



EUDAEMONIA **Love, with Scarlett Lewis**

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Kim Forrester 0:00

Love lifts us up. Love is all around. All you need is love. What would any human life be without that ineffable sense of devotion, affection, compassion, and connection? You're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. I'm Kim Forrester and today we're going to lift the lid on nurturing, healing love.

Intro 0:28

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life ... with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:47

Scarlett Lewis is a mother, accomplished artist, activist for peace, and founder of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love foundation, which she created in honour of her son who was killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre of December 2012. Scarlett's story and Jessie's inspiring legacy is captured in her book, "Nurturing Healing Love: A Mother's Journey of Hope and Forgiveness". It's my honour to be chatting with Scarlett today, to explore the unparalleled power of love and to learn how we can each amplify peace, embrace compassion, and consciously choose love in our lives and in our world. Scarlett Lewis, welcome to the Eudaemonia podcast. It is my delight to have you here with us today. How are things with you?

Scarlett Lewis 1:39

Oh, they're wonderful. Thank you so much. It's so wonderful to be here,

Kim Forrester 1:42

The book that you write, Jesse's legacy, so incredibly inspiring, and I actually want to start by defining love. And I actually truly believe that it is extremely difficult to define love. It is so ineffable. So I'm going to ask you the question this way. What is the opposite of love in your experience?

Scarlett Lewis 2:05

You know, I would say ... and sometimes I define love as I'm speaking to my audience, as connection. Love is connection. Love is belonging. Jessie defined love on our kitchen chalkboard shortly before he was murdered as "nurturing, healing love". And so if I would define love - which is the exact opposite of what you asked me - as connection, then I would define the opposite of love as disconnection, as not belonging.

Kim Forrester 2:44

Wow, that is so simple in its purity. From the moment tragedy entered your life, that day at Sandy Hook Elementary, you actually seem to have been anchored into this deep well of love. Reading your story, it's almost like you leant into love, you leant into compassion, you leant into connection straightaway. What would you say is the source of that love? Did it flow into you from outside of you somewhere, or was it embedded somewhere inside, deep in your soul? So, to put it simply, if we are to look for love in our darkest moments, where do we begin to look for it?

Scarlett Lewis 3:29

Well, I'll tell you where I started - with being present in the moment; where life is happening, with my children, and with those who were close to me. And I will also say I have a deep faith in God and I believe that love never ends. I believe that our connection continues, even if our loved ones pass. And of course, it's especially difficult to lose a child. But I believe that that connection continues. It's not the kind of relationship that we want, or we're used to, but that it continues forever. And so you know, the loss was not a complete one for me and that really carried me through.

Kim Forrester 4:25

Once again, you're going back to that connection; the understanding that Jesse is and remains with you all around you. You actually describe in your book, *Nurturing Healing Love*, the multiple ways that Jesse made his presence known after he passed. There were flickering lights, and balloon hearts, and his young cousin chatting to him. Yeah, I agree with you. I truly believe that love is more powerful than we can comprehend and it must sit somehow beyond space-time. What have you learned about the true power of love and how has this awareness changed the way that you step through life, Scarlett?

Scarlett Lewis 5:13

The true power of love is, I believe, taking responsibility and having the courage to be present in life, to what is the reality. And to also doing your part in helping make the world a better place. I think this is really important. And it wasn't that important to me before my personal tragedy. I will admit that I watched what was going on in my world, I knew what was going on, I was aware, but I did not think that I had the power to do anything about it, or to create change. And what I've realised - and by the way, it did take a tremendous personal tragedy for me to get where I needed to be - but I see now, what one person can do; the tremendous change that one person can have on our world. And if everyone would rise to the occasion - and hopefully not need a tragedy in their life, like I do, but maybe realise through my example that it can happen - that one individual is powerful, then we will all be responsible for what's going on in our world. And we can create the world that we want to live in.

Kim Forrester 6:52

Yeah, you've spoken a couple of times about being present about finding love here, now, in this moment. And you're also speaking there of us actively going out and amplifying love; sending out ripples of compassion and forgiveness and love into the world. And so it makes me wonder, many life enhancing traits and practices are found in the stillness, Scarlett. In that presence. In that quietness. Is love the same? Is it easier to find love in quiet moments or is it easier for us to express

it, to feel it, to amplify it when we are activating it; when we are being active in our joy, and our connection, and our compassion?

