

Film: *Out of Reach*
Parable: The Friend at Midnight
Scripture: Luke 11:5-8

Interpreting *Out of Reach*

The Parable of the Friend at Midnight explores prayer. There is no better example of persistence and faith than that of a child. For God even tells us to have faith like a child.

The children in *Out of Reach* are irresistible. In fact, one can't help but wonder how the father could resist the requests of his daughter... leaning over his shoulder and begging him through her missing front teeth. That is probably how God sees us... not as annoying people pounding on the door at midnight, but as adorable children.

Cultural background

Jesus is not suggesting here that God is like a reluctant sleepy neighbor... Not at all! Rather, He is saying that God responds to persistence (importunity). This importunity in prayer is a boldness that stays at it until God answers. Such persistence indicates faith, and God responds to faith (Hebrews 11:6).



The elements of the parable would have been familiar to middle-easterners in the 1st century.

This request of the neighbor was nothing unusual, since all communities saw hospitality as a civic obligation. The visitor (who often traveled late at night to avoid the stifling heat), was to be treated hospitably, not just by his literal hosts, but by the entire community. Providing food and shelter were givens, and it was probably normal to offer guests unbroken loaves of bread, rather than leftover scraps. Bread was used as a utensil in Jesus' day, similar to the knives & forks of modern western culture. Since baking was often a communal activity, the host knew at once who might have fresh, unbroken loaves available.

Discussion questions

- 1) Do you feel timid about approaching God with your needs?
- 2) This parable tells a story of someone pounding on the door on behalf of someone else – a friend from out of town. How boldly do you pray for the needs of others?

Application

The assumed question of the parable is - can you imagine asking your neighbor for a hand in hospitality and hearing a refusal? The implied answer is a decisive - NO WAY! People in Eastern cultures would have seen "door locked" and "kids in bed" as bogus excuses, a shirking of communal responsibility.



Just as they couldn't imagine a neighbor being so inhospitable, so Jesus is saying we should not view God as inhospitably reluctant to answer our prayers.

Persistence comes when I know I'm doing the right thing, and that's why God responds to persistence in prayer. We don't need to bug God, He is not reluctant. We do, however, need to persist in prayer - so that God sees faith and rewards it.

Discussion questions

- 1) Do you ever feel like you are bugging God with your prayers? Does it sometimes feel like He is standing on the other side of the door telling you to go away?
- 2) Do you have any examples of when you have prayed persistently and God has answered those prayers?
- 3) Have you given up praying about something that maybe requires a little more persistence?

As you reflect on the parable and the film, consider that Jesus told these stories about our everyday lives. He reveals Himself through common experiences and we should be able to find Him in the most unlikely places. Christ "shows up" while we're sitting in front of our computers at work, cooking dinner or driving in traffic. We always like to learn something during the big moments in our lives, but Christ clearly makes the point that learning about His love, His grace and His mercy can be experienced in the most ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.