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FATHER'S DAY Michael B. Beaugh
Genesis 46:1-7; Ephesians 6:4 June 21, 2009
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The movie *The Shaggy Dog* is about a father who is too busy for his family. He does not realize the impact he is having on his family until he turns into a dog. Dave turns into a dog when he gets bitten by a 300 year old sheepdog from Tibet. Don't ask!

In this first film clip, we catch a glimpse of the family dynamic. Dave and his wife Rebecca are having a discussion, sort of, about their son Josh. Josh has suddenly begun flunking his math class. At this point in the film, Dave has been bitten by the 300 year old sheepdog. He is still in human form but beginning to show signs of a dog.

(Show clip#1 - 16:18-18:37)

Don't you just love the way Dave scratches himself? But this is not a happy family. Rebecca lays it on the line when she says to Dave, "You can't just talk a good game." If you talk the talk, you have to walk the walk. Or as we used to say, "The road to perdition is paved with good intentions." Dave has lots of good intentions, but that is not enough.

Things start going from bad to worse for Dave. In this next scene, he and Rebecca are meeting with Josh's teacher. They are trying to figure out what to do to help Josh. Rebecca is proud that Dave is actually there. In fact, she is surprised by some of the things he says. He actually takes responsibility for Josh's problems, admitting that he is gone from the family too much, too busy. He declares that solving Josh's problem is the most important thing to him. Family is his highest priority. However, as usual, Dave is easily distracted. Watch what happens when a stray cat appears in a tree outside the classroom window.

(Show clip#2 - 45:39-47:11)

This scene goes on with Dave on all fours chasing the cat across town. **It is funny, if you like slapstick, until you realize that lots of us fathers are chasing stray cats instead of staying focused on our responsibilities as fathers.**

Eventually, Dave literally turns into a dog. You might think that is the worst possible thing that could happen. However, it is the best thing that could have happened to Dave. It changes his life.

One of the good things about becoming a dog is that Dave's hearing becomes extra sensitive to every sound. In fact, he seems to hear at a deeper level. **He hears things from his family he never paid attention**

to as a father and husband. They don't know that the sheepdog in their house is Dave, so they say things in front of him. In this next scene, Dave the dog is listening to his son Josh explain why he is flunking math on purpose.

(Show clip #3 – 52:40-53:41)

Josh says his father is clueless. Dave the dog says to himself, "What kind of father am I?" For me, that is the central question of this movie. What kind of father am I?

Now, guys, maybe you recognize yourself in these clips. As a father, I can tell you I have been there and done that. Or maybe some of us grew up with dads like Dave, physically and emotionally absent a lot of the time. Clueless.

Now, I don't mean to defend fathers and our absence, but I understand the drive that keeps a lot of us guys so focused on our jobs and achievements that we become deaf and blind to the needs of our own family. We want to succeed. We want the recognition. We want respect. A lot of it has to do with our egos. It goes deeper than that. We want to provide for our families. Then, sometimes, even our families pressure us for more things, for better things. Then we may also have pressures from outside the family to keep producing just to keep our jobs. It is tough to maintain a balance.

However, none of this is a good excuse. We can do better. The Bible is always a good thing to turn to when we need help. So I decided to interview a man named Jacob to get his views on fatherhood. After all, the book of Genesis tells us that Jacob was the father of twelve sons.

I visited Jacob in his home. He brought me into his family room. He invited me to sit on one end of his sofa and he sat on the other. Draped over the back was what looked like a multi-colored quilt. I introduced myself and tried to explain *The Shaggy Dog* to him. He didn't seem as amused about it as I was and didn't seem particularly interested in what I was saying until I mentioned fatherhood. I told him I wanted to know the secret to being a good father.

"I have twelve sons," he said gruffly, "and still don't know the secret. If there is one, I don't know what it is. My boys didn't turn out so good."

This was not exactly what I had hoped to hear. "But you were a man of faith," I said. "God chose you and made a covenant with you to bless your family forever. Surely it was because you did something right."

Jacob gave me a sideways look. "What Bible have you been reading? God never chooses any of us because we are good. I still don't know why God chose me. But when he told me about His plan for me, to be the father

of a great nation, I figured it had to do with having children. So I got busy. I had a bunch of them. And I told every one of them that they were part of God's plan, too."

