) Prayer as the Foundation Beneath Practical Help

When someone is hurting, practical help should be given whenever possible—meals, visits, cards, financial assistance, a listening ear, a ride to the doctor, help with yard or house work. These tangible expressions of the love of Christ matter deeply. Prayer must never be used as an excuse to avoid practical service. If help can be given, it should be given. At the same time, prayer must never be regarded as somehow less than those practical helps. Prayer is not in competition with service; it is the foundation under service and the power behind it. Without prayer, practical help remains only human effort. With prayer, that help is joined to the power of God.

The greatest thing that can be done for any person whose name is on the list is to bring that person before the throne of grace. The greatest thing that can be done for a brother or sister who is struggling is to pray for them with faith and persistence. The greatest thing that can be done for those who are lost is to pray that God would open their eyes, soften their hearts, and draw them to His Son. The greatest thing that can be done for the congregation itself is to pray for its leaders, its families, its young people, and its outreach in the community. The attitude that treats prayer as “all we can do when everything else fails” is therefore deeply misplaced. Prayer is not the leftover of human effort; it is the primary way God has given His people to care for one another and to seek His help. Whether the need is physical, emotional, spiritual, or practical, the most important response is to pray.

(18:30 - 20:33) Conclusion and Invitation

Tom closed by urging the congregation never again to think of prayer as the least that can be done. When the Scriptures are opened and the place God has assigned to prayer is seen, when the example of Jesus is remembered, and when James’s declaration is heard—“the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”—believers are reminded that prayer is among the most important work they can offer one another and the world. Therefore they must keep praying. They must not grow weary or lose heart when answers seem slow or situations remain difficult for a long time. The God who hears is still on the throne. He is still able to do far more abundantly than all that is asked or thought. Every time a name or need is brought before Him, something of real and lasting significance is accomplished; the intercession of the church is joined to the intercession of Christ Himself.

Tom repeated the central refrain: the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. May that be true of each individual and of the body as a whole, for the glory of God and for the good of His people. Prayer is not the least that can be done; it is the most.

He then extended the invitation. Anyone who needed the prayers of the church that morning, or anyone who had never obeyed the gospel and desired to put on Christ in baptism, was invited to come forward as the congregation stood and sang.