

26-0816a Transcript

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: (0:04) Good morning. The first scripture reading is in the book of Matthew, (0:10) chapter 7, verses 7 and 8. And I will read out of the New King James. It says, (0:18) Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. (0:25) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (0:33)	2nd Reading (0:38 - 1:03): John Kessler James 5:16: (0:38) Good morning. The second reading today is from the book of James. It's James 5, verse 16. (0:48) James 5, 16. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, (0:54) so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, (0:59) can accomplish much. It's the word of the Lord. Amen. (1:03)
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Transcript (0:04 - 20:33), Preacher: Tom Freed

(1:08) All right. Good to see everybody. It's my turn once again. (1:16) This morning's sermon is on the power of prayer. Have you ever noticed how we sometimes talk (1:26) about prayer? Someone is facing a serious illness, a deep struggle, or a situation that (1:34) seems beyond human help, and we say, well, all we can do now is pray.

The way we say it often (1:45) makes it sound like prayer is a last resort. The thing we do when every other option has been (1:52) exhausted, as if prayer is the least we can offer. Have you ever felt the prayer that way? As if we (2:05) tried the real help, the practical help, the medical help, the financial help, and now we (2:12) have nothing left.

So we will just pray. But that is not how the Bible presents prayer. (2:23) Prayer is not the least we could do for somebody.

Prayer is the most we could do. (2:30) One of the things I have always appreciated about this congregation (2:33) is that we really pray for people. I think that's one of our strongest attributes here.

(2:43) We have a substantial prayer list that we go over before every service. (2:49) We do not rush past it. I've joked before, sometimes it feels like the prayer list is (2:56) bigger than the attendance at times.

We do have a big prayer list. During the morning prayer, (3:05) we often take time with those names, praying for each one on the list individually. (3:12) And some of you also take that list home and pray for everyone by name.

(3:19) That practice is not a small secondary thing. It is one of the most powerful things that the church (3:26) does. It is quiet, steady work that few outside these walls will ever see.

But the Lord sees it, (3:36) and the people being prayed for feel it in ways we may never fully know this side of heaven. (3:44) So we don't always know who's praying for us. But the prayer does work.

We get the benefits. (3:55) I want you to know how much this means to me personally. You have prayed for my mother (4:02) for over a decade before she passed.

That is not a short season of concern. (4:09) That is long obedience in the same direction. So I'm surprised week after week, year after year, (4:17) that my mom was on the prayer list.

We don't just pray for somebody for a week or two and (4:23) drop them off the list. We continue to pray. You have prayed for my father for the past several (4:29) years and continue to do so.

You have not treated those names as temporary items being checked off (4:37) and then quietly removed. You kept praying. That kind of steady, long-term intercession is a big (4:46) deal.

It is a demonstration of real faith and real love. And I am grateful for it more than I (4:56) can easily put into words. Today I want us to be reminded from the Word of God why prayer is not (5:05) the least we could do but the most.

When we open the prayer list, when we read the names, (5:14) when we carry them home and lift them up one by one, we are engaging in some of the greatest work (5:21) available to the people of God. Let's look carefully at what Scriptures teach about the (5:28) power of prayer. God is completely sovereign.

He does whatever He wills whenever He wills without (5:41) needing our input or permission. The Scriptures are clear. Our God is in the heavens.

He does (5:49) all that He pleases, Psalm 115.3. Yet in His wisdom and grace, He has chosen to involve the (6:00) prayers of His people in the outworking of His purposes. You know, He could do whatever He (6:05) pleases. He could choose to heal whoever He wants, do whatever He wants, but He involves us.

(6:13) We're part of it. Prayer is not a way of twisting God's arm or informing us of things He did not (6:20) already know. It is a means He has ordained for His children to participate in what He is doing.

(6:30) Jesus taught us to ask. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, (6:35) Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find.

