

Series: Fireproof Your Relationships
Title: He First Loved Us
Text: 1 John 4:7-19
Key Word: Principles
Proposition: Everyone will discover that all they really need is to be loved by the Creator of the Universe.

Good morning friends. We are learning *How to Fireproof Our Relationships*. Many are looking for ways to safeguard and improve their relationships. Throughout this series, I offer some practical tools and suggestions on how to be a better spouse, neighbor, and friend. Today, I want to point you to the source of good relational behavior, experiencing God's love. Some may have missed out on such experiences. They have yet to experience God's love at a deep level. What we have not seen or experienced, we will not duplicate.

We're introducing you to God and His love. I trust we're beginning to see the depth of God's love. I hope that we'll welcome Him afresh into our lives. Sherwood Pictures film, "Fireproof," describes a marriage on the brink of divorce. The husband, a fireman named Caleb, decided that, just like he would never walk out on a partner in a fire, he would not walk out on his marriage partner.

Caleb's dad gives him a book with some practical suggestions on how to love his wife. Caleb tries these steps, but they are not working for him. Overwhelmed with frustration he realizes that there is something lacking in his life. *Let's watch this scene from the movie. (Play the Session Two clip from your Fireproof Your Marriage DVD. SHOW CLIP. 5 min.)*

“You cannot give what you do not have.” Most of us grew up in homes where we talked about love. A few of us grew up in homes where we experienced true, deep, unconditional love. Many find it really hard to love when they have never truly felt loved. Many people are walking around these days trying to give and receive something they’ve never experienced for themselves.

Last week we said that love must be put into practice. We need to take tangible steps in the direction of the people we want to love. *Brian and Alicia Waldron* have been reading and applying the Love Dare to their marriage. Let’s hear how it’s going. How many of you practiced the Love/Dare Challenge last week? – Good for you. We’ll have another one today.

EVERYONE DESERVES TO BE LOVED. We’ve got to receive love before we can give it. Open a bible and turn to ***1 JOHN 4:7-19***. The person who wrote this was an old man named, “John.” One day Jesus calls John and his brother James out of their fishing boat and says, “Follow me.” John did. For 3 ½ years, he watched Jesus, listened to Him, ate meals with him, heard Him pray, and watched Him die. John concluded that, in Jesus, he had found the Christ, the anointed One; the Son of the Living God.

This young man devoted his life to telling others about God’s love. He did that for 50 years, then 60 years. Finally, age 65 or 75 years old, John writes to a group of people that matter deeply to him. In this little letter he calls them, “Dear

children, my dear children,” and “dear friends.” Listen to this (read 1 John 4:7-19).

Over the years, something has happened to John. He experienced God’s love, through His Savior, Jesus. The Bible describes in Acts 2 how the Holy Spirit descended and moved into the hearts of Jesus’ disciples. John felt it. John lived with the Holy Spirit, God’s love, inside of him. And now, towards the end of his life, it’s practically all he can talk about, all he can think about, all he cares about.

By the time John writes this letter, he’s learned that relationships are really all that matters. The toys, the titles, the promotions, the events, at the end of life, they don’t really matter. Relationships do.

Let’s look at this passage. John said, “Dear friends, let us *love* one another, for *love* comes from God. Everyone who *loves* has been born of God... Whoever does not *love* does not know God, because He is *love*.” – In one verse, he uses the word “love,” five times. All told, he uses the word 21 times in this one passage.

Something has happened to John. He’s become obsessed with love. It’s not something he planned; it’s just something he lived. He experienced God’s love, and it felt so good to him and seemed so right to him. Over time, he became a more loving person.

What does this have to do with you? Everything! Most of us long to be loved, but we don’t know how to get it. Many of us long to give love, but we keep sabotaging our own efforts and making things worse. Some of us feel like we’ve

tried to love those around us, but it never quite works out, so we toy with just going off on our own and giving up on the whole relationship thing.

God loves us so much that he offers some ***PRINCIPLES OF RELATIONSHIPS***. This first principle may be more implied than stated, but it's true. ***FIRST, PROFOUND EXPERIENCES OF GOD'S LOVE ARE MEANT TO BE SHARED***. I grew up in a very loving and caring home. My parents showed me the joy of serving and helping others. When I was 12 years old, I received a trophy for raising over \$ 50.00 for the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon. I planned, coordinated, and implemented a neighborhood carnival to raise the money. We had all kinds of games, prizes, a wagon ride behind a riding lawn mower, and of course "carnival food. I remember our local newspaper describing the event.

The trophy was great. The newspaper article was wonderful. But there was something greater. It was the team effort in raising money for kids who couldn't walk. Love moved us to share it with the whole world. Many have had experiences like that. Something good happens. You just wanted to share it with everyone. John says, "***SINCE GOD SO LOVED US, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.***" (1 JOHN 4:12) So when you experience God's love, you naturally want to share that love with the people you love.

SECOND, LOVE FOR OTHERS INCREASES WHEN ONE WALKS CLOSE TO GOD. John says, "***GOD IS LOVE. WHOEVER LIVES IN LOVE***

LIVES IN GOD, AND GOD IN HIM. IN THIS WAY, LOVE IS MADE

COMPLETE AMONG US. (1 JOHN 4:16-17) The closer one lives with God, the more love increases.

