

An Unlikely Friendship

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A film about friendship, respect, and the benefits of taking risks, Oliver Nakache and Eric Toledano's *The Intouchables* (2011), tells the story of two unlikely friends and how their companionship benefits each of them. Philippe (Francis Cluzet), is a wealthy older man living in Paris who becomes a paraplegic after a paragliding accident. A paraplegic is unable to feel anything in their lower extremities usually due to a spinal cord injury. Philippe specifically, is not able to feel anything below his head. Philippe hires Driss (Omar Sy) as his personal at home caregiver. Driss is an ex convict who is only looking for a signature to prove that he is searching for employment and has no interest in the job even though Philippe offers him a two week trial. After his mother tells him to leave their house, he decides to take Philippe up on his offer since the job includes a place to stay. Driss is taught all of the care he will need to provide Philippe and makes a joke of most of it. Philippe enjoys this quality about Driss because he does not feel that Driss shows him pity. After spending most of everyday together the two become very close friends and develop a great relationship despite their vast differences.

Foreshadowing the storyline of the movie, Nakache and Toledano begin the film a few months in advance. The opening scene shows Driss speeding down the streets of Paris in the middle of the night in Philippe's expensive cars. The camera pans the streets of Paris and zooms in on Driss and Philippe in the car. Eventually, Driss' reckless driving gets the attention of the police and they proceed to block Driss from driving. The police angrily get out of the car holding guns and instruct Driss to put his hands on the hood of the car so they can figure out the

reasoning behind his reckless driving. The police then instruct Philippe to get out of the car but Driss attempts to explain to them that Philippe is not even capable of opening the door. While the police are still trying to piece together the situation, Driss comes up with a lie and says that they were rushing to the hospital because Philippe was having a seizure. Philippe notices what Driss is doing so he pretends to be having a seizure. The police fall for the lie and offer to escort them to the emergency room. The end of the scene shows the two driving off with the police escorting them. As the camera zooms out, Driss and Philippe begin singing and dancing to the song "September" by Earth, Wind, and Fire, which is a very popular and catchy song here in America and Paris as well. The end of the scene shows Driss and Philippe arriving at the hospital and the police wishing them luck and leaving. After the police leave, Driss lights a cigarette and gives a puff to Philippe then they also leave the emergency room since they do not truthfully need medical attention.

This introductory scene is a perfect way to set up the story. It is a flashforward to the end of the movie so you can see the way the relationship between Driss and Philippe will end. Although they come from different worlds, Philippe appreciates Driss' sense of humor and goofy personality since he is used to being around more serious, aristocratic type people. The two of them dancing and singing in the car is important because the viewer knows right at the start of the film that Driss and Philippe will be able to put their differences in social class aside and become true friends. The scene gives the viewer an idea of Driss' carefree personality through the speeding and the lie he creates in order to fool the police. You can tell that Philippe has a quieter personality it is also apparent that Philippe admires Driss' fun and carefree demeanor.

After the opening scene the movie goes back to months earlier where Driss is shown waiting for an interview for a potential job. It is obvious that Driss is not serious about the

position because all of the other candidates are dressed in suits and dress shoes and Driss is wearing jeans with sneakers. After looking impatient Driss barges in the room and explains that he does not actually want the job he just needs someone to sign the papers so that he can show them to his parole officer to prove that he is looking for employment. Driss hands the paper to Philippe who is sitting in the corner of the extremely elegant room in his wheelchair. Philippe realizes that Driss does not understand that he cannot move his arms and is not aware of the job position being offered.

The setting of this particular scene is very important to the storyline of the film. This is the first time the viewers see the inside of Philippe's mansion in Paris. At first it is not clear that this is Philippe's home, but when Driss enters the office it becomes known that this is where Philippe resides. This is a very important setting throughout the movie because Driss moves in and lives in a guest room which is very different from the home he is coming from. Driss lived with his whole family and shared a very small bathroom with the rest of his siblings. Driss' main motive behind accepting Philippe's job was being provided with a place to stay because his mother had told him to leave the house just prior. Driss' guest room and bathroom is an extremely different living environment than he is used to which gives us more insight into Driss' character and upbringing

Driss grew up in the projects and had a different lifestyle than Philippe who comes from a family of wealthy aristocrats. Despite their differences in background Philippe welcomes Driss into his home and trusts him to follow his rules and provide the best possible care to Driss. While Driss is first learning about the daily routine and how he will assist Philippe, he does not take it very seriously but Philippe seemed to almost appreciate his goofiness because he enjoyed being

able to laugh and make jokes along with Driss rather than someone who would take the job too seriously and feed into Philippe's already unexciting lifestyle.

