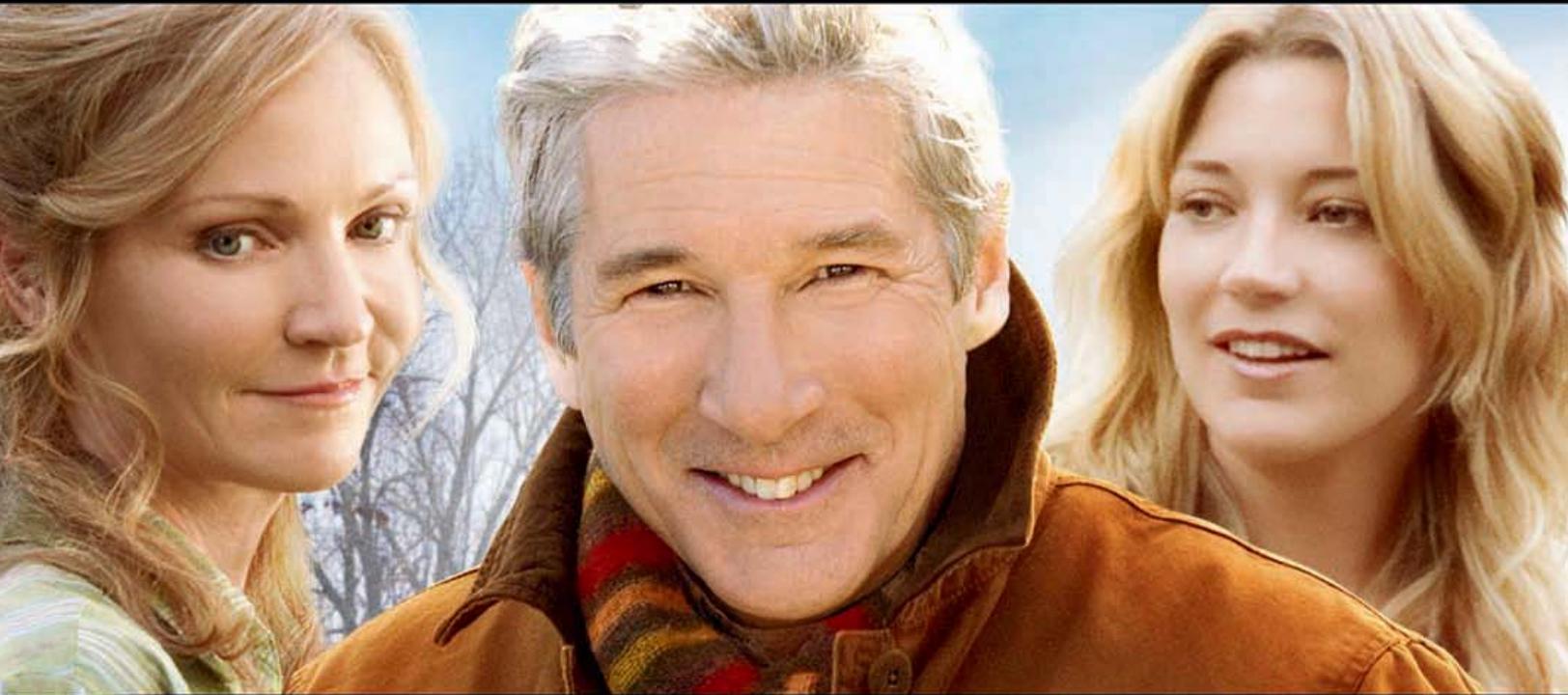


# STUDY GUIDE



Richard Gere

Joan Allen

A LASSE HALLSTRÖM FILM

# Hachi

A dog's tale

Based on a true story



## CREW OVERVIEW

Lasse Hallström (Director)

Stephen P. Lindsey (Writing Credit: screenplay)

Kaneto Shindo (Writing Credit: Hachi Monogatari)

## CAST OVERVIEW

Richard Gere (Professor Parker Wilson)

Joan Allen (Kate Wilson)

Sarah Roemer (Andy Wilson)

Robbie Sublett (Michael)

Jason Alexander (Carl)

Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa (Ken)

## USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically-based discussion of various themes found in Hachi: A Dog's Tale. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or can focus on one or two themes at a time.

