

## The Friend at Midnight (Lk 11:5-10)

### BACKGROUND ON THE WORD *ANAIDEIA* IN LUKE 11:8

- In 11:8 the friend gets up and gives his neighbor bread because of his “boldness” (NIV, 1984). This word, *anaideia* in Greek, is translated variously “importunity” (KJV and RSV), “shamelessness” (NEB) and “persistence” (NIV, 1978; NRSV).
- Although it only occurs in this NT in this verse, it occurs 258 times in ancient Greek texts up to the fourth century A.D. All of these instances “are demonstrably negative except those places early Christian writers have assigned a positive use in dependence on Luke 11:8. It refers to people who have no proper sense of shame and willingly engage in improper conduct. No positive use of this word...occurs except where Christians have adapted it after the beginning of the second century.”<sup>1</sup>
- “Does the Christian act ‘shamelessly’ when he comes to God in prayer? Certainly not. In order to avoid this conclusion and make sense out of the parable, the Church gradually changed the meaning of the word from a negative quality (shamelessness) to a positive quality (persistence). Just when and how this change took place is difficult to quantify...”<sup>2</sup>

### THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

1. As we see from the background material above on the key word *anaideia*, Lk 11:8 is best translated “because of the man’s *shamelessness* he will give him as much as he needs.” What is shameless in what the petitioner does?<sup>3</sup> Why does the friend respond positively if this is shameless? Bearing in mind the context before (the Lord’s prayer) and after (asking/knocking, dads & snakes), what is Jesus saying about prayer?
2. “Aristotle defined *anaideia* as a combination of courage and false opinion. Rather than being the avoidance of shame, it expresses an ignorance of shame and the absence of any sense of shame. As several texts say, it does not know the blush of shame and refers to one who pays no heed to disgrace... The person guilty of *anaideia* does not know where the boundaries are and therefore may be capable of anything.” (Snodgrass)

What boundaries should our prayers cross, which they currently don’t?

3. Dorothy Jean Weaver sees a pattern of audacious prayer and petition in Luke:

Prayer is the gut-wrenching desperation that digs through roof tiles or claws through the crowds to reach the healer on the other side (5:17-26; 8:40-48). It is the unimaginable trust to believe in a miracle sight unseen (7:1-20). It is the sheer audacity to throw all caution to the wind and break every rule on the books in a scandalous and highly public display of love and repentance (7:36-50). It is the utter impertinence to cry out loudly and persistently for healing (18:35-43) and justice (18:1-8) until those cries are heard. This is the prayer to which Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “*Anaideia* and the friend at midnight,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 166, Fall 1997, p. 505.

<sup>2</sup> Alan F. Johnson, “Assurance for man: The fallacy of translating *anaideia* by ‘persistence’ in Luke 11:5-8,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, June 1979, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Some commentators (such as Kenneth Bailey, as quoted in Philip Yancey’s *Prayer*, p. 145) assert that Jesus is being ironic, and that the culture of middle-eastern village hospitality was such that the petitioner’s request was in fact very reasonable, and that Jesus’ listeners would have laughed to hear him speak of the sleeping man’s reluctance to help. In this case, calling the petitioner shameless is calling for a laugh out of the crowd.

calls his disciples. And this is the prayer that Luke splashes in vivid color across the canvas of his gospel.<sup>4</sup>

(See also Mt 15:21-28.) Have you ever prayed audaciously? What constitutes an audacious prayer?

4. In 11:11-13, Luke provides a second explanation (or follow-up, if you prefer) to the parable of the Friend at Midnight. Using the language of Matthew's parallel to this passage (Mt 11:7), what "good gifts" have you had the audacity to pray for? Or to use Luke's version, have you ever prayed for the Holy Spirit? What do you think Jesus was urging the disciples to pray for?
5. Robert Capon has a different take (as usual) on shamelessness in this parable. Discuss:

What is this shamelessness but death to self? People who lead reasonable, respectable lives—who are preoccupied first and foremost with the endless struggle to think well of themselves—do not obtrude upon their friends' privacy at midnight. And why don't they? Because that would display them as thoughtless beggars and make them look bad. But if someone were dead to all that—if he could come to his friends house with nothing more than the confession that he was a total loss as a host (or anything else)—then precisely because of his shamelessness, his total lack of a self-regarding life, he would be raised out of that death by his rising friend.<sup>5</sup>

✕

*Fun Fact:* "Jesus' teaching [of constant prayer] goes beyond that of the Jews, who tended to limit the times of prayer lest they weary God. Three times a day (on the model of Dan 6:10) was accepted as the maximum".<sup>6</sup>

*Bonus Fun Fact:* "The verb [for 'wear out' in the parable widow and the unjust judge] is a picturesque one meaning, literally, 'give a black eye'." (Ibid, p. 263.)

---

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Jean Weaver, "Luke 18:1-8", *Interpretation*, July 2002, p. 317.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Capon, *The Parables of Grace* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), 1988, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 262