Throughout the film, there are many points where Driss encourages Philippe to live on the edge and do something adventurous. There is one scene in particular where Driss and Philippe share their stories and the viewer witnesses the start of their beautiful friendship. One night Philippe begins to have trouble breathing during his sleep. Driss hears his distress on the baby monitor that is in his room used to communicate if Philippe ever needs anything. At first Driss tries to ignore the alarm but eventually he gets out of bed and goes to help Driss and tries all the things that he was taught to help calm him down such as a cool rag and sitting him up in bed. None of these interventions seem to be working so Driss picks up Philippe and puts him in his wheelchair and takes him outside

The camera then shows the two of them in a park in Paris and it is obvious that the fresh air has helped calm Philippe. Philippe then explains that this is the first time he has seen Paris in the middle of the night in a long time. This leads the two of them to share their stories. Philippe explains how he became a paraplegic because of a paragliding accident and Driss jokes around and offers him a smoke. Philippe takes it and appreciates this gesture from Driss because Driss is not treating him differently because of his injury which is one of the main reasons that Philippe enjoys Driss' presence so much. He feels that since his injury many people are scared of hurting him, or people give him special attention simply because he cannot use his arms or legs. Driss never treated Philippe this way, and always treated him as if he was the same as everyone else.

A scene is shown where Philippe is eating at a restaurant with one of his friends and Driss is outside the restaurant waiting for him to finish with his friend. Philippe's friend asked him if he was aware of Driss' past and the fact that he was in jail for six months for robbery. The

friend warns Philippe that he should be careful with Driss living in his mansion because of his history of robbery. This is an important scene in the film because the viewers learn the reasoning behind why Driss was incarcerated. The viewer from the start of the movie is aware of Driss' criminal past, but this is the first time the nature of the criminal actions are brought up.

Philippe responds to his friend saying that he is not concerned about Driss' criminal record because he is the only person that does not treat him with compassion or pity and he fulfills all the duties of his job well. This is the first time in the movie that Philippe verbalizes his opinions on Driss' care and his past. The directors of the film did a good job constructing this scene because Philippe states his opinions clearly for the viewer to understand, but Driss does not hear them because he is outside of the restaurant. This scene is crucial to the film's cohesiveness because the viewer now understands why Philippe had the inclination to hire Driss in the first place and his opinion of Driss thus far in the movie.

Driss' character encouraging Philippe is important throughout the movie and one of the most important ways that Driss encourages Philippe is through his love interest pen pal. Philippe has been assisted with writing letters to a woman for a few years. He has never met the woman in person and she is unaware of his disability. The woman has given Philippe her phone number but he is too afraid to call her. When Driss finds out about this, he immediately picks up the phone and dials her number. Philippe insists that Driss hangs up the phone because he is not ready to bring their relationship to that level. Driss ignores Philippe's commands and places the phone to his ear once she picks up. The two chat briefly and then decide to meet up in person. This makes Philippe very nervous because he is unsure of how she will react when she finds out the truth about him. Driss does not think this will matter and helps Philippe prepare for his big date.

This is another important point for Driss and Philippe's relationship. because if it were not for Driss pushing Philippe and giving him this courage, he may have never had the opportunity to meet this woman. Philippe at first is very angry at Driss and does not want to attend the date, but Driss tells him that he will join and forces him to go. When Philippe arrives at the restaurant for the date he gets too nervous and leaves before the woman arrives.

Every year for his birthday, Philippe hosts a classical music concert for his family and friends hosted in his house. Philippe expresses to Driss that he is not particularly excited for the event because it is usually boring. When the day arrives Driss eventually changes the music to Earth, Wind, and Fire "Boogie Wonderland". This relates back to the first scene of the movie when Driss and Philippe are dancing and singing in the care of Earth, Wind, and Fire's "September". Both these songs are upbeat dance songs that are still popular today. The song playing in the first scene of the movie was foreshadowing to the band's music which becomes an important aspect of the two's friendship because of Driss' love for the band which he shares with Philippe.

Philippe's family unexpectedly loves the music and begins to sing and dance along with Driss. Even though it is mostly rich, serious, aristocrats in attendance, they love the music and celebrate. Philippe has a smile on his face watching Driss enjoy the music and bond with his family and friends. This moment proves Philippe's original intention as to why he hired Driss and the viewer knows this because of the scene prior when Philippe is explaining to his friend that he does not care about what other people think of Driss.