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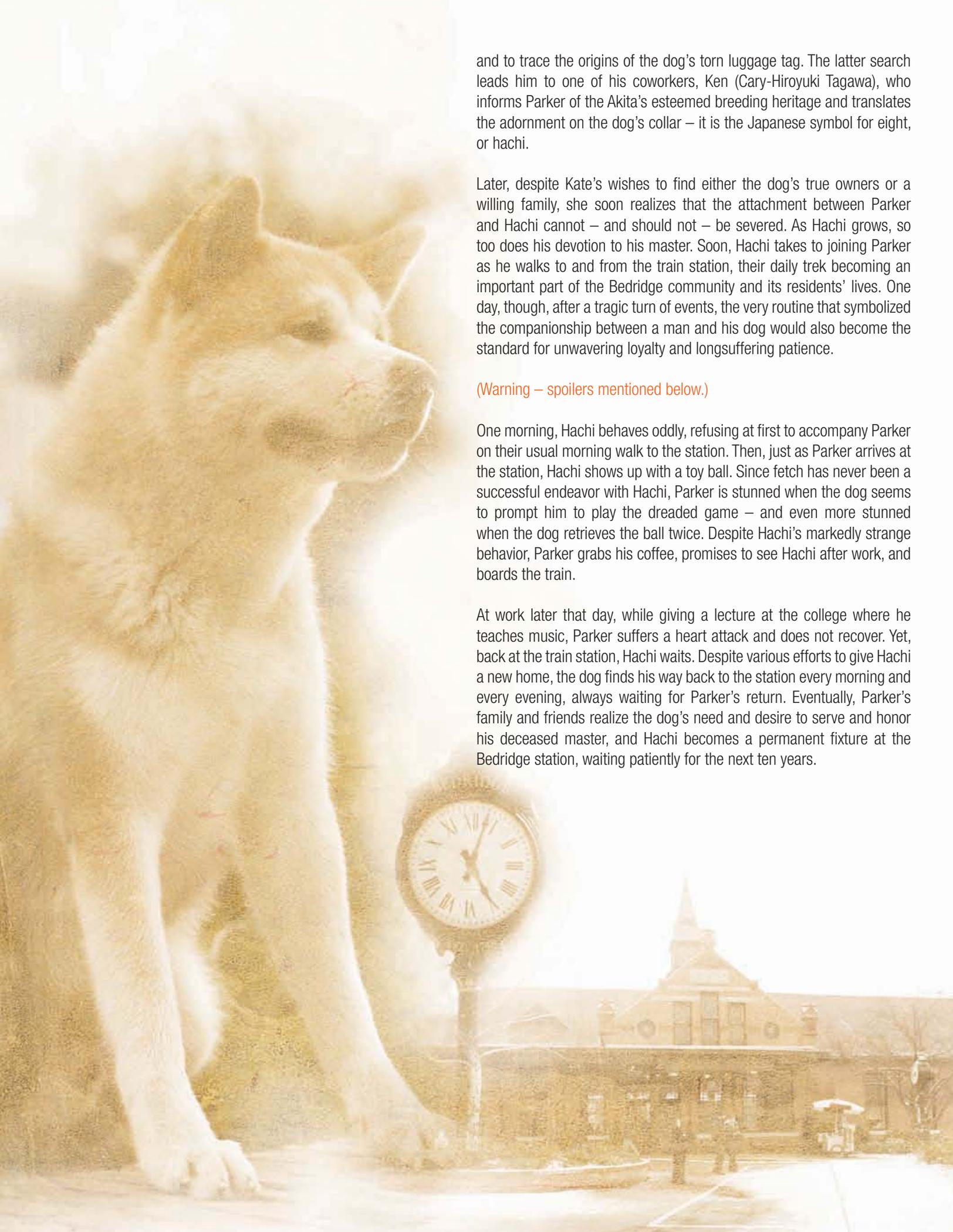
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## FILM OVERVIEW/ NOTE TO GROUP

Hachi: A Dog's Tale is based both on true events (those of a Japanese professor and his loyal Akita during the 1920s) and a 1987 film (Hachi Monogatari, a Japanese adaptation of the beloved story). This newest version, set in the fictional New England town of Bedridge, tells the story of Professor Parker Wilson (played by Richard Gere) and the unexpected bond he and his family forge with an abandoned puppy – a puppy that would later come to demonstrate loyalty and duty beyond understanding and expectation.

