### “Persistence” Steve Finlan for The First Church, July 27, 2025

**Colossians 2:8–12**

8 Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principlesof the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision,by the removal of the bodyof the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

**Luke 11: 5–11**

5 And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ 7 And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish?

The gospel passage today contains a parable and a series of powerful sayings. There is a link between the two parts. Let’s see if we can find the link. I’ll start with the parable. Its message is fairly straightforward: Persistence pays off. It paid off for someone whose friend was reluctant to help, but whom he badgered tirelessly until the friend gave him what he wanted. Therefore, persistence in prayer will pay off for us. But we have to be careful not to turn the parable into an analogy. In an analogy, every character stands for something.

If this were an analogy, one might conclude that God is like the reluctant and grumpy friend who doesn’t want to be bothered. But it’s *not* an analogy which has many correlations; it’s a parable, which has *one* central point. Focus on the one central point, and don’t equate all the characters in the parable with someone or something. The one point is that persistence pays off!

That’s it. That’s the whole message of that parable. Knowing that should help us in interpreting other parables, too. In some of the longer parables, like the Prodigal Son, there seems to be more than one character who stands for something: the excessively merciful father undoubtedly stands for the heavenly Father. But usually it is best to find the single main message of a parable, and to refrain from looking for several equivalencies. Keep the singular focus.

With that idea of perseverance in mind, we can then approach the series of sayings that follows. It says that, if we search, we will find. If we ask, it will be given. Everyone who asks receives, and will receive something useful. This is a great spiritual truth, that honest prayer is always successful. It always allows God to make inroads into one’s mind and soul, and that is success, even if the thing originally prayed for does not come to fruition as expected.

The exhortation to ask, to search, to knock certainly implies persistence, doesn’t it? It won’t be successful if one just puts in two minutes of effort. Again, what we get may not be what we asked for, but it won’t be a snake! It will be something spiritually useful. What doors have opened for you, when you have sought truth? Isn’t a large part of our spiritual life a matter of asking and searching?

If the searching is done with a whole heart and an honest mind, it is rewarded. And isn’t our life often a matter of knocking on doors and hoping to break through to another level, to obtain the right livelihood and a life partner? Much of our striving and working is a kind of extended prayer, and Jesus is telling us that prayer is not in vain. In Luke 18, Jesus tells us that we ought “to pray always and not to lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

In this life on such a world, we can expect challenges, delays, and difficulties, as Karen’s friend in IT told her: “it’s not ‘if’ there will be a tech issue, it’s ‘when’ there’s a tech issue.”

Now, does all this tie in with the Colossians reading? Well, not very much. But Colossians tells us that the person we are praying to is not just an ordinary human, but is the incarnation of deity, who carries the power of God, and who is the head of all heavenly rulers and authorities. Colossians also tells us that we have put off this body of flesh and taken on a new spiritual nature; in our baptism, we were symbolically buried with Christ, and now we are spiritually raised with him through faith (2:11–12). Paul wants us to think of ourselves as intimately connected with Christ the Messiah. We *symbolically* die and rise again, as Christ *literally* died and rose again. But we will also rise again *literally*, after our physical death. Maybe life after death is one of the things we ask for, and *are* given.

One reason that prayer needs to be persistent is that God works on us when we pray. We are changed in the process of praying. This is of the essence of our relationship with God. And sometimes, before God can answer our prayer, we need to be sufficiently changed. We need to become spiritually receptive, since the answer is likely to be spiritual rather than material. The soil must be prepared, so seeds do not fall on rocks or sand.

Thus, prayerfulness becomes part of our lifestyle. Always seeking, always knocking. There’s nothing wrong with being a truth seeker, even if you’ve already found the most important truths. There’s always more to find.

## One woman sought a job as a teacher. She never got the kind of position she sought, but maybe found something better. She writes: “I graduated in 2000 with an elementary education BS and in 2007 with a master’s. Then, the 2008 housing crisis happened. I had two little children, and schools were closing all around the area in upstate NY. I subbed and applied, but there were no full-time tenured track positions for me. In 2014, I ended up working at Starbucks for grocery money. Then, I applied for a hospital position and became a recreational therapist. After working through my imposter syndrome, I realized I *am* a teacher and can teach my patients life skills, social skills, and coping skills. I’ve worked in acute inpatient psych units for 10 years now. Five years ago, I decided to go back to school. One class at a time, a divorce, a pandemic, giving up my full-time position and benefits later, I will have a BSN, RN in May of 2025!” (www.buzzfeed.com/alanavalko/career-pivot-stories)

My wife Karen also had a career direction change. She started out as an art major, but nothing developed for her in that area. She studied science and education and became a high school teacher while raising three girls, and she was good at it, but the administrative environment started becoming toxic, and she moved out and got into financial advising, where she worked hard for three employers, each of which was difficult or toxic in a different way. Now she has finally found a pleasant work environment with great promise for the future.

We don’t always get what we ask for, but our prayers are being answered, and opportunities wait for us. God listens to us. We are cherished and loved.