

A Better Way To Love

Fireproofing Your Marriage: Sermon Five

Matthew 16:24-26

A woman awoke during the night to find that her husband was not in bed. She put on her robe and went downstairs. He was sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in front of him. He appeared to be in deep thought, just staring at the wall.

She saw him wipe a tear from his eye and take a sip of his coffee.

"What's the matter dear? Why are you down here at this time of night?" she asked.

"Do you remember twenty years ago when we were dating and you were only 16?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," she replied.

"Do you remember when your father caught us in the back seat of my car kissing?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Do you remember when he shoved that shotgun in my face and said, 'Either you marry my daughter or spend twenty years in jail?'"

"Yes, I do," she said.

He wiped another tear from his cheek and said, "You know...I would have gotten out today."

It has been my hope and prayer that this series, *Fireproofing Your Marriage*, would make living with your spouse more desirable than living twenty years behind bars.

For the past five weeks we've been learning lessons from a couple named Caleb and Catherine Holt, who are 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 over seven years of marriage. They've come to the resentment stage in their marriage, and both of them want out.

But through the witness of Caleb's father, Caleb has come to trust Jesus Christ as his savior. With the help of his father and his friend Michael, Caleb has been in the process of learning how to love Catherine unconditionally. He's been greatly helped by principles found in a book called *The Love Dare*.

One of the issues that has pushed Caleb and Catherine apart is Caleb's obsession with owning a boat. He's been saving money to buy one for years, even though 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 Session 6 from *Fireproof Your Marriage* DVD)**

What motivates a guy to relinquish his dream of owning a boat to buy a hospital bed for his mother-in-law?

A crisis could do it; an automobile accident or an unexpected diagnosis of cancer and in the heat of the moment a guy might do the heroic thing and take his boat money and buy a hospital bed. But in Caleb's case it isn't a crisis. Catherine's mother suffered a stroke some time ago and has been in need of the bed for quite some time and that didn't motivate Caleb before.

So Caleb didn't do it because of a crisis.

So what motivated Caleb to use his boat money to buy a hospital bed for Catherine's mom?

Desperation? Maybe Caleb is playing this card to appease Catherine and get her to call off the divorce. But if this is a desperation play it's a big gamble because if she ends up walking, he's out the \$24,000, the boat and the marriage. Plus, if this is a desperation play he's not playing it very smart: he doesn't have any bargaining power because Catherine didn't know he'd bought the bed!

So I don't think Caleb did it as a desperation play though I've seen men do things like this to try and save their marriages.

So if it isn't to play the hero and it isn't a desperation play, what motivated Caleb to put up his boat money to buy Catherine's mother a hospital bed?

Now you might be thinking I'm trying to get you to say the "Sunday School" answer. The "Sunday School" answer is "Jesus". Whatever question your Sunday School teacher asks you, little kids figure out that the answer is "Jesus". If your Sunday School teacher asks you, "What's brown, furry, has four legs and a bushy tail, lives in trees and eats nuts?" Somehow the answer is going to be "Jesus".

Well, in this case, Jesus is the answer. Something has begun to change in Caleb since the day he came to believe that God loves him and that Jesus died on the cross for Caleb. Since that day, Caleb's attitude and actions towards Catherine have been changing.

But the truth of the matter is that Caleb is the exception and not the rule. Because the truth of the matter is that many Christian husbands and wives come to the *Resentment Stage* of their marriages, harden their hearts and get divorced.

A study conducted by Christian researcher George Barna discovered that born again Christians are just as likely as the average American couple to divorce. The study is based on interviews with a random sample of 5,017 adults, age 18 and older, from January 2007 through January 2008.

The Barna Group found (that)... Among all born again Christians..., the divorce figure is 32 percent, which is statistically identical to the ...national average divorce rate among all adults.¹

So, on the one hand it is true that Jesus is making a difference in Caleb's life, but on the other hand, Jesus isn't making a difference in thousands of other Christian husbands and wives.