At the beginning of the film, Parker finds the lone pup stranded at the train station. After a failed attempt to surrender the animal to Carl (Jason Alexander), the station's manager, Parker relents and heads home. But, facing mounting pressure from his wife Kate (Joan Allen) to find alternate plans for the animal, Parker proceeds to post flyers and visit the pound,





and to trace the origins of the dog's torn luggage tag. The latter search leads him to one of his coworkers, Ken (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa), who informs Parker of the Akita's esteemed breeding heritage and translates the adornment on the dog's collar – it is the Japanese symbol for eight, or hachi.

Later, despite Kate's wishes to find either the dog's true owners or a willing family, she soon realizes that the attachment between Parker and Hachi cannot – and should not – be severed. As Hachi grows, so too does his devotion to his master. Soon, Hachi takes to joining Parker as he walks to and from the train station, their daily trek becoming an important part of the Bedridge community and its residents' lives. One day, though, after a tragic turn of events, the very routine that symbolized the companionship between a man and his dog would also become the standard for unwavering loyalty and longsuffering patience.

(Warning – spoilers mentioned below.)

One morning, Hachi behaves oddly, refusing at first to accompany Parker on their usual morning walk to the station. Then, just as Parker arrives at the station, Hachi shows up with a toy ball. Since fetch has never been a successful endeavor with Hachi, Parker is stunned when the dog seems to prompt him to play the dreaded game – and even more stunned when the dog retrieves the ball twice. Despite Hachi's markedly strange behavior, Parker grabs his coffee, promises to see Hachi after work, and boards the train.

At work later that day, while giving a lecture at the college where he teaches music, Parker suffers a heart attack and does not recover. Yet, back at the train station, Hachi waits. Despite various efforts to give Hachi a new home, the dog finds his way back to the station every morning and every evening, always waiting for Parker's return. Eventually, Parker's family and friends realize the dog's need and desire to serve and honor his deceased master, and Hachi becomes a permanent fixture at the Bedridge station, waiting patiently for the next ten years.

# THEME ONE: LOYALTY: AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

Guiding Scripture: Proverbs 17:17 (NLT): “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”

## SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- Ruth 1:16 (NIV): “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’”
- 1 Samuel 18:1-3 (NIV): “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father’s house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”
- Psalm 36:5 (NIV): “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.”
- Proverbs 17:17 (NLT): “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”
- Lamentations 3:22-23 (NIV): “Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”
- Luke 16:10 (KJV): “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV): “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (NIV): “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

## DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Hachi’s Choice (00:17:12–00:18:23, Chapter 4)
- An Unexpected Visitor (00:26:12–00:28:27, Chapter 6)
- A Real Fetch (00:49:33–00:54:08, Chapter 10)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The connection between Parker and Hachi is evident from the moment they first meet. As the tiny pup sits on his haunches and looks up at Parker at the train station, it’s obvious that there’s something special in the way this abandoned animal instinctively trusts the stranger standing before him. It isn’t surprising, then, to see the bond between these two grow stronger in the weeks, months, and years that follow.

### SCENE TO REVIEW: HACHI’S CHOICE (00:17:12–00:18:23, CHAPTER 4)

- What do you notice about the way that Parker and Hachi interact in this scene? How might their behavior demonstrate the beginnings of loyalty in their relationship?
- When Parker asks Ken if he wants the dog, Ken replies with a dismissive laugh and says, “Me? No, I think he’s made his choice.” What prompts Ken to answer this way?
- A bit later in the scene, Ken makes another great point: “Whether you found him or he found you, who’s to say? It’s meant to be.” What does he mean? How might Ken’s knowledge of Japanese culture influence his response?
- How else does loyalty emerge as a theme in the beginning of the movie?