Scarlett Lewis 7:38

That's such an amazing question. And I think, previously, I found love in action. I was always moving, always in the middle of a bunch of people and friends, always trying to create or be a part of joyous occasions. And that's where I found love. And I think that following the tragedy - and I've learned so much and we do we grow through difficulty, that is what we do as human beings - and I have found that love is also in stillness. Love is also in those quiet moments. Love is also what we see when we're alone. And I think that I, like many people, might have had a little bit of fear of being alone and stillness before. And then it came to me. It was almost forced on me following the loss of my six year old son. I mean, Jesse was bouncing off the walls with joy and happiness and laughter. Our home was filled with energy. And I remember walking back in the door without him and fearing that stillness, fearing the quiet. And, you know, somehow finding ... sitting there accepting it, being present with it, and ultimately finding solace in it. You know, and that leads me to talking about this pandemic, because going into the pandemic, there was an epidemic of loneliness, where I know that half of Americans were saying that they were lonely, and 18 to 24 year olds were saying that they were lonelier than senior citizens. And, you know, I think it's important that we remember that loneliness starts as a thought in our head. It doesn't start in the heart. It doesn't start in the tummy. The thought may travel to the heart that also has brain cells that might hurt with that thought. And it might travel to our tummy that also has brain cells that might clench with a thought. And then that starts the negative loop. But if we could understand that it starts with a thought, and a thought can be changed, then we can sit with it and realise that it's not our enemy, that it's our friend, and that we can learn from it. Actually, this is how the Choose Love Movement started. It was at Jesse's funeral, when I got up to speak. And I said, "This whole tragedy started with an angry thought, in a young man's head. And the amazing thing to me is that a thought can be changed." So I asked everybody in the congregation to start thinking about what they think about and to change one angry thought a day into a loving thought. I said, "By doing that, it will make you feel better." Pretty simple - love feels good, anger feels bad. It will positively impact those around you and, through the ripple effect, it will make this a safer, more peaceful and loving world. And so everyone that day went out to the four corners of the United States and started calling me, emailing me, texting me about a week later saying that one simple act had completely changed their lives. And I knew that I was on to something and that was the genesis of the Choose Love Movement.

Kim Forrester 11:31

See, even there, you're bringing us back into the stillness. Because in order for us to become aware of what we're thinking, we need space, we need the stillness. So I love that really love can certainly be found in those quiet moments of self reflection, of meditation, of prayer, and just quietening the world around us. Talk about quiet, though, Jesse was not a quiet boy by the sounds of things. You know, throughout the book, there's this exuberance, this joy for life that bounces off the pages. And among the many lessons that Jesse brings to us, he certainly highlights how to embrace the moments of our life. What is the most important lesson you've learned, Scarlett, about loving life itself?

Scarlett Lewis 12:21

I have learned that it's a choice. There you go. A choice that we all have as human beings, and maybe one that we have to make several times a day. But ultimately, it is a choice.

Kim Forrester 12:41

Hence why you called it Choose Love. Putting the power back inside people. They say that hurt people hurt people, Scarlett, and certainly I can see that any quest, any endeavour, that we have to amplify love in the world must include the amplification of self love. How has your love of self changed since you started embracing and sharing Jesse's legacy?

Scarlett Lewis 13:10

I will tell you that my self love has amplified because that's what grows in those moments of stillness. But when your self love grows, your capacity for loving others grows as well. And I looked at my son's murderer - and there was so much contempt for him so much hatred, so much blame - and I looked at his life and I realised that it was riddled with pain, and isolation, bullying, abuse. And because I was able to love myself, I was able to love him as well. And in doing so, it freed me of anger, and blame, and hatred that so many were feeling. And I was able to feel compassion for him. I was able to forgive him. And that's probably the most important part of my healing journey, is forgiveness and even compassion and love for the murderer. Because I realised that, because his entire life was filled with disconnection, it could have been changed. It could have been stopped. Because it started with a thought, that thought could have been changed at any place during his life. And so what I do today is as much for those people that are in tremendous pain as it is for the Jesse's of the world.

Kim Forrester 15:08

You speak there of this incredible step towards compassion and love. And I say incredible because, in an ideal world, it's something that we could all embrace and we could all undertake. But the fact is, you represent a small minority of humanity who have been able to truly embody that forgiveness, and that compassion, and that movement into love. For the rest of us mere mortals, Scarlett, if we can't find it in our hearts - yet - if we can't find it in our hearts yet to love someone who we regard as the enemy, who we regard as the other, what would you encourage us to reach for that at least points us in the right direction? If we can't find love and compassion for someone else, is there something we can reach for that at least places us on the love spectrum?

