

Series: Fireproof Your Relationships
Title: A Better Way of Loving
Text: Luke 5:1-16
Key Word: Principles
Proposition: Everyone can love better by following these biblical principles.

Good morning friends! I have a question for you. Who taught you how to tie your shoe laces? Raise your hand when I come to your answer. Was it your mother? Your father? Your brother or sister? Your grandmother? A friend?

I don't remember how old I was, but I remember that it was my mother who taught me. She showed me how to make a half knot, and then a loop with one lace, wrap the other around it, make a loop with the other lace, slip one through the other and pull tight. I know that process so well that I had to actually stop, think a bit, and see myself do it, in order to be able to describe it to you.

Bob didn't have anyone teach him how to tie his shoes. One day in his mid-forties it dawned on him that his shoelaces were always a little funny because he had taught himself how to tie his shoes. Bob came from a family with six children. All the other family members assumed that someone else had taught him how to tie his shoes, so no one ever formally sat down with him to teach this fundamental lesson.

I am saddened by this. I suspect that you are too. Tying one's shoe isn't that complicated, once you know how, but figuring it out on your own is nearly impossible.

That's true about a lot of things in life. Brushing your teeth isn't that hard to learn, but it goes a lot better if someone shows you how. Setting an alarm clock isn't that tricky, but it is so much easier when someone demonstrates the steps for you. The same is true with planting a plant and serving a tennis ball, swinging a golf club, introducing yourself to someone you've never met – the fundamentals of life all go better if you can learn them from somebody who already knows how.

Nowhere in life is this truer than learning to relate to people and nowhere is it more important than learning how to really love people. The sad thing is, in most families—probably in yours, and certainly in mine, no one ever sat us down and said, “Here are the fundamentals of how to love others.” No one ever taught us the fundamentals of how to really love other people.

So, like Bob teaching himself to tie his own shoes, we learned how to love by watching, imitating and experimenting. For many of us, that method didn't work. As a result, we've hurt some people we really didn't mean to, we've damaged some relationships, and we have some regrets about others. This morning, I want to show you a better way. I want to teach you the fundamentals of a better way of loving.

For the past five weeks we've been learning lessons from a couple named Caleb and Catherine, who are husband and wife and the central characters in the movie *Fireproof*. Not knowing how to really love each other, Caleb and Catherine

have done a lot of things to hurt each other. They've come to the resentment stage in their marriage, and both of them want out. Then, Caleb's dad hands him a book called, *The Love Dare*, which teaches him the fundamentals of expressing love.

Caleb's obsession with owning a boat drove a wedge between him and his wife. He's been saving money to buy one for years, while Catherine's mother needs medical equipment but has no money to purchase it. Watch this video, and see what happens when Caleb finally figures out the true nature of love. The first scene occurs early in the movie, and the second scene happens weeks later. (*Play the Session Six clip from your Fireproof Your Marriage DVD. SHOW CLIP.*)

I want to show you a better way to love today, shown by Jesus. ***OPEN A BIBLE TO LUKE 5:1.*** I will be referring to different verses in this chapter so I invite you to keep your Bible's open at this place for future reference.

We find Jesus by Lake Gennesaret also known as "The Sea of Galilee." He and Peter have only met a few times before; they're really just getting to know each other at this stage. Jesus, in this story, loves the crowd and loves Peter in a better way than you might initially suspect.

Love is rather complex. We tell someone that we love them and then in the same breathe we say we love chocolate chip cookies. I tell Melinda daily that I love her, desiring to spend all my days & nights with her. Our love is so mysterious and complex with its joys and struggles, and yet it is so beautiful, so

good, that we can't do anything to mess it up. At the same time, I also say that I love having clear goals in front of me and working to achieving those goals. It seems to me that love loses it's meaning when we use it for so many things. Sometimes I wonder if we get confused. In the New Testament, there are **three words for love**. One is "Eros," the second is "phileos," the third is "agape."

EROS, PHILEOS, & AGAPE.

You've heard these words before. Our word, "erotic," comes from Eros. The city of Philadelphia ("the city of brotherly love") comes from phileos. And nothing comes from agape, because agape stands on its own. It is the better way of loving.