Read Proverbs 17:17 and Luke 16:10 (see Scriptures Referenced) and discuss these verses’ takes on the idea of loyalty. Consider the deeper meaning and implications that the verses represent.

As the pup grows into a mature dog, Hachi’s loyalty to Parker continues to develop and evolve. One morning, as Parker leaves for work and shuts the fence gate, Hachi shows his love for his owner in an ambitious – and downright messy – way.

### SCENE TO REVIEW: AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR (00:26:12–00:28:27, CHAPTER 6)

- What compels Hachi to pursue Parker?
- While this scene has its comical elements, what do Hachi’s determined actions say about his loyalty and love for Parker?

- How does Parker respond when he sees Hachi at the train station? In what ways does Parker's response reveal his love for the faithful animal?
- Hachi goes to great lengths to maneuver his escape under the fence. Can you recall a time in your own life when either you or someone you know went to great lengths out of a sense of loyalty?

There is something precious about the innocent and unyielding love that dogs often show. Hachi – along with the personification of certain human emotions and attributes that he represents – is a wonderful example of faithfulness. His actions speak volumes and we, as the audience, can learn a great deal by observing this particular animal. We can also learn from the connection, or friendship, that Parker and Hachi share.

In the Bible, there are several excellent examples of loyalty and friendship, including the stories of Ruth and Naomi (found in the book of Ruth) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel). Read Ruth 1:16 and 1 Samuel 18:1–3 (see Scriptures Referenced) and discuss the following questions:

- What do Ruth's words say about her faithfulness to Naomi? What do her words say about her faithfulness to the God of Israel?
- Naomi is a broken and bitter woman after seeing the death of her husband and sons. How does Ruth's loyalty prove to be a comfort to Naomi?
- What do you think of David and Jonathan's friendship? Why is this friendship esteemed as one of the greatest in Scripture?
- Based on the 1 Samuel verse and your knowledge of the story of David and Jonathan, how does loyalty play an important role in their friendship?

At a turning point in the movie, Hachi follows Parker to the train station with a toy ball, determined to play with his owner. Little does Parker know that Hachi's desire to play fetch for the first time stems from a unique and inexplicable sense of impending tragedy.

## SCENE TO REVIEW: A REAL FETCH (00:49:33–00:54:08, CHAPTER 10)

- Prior to this scene, Parker and Ken have a conversation in which Ken says, "If [Hachi's] going to fetch, it'll be for a very special reason." What is the significance of Ken's statement in light of this scene? What is Hachi's "very special reason"?
- Notice how Parker holds Hachi's yellow ball during his lecture at the college. Is there any significance to this gesture? Why or why not?
- How is the theme of loyalty demonstrated in this scene? How is love demonstrated?

Take a moment to read 1 Corinthians 13:1–8 (see Scriptures Referenced), a series of verses embedded in one of the most definitive passages concerning love.

- What qualities of love, as listed in this passage, correspond to loyalty?
- Which of the love qualities are demonstrated in the movie? How so?

Read Psalm 36:5; Lamentations 3:22-23; and 1 Corinthians 1:9 (see Scriptures Referenced). After you read the verses, consider and discuss the following questions:

- How do these verses extol God's faithfulness?
- Why is it important for God to possess a characteristic such as faithfulness (loyalty)?
- How might these verses encourage us to become more loyal in our own lives and relationships? What are the benefits of living loyally?

As you finish this theme discussion, consider other Bible verses that relate to loyalty and its relationship to love. Consider, too, any other scenes in the movie that support the theme.



# THEME TWO: A DEMONSTRATION OF SELFLESSNESS

**Guiding Scripture: Deuteronomy 13:4 (NIV): “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.”**

## SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- Genesis 6:12–14, 22 (NIV): “God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on the earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood...’...Noah did everything just as God commanded him.”
- Deuteronomy 13:4 (NIV): “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.”
- Psalm 19:9–11 (NIV): “The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”
- Proverbs 10:8 (NLT): “The wise are glad to be instructed, but babbling fools fall flat on their faces.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV): “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”
- Luke 9:23 (NLT): “Then he said to the crowd, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me.’”
- John 15:10 (NIV): “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father’s commands and remain in his love.”
- Galatians 6:2 (NIV): “Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.”

## DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- **A Sense of Duty** (00:59:48–01:02:08, Chapter 12)
- **Andy’s Blessing** (01:09:19–01:10:50, Chapter 14)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

At one point in the movie, Parker discusses with Kate a few of the things that Ken shared with him about the Akita breed. Parker mentions that Akitas were traditionally bred by the Shoguns for combat and hunting, and that the dogs were often regarded as royalty. It’s interesting to note that these traditional Akita responsibilities hinge on the dog’s sense of duty and selflessness, two related characteristics that Hachi demonstrates when he faithfully trots to the train station to wait for a passenger that won’t be arriving.

## SCENE TO REVIEW:

### A SENSE OF DUTY (00:59:48–01:02:08, CHAPTER 12)

- At the graveside service, Ken reads part of “Song of Myself” from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*: “I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign’d by God’s name, And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe’er I go, Others will punctually come for ever and ever.” What do you think of this passage?
- As Hachi waits at the train station, Carl stops by, pats him on the head, and says, “All right, Hachi. You do what you have to do.” How does Carl’s comment address Hachi’s sense of duty and obedience?
- What do you think of Hachi’s determination to go to the train station? How can his actions be credited with duty? How do his actions demonstrate selflessness?

Choosing to fulfill one’s duty isn’t the easiest of tasks. As recorded in Genesis, God became heartbroken over mankind’s propensity for evil, so He commands Noah to build a massive ark in preparation for The Flood. Read Genesis 6:12–14, 22 (see Scriptures Referenced) and discuss the following questions:

- How does Noah respond to God’s instructions?
- Why is it important for Noah to fulfill his duty?

Noah’s contemporaries probably couldn’t understand why he was building an ark. Still, Noah remained obedient and carried out God’s command to the letter (or, more aptly, to the cubit). Similarly, Hachi’s family and friends don’t necessarily understand the sense of duty that compels Hachi to return to the train station, yet the animal revisits his waiting post day after day.

- What drives Noah's sense of duty? What drives Hachi's?
- How can we fulfill our duties and act obediently even when our friends and family may not understand the motivation behind an endeavor?

Read Psalm 19:9–11, Proverbs 10:8, and John 15:10 (see Scriptures Referenced). Discuss how each of these verses relates to the concepts of duty and selflessness. Discuss, too, the inherent obedience necessary to the heart of fulfilling one's duty.

Despite several attempts to keep Hachi in her home, Andy realizes Hachi's need to be liberated from the confines of a backyard and subsequently allowed to return to his mission.

## SCENE TO REVIEW: ANDY'S BLESSING (01:09:19–01:10:50, CHAPTER 14)

If you were in Andy's position, how would you respond to Hachi's behavior? How would you determine what the animal needs or wants? What does Andy recognize in Hachi's despondency?

- What do you make of the interaction between Andy and Hachi? How does the movie portray their relationship from Hachi's days as a puppy to the current scene?
- Which elements in this scene promote a sense of duty?
- How does Hachi's decision to leave Andy's home represent selflessness even though it seems the decision could, in fact, be considered a selfish one?
- How about you? Have you ever had to make a decision to fulfill a responsibility, even if it meant that you might suffer or need to give of yourself? If so, what happened?

Read Luke 9:23 and Galatians 6:2 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do these verses say about selflessness? What do the verses ask of us? How can we take up our cross daily (Luke) and share in each other's burdens (Galatians)?
- Why is selflessness a necessary component of duty or responsibility? Can you think of examples from either the movie or your own life that speak to this connection?

As you finish this theme discussion, read Deuteronomy 13:4 and Ecclesiastes 12:13 (see Scriptures Referenced) and talk about the life instructions embedded in these verses.