"That's what I mean," I said with excitement in my voice. "As a father you told your sons about God. Surely that is the secret to being a good father."

"That was the easy part," he said. "They still gave me grief. Like the time my sons sold their brother Joseph to slave traders heading for Egypt. Talk about sibling rivalry! They showed me his blood-stained coat of many colors and said animals had killed him." Jacob put his hand on the quilt on the back of the sofa and looked at it as he said, "I wept for weeks and weeks. For years I carried an empty spot in my heart. Nothing compares to losing a child." Jacob brushed back tears. He turned and looked at me. "Many years later I learned they had lied to me about Joseph. My own boys, lied to me! Does that sound like I was a good father?"

"So what did you do to them," I asked, "tough love?"

Quietly, almost in a whisper, he said, "I did nothing." He thought for a moment, and then added more forcefully, "No, that's not right. I forgave them. **Fathers get a lot of chances to practice forgiveness.** Like God our Father had to forgive me so many times. Like my own father forgave me for the lies I told him. Like my twin brother Esau forgave me for the monstrous thing I did to him. As fathers, we will be hurt by our children. They will disappoint us, even if they go to Sunday School every week. The question is, can we forgive them? I like what that feller wrote in Ephesians."

I said, "You mean, 'Spare the rod, spoil the child'?"

Jacob shot me a chiding look. "And you call yourself a minister? That's from Proverbs. That feller in Ephesians wrote, 'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.'"

"Did your father set a good example of that?" I asked.

Jacob responded without hesitation, "From day one. My father put me on to the God of his father. Said He was the only God I would ever need. That's why I took my family to Egypt during the Great Famine.

"I received word that Joseph was alive and well in Egypt. I wanted to hop on the bullet train to Egypt to see my long lost son. I wanted to hold him in my arms again and tell him how sorry I was for what happened to him." (I made a mental note of that. "Jacob hugs his children.")

"But that's not why I went to Egypt. I went because my God and the God of my father told me to go to protect my family from the Great Famine, to save them. Sometimes a father's responsibility seems just too great, and then God speaks to you and says, 'I love your family and I have a plan for your family. **Protect them and be the father they need.**'"

"So you took your family to Egypt?"

"I organized the whole kitten caboodle. I rounded up all my wives, and sons and daughters and in-laws, all my grandchildren. Seventy of us. We were a sight! We looked like the Clampits heading for the big city. We got down there and headed straight for the pharaoh's palace. I'll never forget standing in the Great Hall with my family surrounding me. We waited, staring at the door Joseph would come through. Then there he was. The door opened and Joseph appeared like in a dream. Our eyes met. We fell into each other's arms. We kissed each other's necks and wept on each other's shoulders. Here was my whole family in one place and I couldn't have been any prouder of them. And I couldn't figure why God was so good to us, but this I knew. I saw all those other gods in Egypt and just shook my head in disbelief. Every time I walked past a statue of this god or that god, I felt sorry for the people there. One God is enough for anybody, especially when He is the One whose promises always come to pass." Jacob suddenly looked at me with kindness in his eyes. **"Do you want to be a better father?" he asked.**

"Yes."

"Then get out of the way. Let the God of my father and my father's father and the God and Father of Jesus His Son be the true Father of your children."

Just as I got ready to ask what he meant by that, Jacob said he needed to go rest. As I walked away from his home, I realized that the advice we get about how to be a better father is just that, advice. It usually goes in one ear and out the other, if we even listen to it. It usually takes more than friendly advice to change our habits. It takes something like getting bitten by a 300 year old dog.

Here is what I thought. Perhaps the 300 year old sheepdog in the movie is a metaphor for God. That's not so farfetched. In one of the most famous Christian poems written a little over 100 years ago, Francis Thompson compares God to a dog. The title of the poem is "The Hound of Heaven". Thompson says God never stops pursuing us like a hound chasing a rabbit. God pursues us to bless us. If he ever catches us, our children will rise up and call us blessed.

At the end of the movie, Dave is a changed man. He makes amends with his daughter Carly, his son Josh, and his wife Rebecca.

(Show clip#4 – Final scene with Dave and family on the courthouse steps.)

Carly says it all. "Dad, you made a great dog, but you are an even better father."