Knock and it will be opened to you, (6:45) Matthew 7.7. He told the parable of the persistent widow for this very reason, (6:53) that they ought to pray and not lose heart, Luke 18.1. Paul commanded the church, (7:02) Pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5.17. He urged the Ephesians to pray at all times in the (7:11) Spirit with all prayer and supplication, Ephesians 6.18. He told the Colossians to continue steadfastly (7:21) in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving, Colossians 4.2. It's interesting how for all (7:31) these early churches, the things that Paul told them about prayer. If prayer were a small thing, (7:40) the Lord would not have spoken of it this way, and He would not have modeled it so consistently (7:48) Himself. The Gospels show Jesus rising early while it was still

dark to pray, Mark 1.35, (8:02) withdrawing to lonely places to pray, praying through the night before choosing the twelve, (8:11) and praying in Gethsemane until His sweat became like drops of blood, Luke 22.44. The Son of God, (8:20) who needed nothing, still devoted Himself to prayer.

How much more do we who need everything (8:28) need to pray? You know, God could have had anything. He had the ultimate power. He's God, (8:38) and yet He still prays constantly.

When we bring someone's needs before the Father, (8:45) we're not performing a minor duty. We are participating in the means God has given us (8:52) for blessing, strength, healing, endurance, and the advancement of His kingdom. It is not (9:00) the least we could do.

That is among the greatest privileges we have been given as His people. (9:09) James points to Elijah as an example. He is careful to say that Elijah was a man with a (9:18) nature like ours.

He was not superhuman. He was a man of like passion, subject to the same weaknesses (9:26) we face. Yet when he prayed fervently that it might not rain, the rain stopped for three and (9:33) a half years.

When he prayed again, the rain returned. The point is clear. Ordinary people (9:43) of faith, praying according to the will of God, can see God do extraordinary things.

(9:54) We are not Elijah, and we do not control the weather, (9:59) but the principle stands. The prayers of God's people have real effect. (10:07) God hears, and God answers.

Sometimes the answer is immediate and dramatic. (10:16) Sometimes it is slow and quiet, unfolding over months or years in ways we only recognize later. (10:24) Sometimes the answer is no or not yet, or I will give you something better than (10:30) what you ask.

That is always great when you get better than what you ask God when you pray. (10:39) A lot of times He does that for us, but the prayer is never wasted. (10:46) Heaven is not indifferent to the cries of God's children.

(10:54) Consider the early church in the book of Acts. When Peter was imprisoned by Herod and facing (11:02) execution the next day, earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church, Acts 12.15 or 12.5. (11:12) The church did not organize a protest. They did not bribe the guards.

They prayed, (11:20) and God sent an angel. The chain fell off, the iron gate opened of its own accord, (11:27) and Peter walked free. When Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the inner prison (11:36) at Philippi, they prayed and sang hymns to God at midnight.

Suddenly there was an earthquake. (11:45) The foundations of the prison were shaken, and everyone's bonds were unfastened, (11:52) Acts 16.25-26. Prayer was not their last resort after they tried everything else. (12:01) It was their first and most powerful response.

Prayer changes things because the living God is (12:09) the one who hears. He invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy (12:17) and find grace to help in a time of need, Hebrews 4.16. 1 John 5.14-15 gives us this confidence, (12:30) and this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His (12:36) will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the (12:44) request that we have asked of Him.

When we bring names and needs before Him, we are not speaking (12:53) into the air. We are speaking to the Father who loves His children and acts on their behalf (12:59) according to His wisdom. He hears everything we ask.

He doesn't always answer it how we want it (13:08) answered, but He does hear our prayers, and if it's according to His will, He answers the prayers. (13:18) It's relatively easy to pray once or twice for someone and then move on. It is much harder (13:25) and far more Christ-like to keep praying when the situation does not change quickly, (13:32) when the need stretches on for months or years, but we are tempted to think nothing is happening.