¹ <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20080404/study-christian-divorce-rate-identical-to-national-average/index.html>

What's going on? What's the difference between Caleb and the thousands of Christian husbands who harden their hearts and divorce their wives?

Is Caleb just a better man than these other guys? By his own confession Caleb has admitted that he has been insensitive to Catherine, trampling on her with his words and his actions. We know he has had parasites of pornography and materialism. So the changes taking place in Caleb are not because he's a better guy than other Christian men.

The difference is that Caleb is learning to die to himself. Caleb is learning that he is not God; he is not the center of the universe and that living for himself is the cause of his broken marriage.

This is the core problem of all our lives. As Dallas Willard writes... **...(we) make our "survival" the ultimate point of reference in our world - ...in effect, (we) treat ourselves as God should be treated...**²

If you will drill down and think deeply about your life you will discover that most, if not all, your problems are the result of your self centeredness wanting your way whether its right or wrong or your problems are the result of someone else's self centeredness competing with your self centeredness.

What we need to understand is that God's plan of salvation not only includes setting us free from the penalty of our sin against God, but extends to saving us from practicing sin against God. As we studied last week our most fundamental sin against God is denying the place He deserves in our lives and instead worshipping the creature (ourselves) rather than worshipping our Creator.

God's plan of salvation begins with *forgiveness* but continues on to *formation* of a new character.

Our new character cannot co-exist with our old character; the character formed in self-centeredness must die.

That is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 16:24...

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Matthew 16:24-26

Taking up our cross is not enduring burdens. The cross was an instrument of death. In modern terms Jesus might say that we are to deny ourselves and take our lethal injection daily and follow Him. Daily we say "no" to living for ourselves as if we are the center of the universe and instead we say "yes" to what Jesus is teaching us.

One of the very first things Jesus teaches us is that God is our Father and He will meet our needs if we trust Him.

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly

² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, p65.

Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:31-33

Until we really believe that God loves us and will care for us, we won't give up the old life. We won't fall back off a chair unless we're convinced the person standing there is strong enough and committed to catching us. We won't surrender ourselves to Jesus until we really believe that He is strong enough and committed to caring for us.

Think about what has to change in Caleb's thinking. For seven years he's been saving for that boat. For seven years he's been daydreaming of how it's going to feel to fire up those engines and ease that baby away from the dock with all those people watching. He can hear the roar of the engines as he opens the throttle and cuts through the water. Every time he thinks about that boat his heart starts pumping and he thinks that having that boat is just going to be the greatest thing in his life.

So to give that boat up is a huge shift. What Caleb had to come to believe is that what Jesus was leading him to do (buy a hospital bed for his mother-in-law) would be far better and far more satisfying to his soul than buying a boat.

That is faith. That is dying to self. That is a huge step towards becoming like Christ.

This is the pathway to everything we have talked about in this series: love and respect, unconditional love, making it through the stages of marriage, breaking free from relational parasites and forgiveness.

It begins and continues with a daily dying to self centeredness and living to Jesus centeredness.

After the clip we watched this morning you might have been expecting me to preach, "Now go do likewise." But I know we can't. Now I know we might be able to do the occasional heroic act of sacrificial love. But we can't sustain it unless we're in the process of daily dying to ourselves and abiding in Jesus.

It's not the big heroic acts of sacrificial love that are going to grow our marriages. It's loving each other every day in word and deed. It's appreciating each other and thanking each other every day for the things we do to serve our family. It's humbling ourselves and seeking forgiveness when we're wrong or we've been hurtful. It's encouraging and praising our spouse and helping them become all that God has created them to be in Christ. It's laying down our wants and desires for the sake of our beloved.

This kind of love only develops when we put to death our old life and follow Jesus.

LOVE DARE CHALLENGE

Surrender your life to Christ. Memorize Matthew 6:31-33 and focus on releasing one thing you have been clinging to for security rather than finding your security in God's care.