# THEME THREE: THE FOUNDATION OF COMMUNITY

Guiding Scripture: John 15:12 (NIV): “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

## SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- Genesis 2:18 (NIV): “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’”
- Proverbs 17:6 (NLT): “Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged; parents are the pride of their children.”
- Proverbs 31:10–12 (NIV): “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.”
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV): “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”
- Ecclesiastes 9:9 (NLT): “Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil.”
- John 15:12 (NIV): “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”
- Romans 12:18 (NIV): “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
- Ephesians 5:33 (NLT): “So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”
- 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV): “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

## DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Hachi’s New Home (00:23:21–00:25:45, Chapter 5)
- Theater Renovations (00:40:14–00:41:51, Chapter 9)
- Michael’s “Interview” (00:33:15–00:34:35, Chapter 7)
- The Big Announcement (00:44:12–00:45:49, Chapter 9)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As evidenced throughout the movie, Parker and Kate have a strong, committed relationship. Their marriage is, in fact, a testament to their dedication to family, friends, and the surrounding community. Even though Parker and Kate don’t always see eye to eye (e.g. Hachi’s future at the beginning of the movie), their mutual love and respect serve to remind them of the other’s best interests.

## SCENE TO REVIEW:

### HACHI’S NEW HOME (00:23:21–00:25:45, CHAPTER 5)

- How does this scene represent Kate’s commitment to and love for Parker?
- As Kate watches the backyard scene through the window, what does she recognize that changes her mind about Hachi? What does she see in this playful moment?
- What role does Andy (Sarah Roemer) play in this scene? What do you think of the brief interaction between Andy and her mother in the kitchen? What about the interplay between Andy and her father in the backyard?

Read Proverbs 31:10–12 and Ephesians 5:33 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How do these verses speak to Parker and Kate’s relationship? Can you point to specific moments in the movie in which there is tangible evidence of these verses?
- Why is a “wife of noble character” (Proverbs 31:10) so valuable?
- What is respect’s purpose in marriage? Why is it vital to marriage – and to other types of relationships as well?

## SCENE TO REVIEW: THEATER RENOVATIONS (00:40:14–00:41:51, CHAPTER 9)

- What aspects of this scene show the respect between Parker and Kate?
- How is Parker’s “speech” a form of encouragement?

It’s interesting to note that Parker’s original intention in visiting Kate was to determine Hachi’s whereabouts. Yet, as Parker senses Kate’s nervousness about her impending renovation deadline, his focus switches to his wife and her needs. This scene beautifully demonstrates the way that Parker and Kate prioritize each other, serving to strengthen the foundation on which their marriage is based.

Read Genesis 2:18 and Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; 9:9 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How do these verses relate to marriage and family?
- What do these verses say about God’s purpose for marriage? About the importance of companionship within marriage?

In addition to Parker and Kate’s relationship, the story features the timeline of Andy and Michael’s (Robbie Sublett) courtship and marriage. Even though Michael is initially nervous and uncertain about his standing in the Wilson family, Parker reaches out (albeit a bit reluctantly) to the young man, calming Michael’s nerves and showing the importance of family.

## SCENE TO REVIEW: MICHAEL’S “INTERVIEW” (00:33:15–00:34:35, CHAPTER 7)

- What do you think of Parker and Michael’s interaction? What kind of picture does this scene paint of their relationship?
- Parker says, “Because [love’s] what you want to remember on the bad days.” What do you think of this advice? What does this advice say about Parker’s relationship with his own wife? What does it say about his relationship with his daughter?
- Could Parker’s comment be construed as a form of community-building? Why or why not? Use details from the movie to support your answer.

Take a moment to read John 15:12, Romans 12:18, and 1 Peter 4:8 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How could these verses be applied to family and community?
- Why is love an important aspect (if not the most important aspect) of relationships?
- How about yourself? Can you think of a time in your own life when you saw the importance of these verses’ messages? If so, what happened?

In regard to family, Andy is her parents’ pride and joy. And Parker and Kate cherish their daughter and the place she holds within their family. It isn’t surprising, then, to see Parker and Kate’s response when Andy arrives with news about another arrival.