One day, Philippe decides to bring Driss on one of his paragliding adventures. It is ironic that Philippe is still avid about paragliding despite the fact that a paragliding accident is the reasoning for his injury. This shows that Philippe is still determined to live a normal life, just as

he would if the injury never had happened. Driss is also surprised that Philippe is so eager to paraglide because he is terrified. Upon arriving at the hills to paraglide, Driss states that you would have to be crazy to paraglide. Philippe then surprises Driss and tells him that he will be paragliding. Driss says that will not happen and he is too scared but the partner picks him up and takes him on the paraglide anyway and Driss is screaming the whole time.

This scene is essential to the storyline because it shows the viewers Philippe's adventurous side. Up until this scene of the film, the viewers see Driss as the adventurous live in the moment type but this scene shows something that Philippe is passionate about and shows him taking a risk that even Driss, who seems fearless, is afraid of. This scene also shows Philippe truly happy which is rarely seen throughout the movie. Paragliding is an important activity to Philippe and it is apparent that he really loves it because he continues to go even though the accident almost killed him. Philippe demonstrates a lot of bravery doing this, which is a new characteristic the viewer sees in Philippe.

The final scene of the movie does a good job of wrapping up the whole storyline and the friendship created between Driss and Philippe. Driss' little cousin shows up to Philippe's mansion to talk to Driss. He is shocked to see Driss' room and bathroom, and the luxury that he is living in. The two talk for a little and he explains to Driss that he is in trouble with a gang and wants to take refuge with Driss. This leads Driss to explain to Philippe the whole truth about his past, which leads Philippe to let Driss go. He says that Driss' family needs him and Driss needs to be there for his family rather than spending his whole life taking care of Philippe. Driss returns to the suburbs and Philippe hires a new caregiver.

One night Philippe has trouble breathing again, just like the night when Driss took him to see the streets of Paris in the night. The new caregiver does not know how to help Philippe so

Philippe's assistant calls Driss in the middle of the night. Driss comes to help Philippe and give him some fresh air. This leads back to the opening scene of the movie where Driss and Philippe are driving and get pulled over. This shows to the viewers that the film has come full circle and they can now see the impact that both of these characters have had on each other's lives.

The very last scene of the movie shows Philippe waiting in a restaurant for Driss. Driss walks in and sits down and has a short conversation with Philippe. Driss then stands up mid conversation and the woman who Philippe had been contacting online walks up to the table. Philippe is shocked and appears nervous. Driss walks away and winks because he knows without his help Philippe is unable to leave like he did the first time. Driss is then shown waving outside the window of the table that Philippe and his date are sitting at. Driss then walks back to the suburbs.

This scene is important in summarizing the movie because it is a perfect example of the friendship the two have created. Although Driss is a jokester, he is always pushing Philippe to take more risks and live a normal life despite his injury. This is important to Philippe because most people just show him pity and are scared they will hurt him. He appreciates Driss always treating him as if he is one of his lifelong friends despite his disability.

Many aspects of this film are parabolic because of the overlying themes of friendship, respectfulness, and taking risks. Many of these important life lessons are expressed throughout the Bible and the lessons that I have learned throughout the course of my Jesuit education. One of the most famous parables is *The good samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) . In this parable we are taught the importance of being a kind and loving neighbor and helping those in need of assistance. The story explains the story of a traveler who is left on the side of the road beaten. Two people pass the man and do nothing to help. Finally, a samaritan sees him on the side of the

road and rescues him. This relates to *the Intouchables* because of Driss' compassion while caring for Philippe. If people were not willing to help others it would be very difficult to have a functioning society.

This also relates to my Jesuit education because over the course of my three years at the University of Scranton I have learned the importance of being respectful and helpful towards others. I feel that learning this has shaped me into a better person than I was at the beginning of my college career. As a nursing major, I find it very important being willing to help others and see everyone as an equal despite their background. In this film Driss is able to look past the fact that him and Philippe come from very different lifestyles. He puts this aspect of their relationship aside and provides Philippe with the best care he is capable of which is very important.

Another philosophy that has stood out throughout my Jesuit education is "Cura personalis" meaning care for the whole person. This philosophy has been expressed during my nursing classes and also my ethics class. This is also a very important theme for *The Intouchables*, because Driss cares for all of Philippe's physical disabilities but also takes into consideration his mental health and treats him as if he is equal and not above or below Driss. This is important because mental health is just as important as one's physical health and it is important to take that into consideration as well as one's physical health.

Overall, *The Intouchables* is a very well done film that highlights the importance of friendship and its impact on two very different people. Respect is another important theme because it is impossible to have any sort of relationship without respect for each other's background. Driss and Philippe both respect each other and create a great friendship despite their vast differences. These are important lessons taught in the Bible and our Jesuit education which is inspiring us to be the best versions of ourselves.

References

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