Eros love is sensual, physical love. **Eros asks** the question, **"What can I get out of this?"** **Phileos** is relational love. It's that friendship love, a love that draws you to hang out with another. It's a deeper kind of love. It **asks** the question, **"What can we get out of this?"**

Agape is unconditional love. It's the deepest kind of love. It's more profound than fleeting feelings. It's greater than temporary urges or desires. It's a love a deeper commitment, a 'no matter what' love. It **asks** the question, **"What can YOU get out of this?"**

Another way to think of these is, ***EROS LOVES WHEN...PHILEOS LOVES BECAUSE...AGAPE LOVES IN SPITE OF...***

With this in mind, let's look at this story, in Luke 5. Jesus is teaching beside the Sea of Galilee when a crowd starts to gather. Imagine Jesus picking the seashore with a natural slope so everyone can sit, see and hear well. As He teaches, more and more people begin arriving. He soon realizes that he needs to move back to make room for more, then backs up even more until he finds himself standing ankle deep in the water.

A few feet He sees Simon Peter's boat. "Simon," He says, "can you take me just a few yards out into the water?" Peter does. Jesus then teaches from the front of the boat, creating a space between him and the crowd, allowing everyone to see. The water serves as a natural amplifier so everyone can hear.

Later, Jesus says to Peter, "Put out into the deep water and let's catch some fish." Reluctantly Peter obeys. He and his partners catch so many fish their boats almost sink.

How did Jesus love the crowd? While teaching, Jesus had a choice of how to love them. He could have been only concerned about himself. He could have been concerned about himself and them. Or He could have been concerned only for the crowd.

Thinking only of himself, He would have thought, "I love it when this happens. I love it when a crowd comes to adore me." As they drew near, pushing

Him toward the water, He would have pushed them back and said, “Careful! Don’t get my clothes wet. Don’t get too close to the King.”

Thinking only of himself and the crowd, thinking of a win-win situation, He would have said to Himself, “This is so great. We’re all here together to learn. I need to manage this thing so that none of us gets hurt.” With this perspective, He would have organized the people and asked them to treat each other nicely, and then gone on with His talk.

Jesus didn’t employ either of those kinds of love. Frankly, I don’t think He would have known how. Because He was God He always loved with agape love. He always thought of others first and foremost.

When the crowd began to grow, instead of thinking, “me,” or “we,” Jesus thought “them,” and “you.” While continuing to teach, He thought to Himself, “What can I do to serve these people better? After all, they’re getting crowded, and some of them are about to get wet.”

Without missing a beat, He moved Himself into the boat and set it up so everyone could see and hear and feel comfortable. That’s real love, that’s agape. – Not, “me,” not even, “we,” but “you” love.

How did Jesus love Peter? If He was concerned about himself, He would have turned to Peter and said, “Wasn’t that great! Did you see how responsive

those people were to my teaching? Man, I'm exhausted. Do you have anything to drink?"

If He had been concerned about himself and others, He would have turned and said, "Well, I was good today, wasn't I? I think everybody was drawn closer to my kingdom, don't you think?"

Jesus doesn't do either of those things. Instead, He loves the better way. When the sermon was over, instead of thinking about Himself, or even thinking about everyone there, He thought about Peter. "Hey Pete," He says, "Let's go catch some fish!" In His better way of loving, He sets it up so that Peter experiences the catch of his life.

Now, which would have been easier on Jesus: fishing that day, or not fishing? (Not fishing.) He didn't need the fish. He didn't need the exercise. He didn't need to spend the extra few hours in the burning sun. But Jesus wasn't in the boat for Himself. He was in the boat for Peter. So after the sermon was over, He loved Peter knowing that He had some larger purpose in mind.

Friends, wouldn't the world be a better place if all of us loved like that?

Let me give you a couple of principles for loving this better way: **First, better love puts others before oneself.** Better love says it's all about you. We have seen this in our story.

In my house, I do the taxes. I tolerate this process. I love my wife, and she hates doing the taxes, so every year, I get out all the files and receipts, sort out all our expenses by various categories, and complete the forms for my tax consultant. Why? Is it because I believe that Melinda lacks the skill and knowledge to do this? No. It is because I love Melinda.

Next, better love makes the first move. Better love takes initiative. Better love acts. Better love refuses to wait for someone else to act, to take the lead. Jesus called Peter, not vice versa. Jesus initiated the idea of fishing, not vice versa. Love takes the first step. It's proactive, not reactive. It doesn't wait for others to begin the friendship, it makes the first move.

Because I love Melinda, I make the first move with the taxes. Because she loves me, she helps out by giving me the time and space to do my work with minimal distractions. I make the first move. She makes the first move to help. In that sense we do the taxes together because we love each other. Love makes the first move.

You might be able to see this even more clearly in this next story in the book of Luke. Right after the big catch, Jesus heals a man with leprosy which begins at verse twelve.

I love this story because it reveals the heart of Jesus. It also reveals how to love in the better way. Leprosy was painful, humiliating, and life-ending disease.

