

"The Bicycle Thief" starring Italian actors, 1949, NR, 93 minutes

Major themes:

- Father-son relationship
- Theft
- Transportation for work
- Despair
- Poverty
- Searching
- Hope
- Mercy

Major characters:

- Antonio Ricci
- Bruno Ricci
- Maria Ricci

Background info:

- Prospective producer David O. Selznick originally proposed casting Cary Grant as the lead. Director Vittorio De Sica countered with a request for Henry Fonda before deciding to cast all amateur actors. For the role of Antonio, De Sica chose a factory worker who had brought his son along to the audition. The part of Maria was filled by a journalist who had approached the director for an interview. De Sica stated that he selected each of them on based on the way their walked. The child Bruno's role was filled by a boy in the crowd who was watching the filming.
- This film is cited as a prototypical example of "*neorealism*," a film genre characterized by truth, naturalness, authenticity.
- The scene in the latter part of the film where Bruno is nearly run over twice while crossing the street was completely unrehearsed.
- The poster that Antonio is hanging is a picture of the famous actress Rita Hayworth, who was at the peak of her career at the time this film was made.
- "*Modena*" refers to "*Modena Football Club*", which is based in Modena, Emilia-Romagna, and was founded in 1912.
- The film is found on many critics' and directors' lists of the best films ever made. It was given an Academy Honorary Award in 1950, and, just four years after its release, was deemed the greatest film of all time by the British film magazine "*Sight & Sound's*" once-a-decade poll of filmmakers and critics in 1952. The film placed as the tenth greatest ever made in the latest directors poll, conducted in 2012. It is also listed as #22 on "*Entertainment Weekly's 100 Greatest Movies of All Time*" (2010).

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 22:16 (NIV) – “*. . . He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?’ declares the Lord.*”

Psalm 20:7 (NIV) – “*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*”

Psalm 103:13 – 14 (NIV) – “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*”

Proverbs 6:30 (NIV) – “*People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving.*”

2 Corinthians 4:6 – 9 (NLT) – “*For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.*”

Proverbs 30:7 – 9 (NLT) – “*O God, I beg two favors from you . . . First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God’s holy name.*”

James 2:12 – 13 (The Message) – “*Talk and act like a person expecting to be judged by the Rule that sets us free. For if you refuse to act kindly, you can hardly expect to be treated kindly. Kind mercy wins over harsh judgment every time.*”

Romans 15:13 (NIV) – “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*”

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Discussion points:

1. It's hard to imagine what it is like to have your main form of transportation stolen, especially when jobs are scarce and your job requires that particular mode. For Antonio, his bicycle symbolized hope for a better future. In what or in whom do we place our hope? What are the ramifications of placing our hope in temporal things?

2. How did Antonio's actions and priorities affect his relationship with his son Bruno?

3. For many, if not most, people in the world, life is a continuous struggle. What struck you most about the struggles depicted in this film?

4. This film shows instances of unscrupulous people taking advantage of those in desperate circumstances (for example, the fortune teller who profited by posing as a messenger from God while dispensing useless advice). How can we respond to this kind of injustice?

5. When Antonio realizes that something tragic could have happened to his son, his heart is softened, and he is able to see his son with new eyes of love and compassion. Why does it so often take devastating circumstances to get our attention? What would it look like for us to turn to God, the source of all hope, first and not only as a last resort?

6. One reviewer described this film as "*compassionate poetry.*" What is your response to this movie?