(13:39) It happens often where we keep praying, maybe the situation doesn't get any better, (13:46) but that doesn't mean we should stop. Jesus specifically taught the value of persistent asking. (13:55) In Luke 18, He told the story of a widow who kept coming to an unjust judge.

(14:03) For a while, the judge refused, but he finally said to himself, (14:09) Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, (14:16) I will give her justice. Jesus drew the lesson clearly. If even an unjust judge responds to (14:24) persistent asking, how much more will our righteous Father respond to His children who (14:31) keep bringing their requests to Him? When this congregation prayed for my mother all those years, (14:39) and continues to pray for my father, this is not a small act of kindness.

(14:46) That is faith that refuses to quit. That is love that keeps carrying a burden (14:53) long after the novelty has worn off. And not just for my family, but I know we've done it (15:01) for everybody here in one way or the other.

That is a kind of intercession that reflects the heart (15:10) of the Lord Jesus Christ, who always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God (15:16) through Him. Hebrews 7.25. In the Old Testament, the priest ended up dying, (15:28) but Jesus lives forever as our High Priest, and He is constantly praying and making intercession for us. (15:36) He does not grow tired of praying for us.

How then can we grow tired of praying for one another? (15:46) Paul told the Colossian church that Hephæstus was always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, (15:54) Colossians 4.12. Notice the word struggling. This was not a casual mention of names. (16:03) This was earnest, ongoing labor and prayer.

That is what some of you do with the names on our prayer (16:11) list. You struggle for them before the throne of God. You keep coming.

You do not give up. (16:19) And that is the most you can do for people. When someone is hurting, we should help in practical (16:29) ways whenever possible.

Meals, visits, cards, financial assistance, a listening ear, (16:37) a ride to the doctor, help with the yard or house. Those things matter deeply. (16:45) They are tangible expressions of the love of Christ.

(16:49) We should never use prayer as an excuse to avoid practical service. (16:54) If you can help somebody, go ahead and do it. But we should not ever think of prayer as somehow (17:05) less than those practical helps.

Prayer is not in competition with practical service. (17:13) It is a foundation under it and the power behind it. Without prayer, our practical help is only (17:23) human effort.

With prayer, it is joined to the power of God. The greatest thing you can do for (17:31) the person whose name is on that list is to bring them before the throne of grace. The greatest thing (17:40) you can do for a brother or sister who is struggling is to pray for them with faith and persistence.

(17:47) The greatest thing you can do for those who are lost is to pray that God would open their eyes, (17:53) soften their hearts, and draw them to his son. The greatest thing you can do for this congregation is (18:01) to pray for its leaders, its families, its young people, and its outreach in this community. (18:09) That is why the attitude that treats prayer is all we can do when everything else (18:15) fails and is so misplaced.

Prayer is not the leftovers of our effort. (18:23) It is the primary way God has given us to care for one another and seek his help. (18:31) Whether the need is physical, emotional, spiritual, or practical, (18:36) the most important thing we can do is pray.

So never let us think of prayer as the least we could (18:46) do. When we open the scriptures and see the place God has given to prayer, when we remember the (18:55) example of Jesus, and when we hear James say that the prayer of a righteous person has great (19:01) power as it is working, we are reminded that prayer is among the most important work we can (19:09) offer one another in the world. Keep praying.

Do not grow weary. Do not lose heart when answers (19:20) seem slow or when situations remain difficult for a long time. The God who hears is still on the (19:28) throne.

He is still able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. (19:37) And every time we bring a name or need before him, we are doing something of real and lasting (19:45) significance. We are joining our forces with the intercession of Christ himself.

(19:54) The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. May that be true of us (20:04) individually and as a body for the glory of God and for the good of his people. (20:13) Prayer is not the least we can do.

It is the most. As we close, if you need the prayers of the church (20:22) this morning or if there is any one of you that has never obeyed the gospel and would like to put (20:27) on Christ in baptism, the invitation is open. Come as we stand and sing. (20:33)