It's like when you hang around someone who's really good at what they do. If you hang around with a great athlete, a business person, or a parent, you'll find yourself thinking about the things they think about, doing the things they do, setting their priorities, and noticing the things they notice. Friends, Greatness is contagious. If you hang around it, it'll rub off on you.

God's love is so great that if you live close to Him, you will find yourself becoming more like Him, valuing what He values, acting like He acts. When you get close to God, you will find yourself becoming more loving, and that's the key to all relationships.

So how can become close to God? First, open the door. It's that simple. It depends on you. The Risen Jesus says, "***HERE I AM! I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN AND EAT WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME.***" REVELATION 3:20

Opening the door is a metaphor for inviting Christ into your life. All we have to do is open the door. It's saying, "Jesus, would you come into my life. I want a relationship with You. I know there are things that I have done that would disqualify me from a relationship with You. Would You forgive me for those things and become my Lord and my Savior and my friend?" Such a prayer

assures us of God's forgiveness of the past. It gives us His loving power for our present circumstances and hope for tomorrow.

“So, how do you stay close to God?” Very simple: you hang out with Him, just like you'd hang out with any other friend. You talk with Him; you invite Him to be a part of your day. You come to church. You want to hang out His friends. You read His book, the Bible. Then you begin to think His thoughts. The things He hates, you despise. The things He loves you love. Real love, enduring love, patient love, forgiving love, comes from God. Remember the more you know God, the better you will love people

Most want to have this love, but fear prohibits them from doing what they want. Fear of failure, rejection, of being hurt; fear of the unknown, overwhelm and intimidate us from loving and being loved. Fear is the belief that something nearby is harmful or dangerous. God promises though that perfect love drives fear away.

Paul says, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). The author of Hebrews says, *“The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?”* (Hebrews 13:6, TNIV) Love eliminates fear. With no fear of people, we stop competing with them, we stop trying to get them to notice us and we stop depending on them to make us feel good. We're free to love and to be loved.

The Final principle is *WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.*

We cannot give what we do not have, but once we have received God's love, if we stay close to Him, we just get better and better and better at loving people.

Throughout history we have seen people show us that we thought could not be done, can be done. Their example has given many courage to try and succeed at doing what was once thought to be impossible. Jesus was one of those examples. John says that Jesus came to show us what real love is—selfless and others-centered. For loves' sake His Spirit enables us to model his love. We can have what God is offering us; His love in us can be ours, right now!

Here are two Love Dare Challenges. The first is, receive God's love if you've never done so before. This is a challenge, because it requires faith and humility on your part. You're trusting that God really loves you. You're trusting that He wants nothing more than a friendship with you. If you ask Him to, He will be your Savior and friend. Yes, it means knowing that you are not as good as you think you are. It means that you believe that He is better than, more than you ever imagine. His mercy is greater than your greatest sin. His holiness is brighter than the brightest star.

If you have not opened the door of your heart and received His loving presence in your life, I invite you to pray this prayer with me. I'll pray it out loud and you pray it quietly, or voice the words silently in your mind. ***LORD JESUS, I WANT TO RECEIVE YOUR LOVE TODAY. I BELIEVE YOU CAME AND DIED FOR ME, AND I WANT TO BE YOUR FRIEND AND FOLLOWER. TODAY, I INVITE YOU INTO MY LIFE. LEAD ME, GUIDE ME, LOVE ME, SO THAT I CAN LOVE OTHERS BETTER EACH DAY.***

Congratulations! You are now a child of God who shall experience His love every day. Don't miss it! If you'll come up afterwards, we'll give you a Bible so you can read God's thoughts and begin hanging out with Him. And whatever else you do, be sure to come back next weekend so you can continue to build a habit of hanging out with God's people.

The second Love Dare Challenge contains three parts: each part will fit who you are. ***HUSBANDS: EVERY DAY THIS WEEK, ASK THE LORD TO SHOW YOU ONE WAY TO LOVE YOUR WIFE, AND THEN DO IT.*** Here's how you can do this. Spend 4-5 minutes talking to God each morning, and once you've gotten through the normal prayer requests for your day and your family, at the very end of your prayer say, "Lord, show me one way I can tangibly love my wife today." If something comes to mind, do it. If nothing comes to mind, read 1 Corinthians 13. I guarantee you'll think of something while you're reading that. Husbands, will you take this challenge?

WIVES: EVERY DAY THIS WEEK, ASK THE LORD TO SHOW YOU ONE WAY TO LOVE YOUR HUSBAND, AND THEN DO IT. Work the same process your husband is going to work. A few minutes of prayer, reading 1 Corinthians 13 if you don't hear anything directly from God. Then doing whatever it is that you believe the Lord wants you to do that day to love your husband. Wives, will you take this challenge?

Singles, your challenge is similar. ***SINGLES: MAKE A LIST OF 6 FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS OR CO-WORKERS AND ASSIGN A DAY TO EACH OF THEM. THEN, EVERY DAY THIS WEEK, ASK THE LORD TO SHOW YOU ONE WAY TO LOVE THE PERSON OF THE DAY, THEN DO IT.*** Singles, will you take this challenge?

Let's pray. (Ask God to walk closely with each person, to strengthen their love and ability to love. Ask Him to give them ability to give love in meaningful ways each day this week.) {2195}