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KEEPING PRIORITIES STRAIGHT Michael B. Beough  
Deut. 30:11-20; Matthew 16:24-26 July 12, 2009  
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For me, the movie *Cheaper by the Dozen* is about priorities. Having the right priorities and sticking to them are basic defining necessities for a meaningful life. They are critical for our relationship with God and with those we love. Yet, sticking with the right priorities is one of the hardest things to do.

From the beginning of this movie, **it is clear that the number one priority for Tom and Kate Baker is family.** They get married and want eight children. They end up with twelve, but is okay because their priority is family. They also want to be good parents. So everything they do, even the place they live and work, has to do with what is best for their family.

With this first film clip, let me introduce you to the Bakers.

Clip 1:15-3:49

I am not sure I can relate to their joy in having 12 children, but I can relate to the way they struggle with keeping their priorities straight.

The trouble begins when Tom is offered his dream job. With the encouragement of Kate, he takes the position of head coach at his college alma mater, Illinois Poly-Technic University. It means moving his family to Chicago.

In this next clip, we see how Tom justifies the move and the reaction of the children. Especially listen to what Tom promises them.

Clip 17:00-18:38 (Happier and stronger family)

In a way, I feel sorry for Tom. **He honestly believes that the move will make his family happier and stronger.**

Unfortunately, the opposite happens. For one thing with his new job, he has to spend lots more time as a coach and less time at home with his children. The more preoccupied with his job he becomes, the more his children get left out. They feel like they have lost their father.

Then Kate finds a publisher for her first book. The only problem is that she has to go on a two week book tour in the fall just when football season begins. Tom encourages her to go for it because he believes he can handle the children and his job while she is gone.

However, Tom is not the super-dad he thought he would be. The more time he spends meeting the crises of his children, the more his team suffers. As a solution, he brings the team to his house so he can be close to his children while working. He holds team meetings in the living room and practice in the yard. But it doesn't work. The more time he spends with the team, the more his children spiral out of control. The athletic director finally tells him he has to choose between his family and coaching.

Then the unthinkable happens. Mark runs away from home. He is the red headed boy who made Tom promise that moving to Chicago would create greater happiness. The whole family spills out into the neighborhood to search for Mark. He is nowhere to be found until Tom realizes Mark may be at the train station trying to go back to Midland. Mark had drawn a picture of their house in Midland with a title that said it is his favorite place in all the world to be.

In this next clip, Tom finds his son.

Clip 1:23:19-1:25:38 (Mark on the train)

As I said earlier, I cannot relate to the joy of having twelve children, but I can relate to Tom's struggle with keeping his priorities straight.

Someone who understood this struggle was Moses. In Deuteronomy 30, he makes a grand speech about priorities.

**So I decided to interview Moses.** I found him at his kitchen table. Guess what he was doing? He was weaving a basket. This seemed an odd thing for the most famous law giver in the history of the world to be doing. Talk about priorities! Weren't there more important things to do?

I watched his nimble fingers for a moment as he wove the reeds into a basket. It looked like he had done this many times before. I hated to interrupt him, but I introduced myself and straight off complimented him for his great motivational speech about priorities in Deuteronomy 30.

He dropped his hands to the table and just harrumphed and said, "Lot of good it did!"

I said, "But what you said is still so true. We have to get our priorities straight. We have to put God first in everything."

He said, "So I guess you do that, right?" He didn't wait for me to answer. He told me to sit down at the table. He handed me some reeds and proceeded to show me how to weave a basket. I honestly thought maybe his age was catching up with him, you know what I mean?

As he gave basket-weaving instructions, I tried to look directly into his eyes to see if anyone was home. But he never took his eyes off my hands. I tried steering the conversation back to my subject. I said, **"What I want to know is how you managed to keep your priorities straight. How can I do a better job of that?"**

Moses said, "That's what I am showing you."

I said, "By teaching me how to weave a basket?"

He walked into another room and came back with a finished basket in his hands. He set it on the table between us. It looked rather beaten. As he looked at it, his eyes momentarily misted with tears. "Here is what I know," he began. "This basket saved my life. My mother wove this basket with her own hands when I was three months old. She put me in it and set me in the river to hide me from the Pharaoh. At the time, all of us Israelites lived in Egypt, and for some reason, the Pharaoh wanted all Hebrew boys put to death. Why did she do that? Why did she risk her own life to save me? It took me years to get the answer. *She did it in obedience to the love God put in her heart.* She wanted me to live. And I lived. **And I learned that when we obey the love God puts in our hearts, there is life.**

"I weave baskets to help me keep my priorities straight."

"But your speech," I said.

Moses put up a hand to stop me. "Instead of making a fine speech, I wish I had taught my people how to weave baskets." He laughed at the thought. He reached over and took my hands in his. He guided them to show me how to make a basket. In silence we worked. Then he spoke again.

"For the life of me, I couldn't get my people to choose life for very long. They always drifted away from obedience to the love God put in their hearts. They suffered many calamities because of it. But this one thing I know. God never gave up on them, praise be His Name. That's what I wanted them to get out of my speech. After forty years of wandering around in the wilderness, we were about to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The people had screwed up royally. Their lives were a mess. But their future lay before them. I wanted them to know that life is really about God's priorities. God's priority is to save us from ourselves by enabling us to obey the love God puts in our hearts.

"Of course, you have an advantage, you know."

I knew what he meant. He was talking about Jesus. I nodded.

**"If Jesus doesn't make you want to obey the love God has put in your heart, then nothing will. And if you want to obey that love**

**because God leads you to choose life, then he will give you the strength to do so.** You will need that strength because there are lots of Pharaohs out there.”

With my basket in hand, I left Moses. I started thinking about Tom and Kate. Sometimes it takes a crisis for us to get back on the right track. Mark’s disappearance helps them regain their clarity. Tom quits his coaching job at his alma mater. They make the changes necessary because for them it is family above all else.

(Clip 1:26:51-1:28:02)

This is one of those feel good endings that seems too good to be true. But if it is too good to be true, then what about God? God promises us a good ending. If we can see beyond the obvious in this movie, we might catch a glimpse of the meaning of Jesus’ words in Matthew 16: 26, *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

It is like Moses told me. If we obey the love God has put in our hearts, there will be life.