The minute this man noticed one little white spot on his arm, leg or stomach, he was required by the Law to remove himself from all human contact. From that moment, to the end of his life, leprosy was so contagious; he could never touch anyone again. Can you image that? Never being able to hug your wife, pat your son on the head, stroke your daughter's hair, shake hands with a friend?

The first sign of leprosy was not only a death-sentence, it was an isolation sentence. Lepers were not allowed to live with their loved ones any more. They couldn't live in the village. When a person came within 10 feet of them, they had to shout loudly and clearly, "leper!" so that everyone would know to stir clear of them.

According to Luke, this man wasn't in the early stages of leprosy. He was covered with it, which meant he hadn't felt the warmth of human touch in probably more than a decade.

Jesus had a choice of how to love. If He was concerned only for himself, he'll probably just say to himself, "Why would I ever want to help someone as repulsive as that? There is absolutely nothing in it for me." And then walk on.

If Jesus chooses to think of himself and the leper, He's likely to think, "Okay, I'll heal you since you're a friend." And then without touching him, say a prayer knowing that would heal the man.

How does Jesus love this man? What does Jesus do? **“JESUS REACHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOUCHED THE MAN.”** LUKE 5:13 He does this before the man is well. The man says, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man, “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Jesus makes the first move. Before healing, He touches.

This is agape, friends. This is, “What can I do for you?” love. This is not, “I love you when...” It’s not, “I love you because...” It’s, “I love you in spite of...” I love you warts and all.

Jesus teaches us another principle of loving better: **BETTER LOVE TAKES RISKS.**

Now, granted, Jesus was the Son of God, so maybe He was immune to leprosy, but I don’t think so. The Bible indicates that He was fully human as well as fully divine. So Jesus could have potentially contracted leprosy by touching this man. Certainly by touching him, He broke the Jewish law as well as the heavy social stigma surrounding leprosy. Taking risks is a better way to love.

A psychologist once asked a group of children about a better way of loving. It was surprising how close they came to agape with all their answers.

One little girl said, **“WHEN MY GRANDMOTHER GOT ARTHRITIS, SHE COULDN’T BEND OVER AND PAINT HER TOENAILS ANYMORE. SO MY GRANDFATHER DOES IT FOR HER ALL THE TIME, EVEN**

WHEN HIS HANDS GOT ARTHRITIS TOO. THAT'S LOVE.” Another little girl said, ***“LOVE IS WHEN YOU GO OUT TO EAT AND GIVE SOMEBODY MOST OF YOUR FRENCH FRIES WITHOUT MAKING THEM GIVE YOU ANY OF THEIRS.”*** A little boy said, ***“LOVE IS WHEN MY MOMMY MAKES COFFEE FOR MY DADDY AND SHE TAKES A SIP BEFORE GIVING IT TO HIM, TO MAKE SURE IT TASTES OKAY.”***

Another said, ***“IF YOU WANT TO LEARN TO LOVE BETTER, YOU SHOULD START WITH A FRIEND WHO YOU HATE.”***

When you can learn to love someone you hate, then you know you're not thinking “me,” or “we,” but “you.” And you know you're not waiting for them to start, but making the first move yourself. You also know you're taking a risk, because they might reject you. And you know it's the better way, because loving someone you hate is probably the last thing you'd ever want to do.

Here's what I know friends. Our world needs a better way of loving. Our friends need a better way of loving. Our families need a better way of loving. We need a better way of loving, and Jesus' way is the way. Not “love when,” not “love because,” but “love regardless of.” Who do you need to love this way today? How will you love them this way?

Here's another thing I know: None of us are going to become better at loving *by accident*. It's very unlikely that any of us will drift into becoming more

loving people. The drift in life is always in the direction of ease. It's always toward getting the world to rotate more towards our agenda, not us towards others'. But we can do this. If we think about it, pray about it, talk about it, work on it, we can develop a better way of loving. We can do this by the power of the Risen Jesus within us. For all things are possible with God.

So who will you love this way today? And how will you do it? Here's our **Love Dare Challenge**. **COUPLES:** Remember that better love thinks about others more than self? This week your challenge is to love your mate in a way that is not self-seeking. For the next week, focus on this point and put your spouse first. Each time you make a decision that affects your mate, set aside your needs and make the choice that is best for him or her. Pray for God to give you guidance and encouragement in this area. Couples, will you take this challenge to love better and to love selflessly?

SINGLES: Pick one or two people who are close to you and with whom you interact on a regular basis. Then, your challenge is the same—for this week, make every decision in a way that sets aside your needs and puts the other person's needs first. Singles, will you take this challenge to love better and love to selflessly?

Let me pray for us. (2996)