## SCENE TO REVIEW: THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT (00:44:12–00:45:49, CHAPTER 9)

- How does Parker respond to Andy’s news? What do his actions and response say about his relationship with his daughter?
- How does this scene represent the importance of family?

Read Proverbs 17:6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does Andy’s love for her parents relate to this verse?

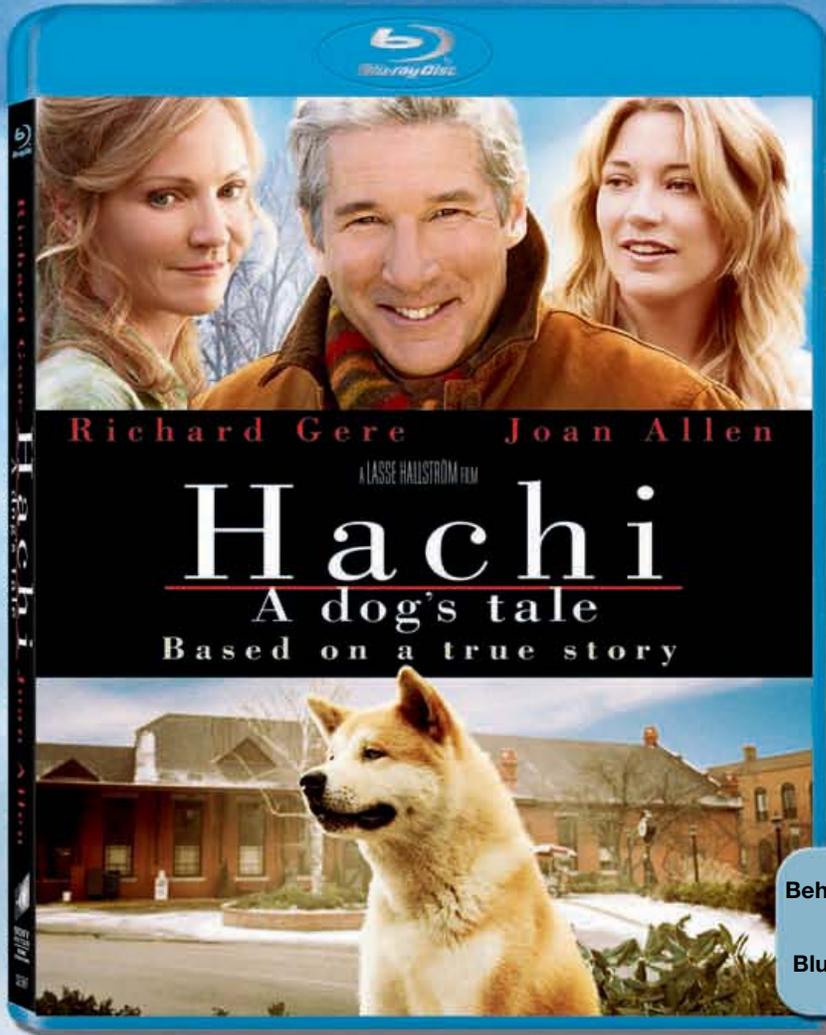
As you conclude this theme discussion, think about other Bible verses that discuss the idea of family, relationships, and community. Consider, too, additional scenes from the movie.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

- How would you describe Kate and Hachi’s relationship? It’s much different than Parker and Hachi’s, but why? Point to specific scenes for support.
- In what ways do the residents of Bedridge contribute to Hachi’s waiting endeavor? How does community play an important role in the movie in general?
- What do you think of Carl’s willingness to exploit Hachi for an article in the local newspaper? What do his actions say about his character?
- It’s easy to become absorbed in Parker and Hachi’s story – to the point that we forget about Ronnie’s class presentation. But, how does Parker and Hachi’s story impact Ronnie (and the larger story narrative)?
- From time to time, director Lasse Hallstrom shows scenes from Hachi’s perspective. What do you think of these black-and-white shots? What purpose do they serve?

“This film will touch your heart.”

- Francine Brokaw, Los Angeles Family Magazine



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