Scarlett Lewis 16:05

Absolutely. In fact, we're all on the love spectrum. But I think that it's important to understand that every decision that we make, even the decision to hate someone, each decision that we make, the foundation is grounded in love, or fear. So we have to realise that and we we have to understand that when we blame someone else, when we finger point, when we feel hatred towards another person, that is based in fear. And we can choose love in that situation. How do we move from fear to love? Well, I know that for me, the formula for choosing love that we teach is what I pull out every single day and refer to, and it's starts with courage. Courage is the most important character value because it underlies all the rest. How do we move from fear? Obviously, that would take courage. And I love that science tells us that courage is like a muscle, and we can practice it and strengthen our courage to be able to make that choice. And Jesse is a great example of courage. Jessie's brave actions saved nine of his classmates lives before losing his own during his final moments. And you can think, wow, so Jessie was a six year old little boy, a gunman shot his way into his school, the loudspeaker was on, everyone heard what was going on. The shooter, a former student whose mother had taught at the school, murdered his principal and counsellor right outside his open

classroom door, and then turned into his classroom and started open firing. And even during that chaos, Jesse had the presence of mind to direct his classmates to run. And they said because he told them to run, that they were saved. And then he lost his life. And I think that in remembering that, we can understand that we all have the capacity for courage that Jesse showed. Every single one of us. And, by the way, hopefully, none of us, including myself, will ever be in a situation like Jesse was in. But I'm talking about the everyday courage that it takes sometimes just to get out of bed and put our best foot forward. The courage that it takes to be vulnerable, the courage that it takes to be our best self, to be our authentic self. The courage that it takes to tell the truth, to be kind when someone's not being kind to us, to face our fear instead of avoiding it and numbing ourselves. That's the courage I'm talking about. So we can practice that courage every day. And then the formula goes into gratitude. Being grateful, we have tens of thousands of thoughts that go through our head every single day. And because of our inherent negative bias, the majority of those thoughts are negative and repetitive. And so when we're ready to switch out of that negative thinking, we can choose something to be grateful for. When it shifts our way of thinking, it shifts the focus of our lens immediately to what we're grateful for. And then that strengthens us actually neuro-scientifically to forgive. And it's interesting, because when you understand forgiveness, you know that it's not a gift that you give somebody that's undeserving, that hurts you. It's a gift that you give yourself, and it frees you. It gives you your personal power back. I know that because I practised it following Jesse's murder. And it is the key to healthy relationships. And Harvard University said in their lifespan study, that healthy relationships are the key to happiness. And then forgiveness ... I'll tell you the last character value in the formula. It's compassion in action. So once we have our freedom, that allows us to step outside of our busy-ness, distraction, even our own pain and suffering, and help somebody else. And when we've done that, we have chosen love. And we have positively impacted ourselves, and others as well, and done our part to make the world a better place.

Kim Forrester 21:03

Love is embedded in our pop culture, right? Every third song is about love. Movies are about love. Poems are about love. And I do wonder though, if the love that we absorb on a daily basis is some what misconstrued. What fallacies do you notice in our society about what love is and how to express it?

Scarlett Lewis 21:29

I think the fallacy that I notice the most is that people focus on love as romantic love. You hear it in every genre of music - love as the romantic love. And love is so much more. Love is in everything that we do, every day. Love comes through our eyes at what we see. It's nature. It's being with our children, it's fixing lunch for them, it's getting them off to school. It's showing up at work as your best self. It's helping a friend through a problem. It's fixing dinner at night, it's cleaning the dishes. It's getting yourself to bed early and doing a meditation. It's so much. Love is everywhere. And I think that one of the things we don't realise is that love is in everything, and we we compartmentalise it. And we don't need to do that. Because once we open our worldview of love, we realise that it's all around us all the time. And it's encapsulated in micro-moments of joy that all of us have every day. But we're so busy, so distracted, that we don't notice them. And I'm not talking about the joy that hits you over the head. I'm talking about the little micro moments that you pass right by that you don't even notice. For instance, last fall, it was the last rose of summer. I love roses. I live on Wild Rose Farm and I have roses all over, wild and cultured. And I was walking from my car inside. Oh, my mind is filled, I am rushing as usual to another interview, and I pass the last rose of summer. And on that occasion, I recognised it as a micro-moment of joy. I paused. I actually cut that rose and I

brought it with me inside. I put it in a beautiful vase, I smelled it, I looked at the colour, I rejoiced in it. And then I put it on my desk and I shared it with probably thousands of other people that I spoke to that week when I was doing my Zooms. And I shared it and I said, "Here's my last rose of summer. Isn't it beautiful?" And it got so much mileage because I took the time to recognise a micro-moment of joy. And I encourage your listeners to do that as well because they're all around you every day. Recognise them and savour them.

Kim Forrester 24:30

We've come back to that mindfulness, that presence again, for you to even notice the rose. And then stepping toward gratitude. I love that so much, Scarlett. But tell me this, can we love too hard? Is it possible for us to smother, over protect, restrict another because we're loving them too fervently?

Scarlett Lewis 24:53

You can never love too much but what you can do is smother someone with fear. We have to remember, every choice that we make is either one in love, or fear. So are we reacting out of fear or love? When we do that, when we smother someone, when we clear the path for them. You know, I'm talking about our kids. When we are so fearful for our kids that we don't let them learn the lessons that they need to learn, make mistakes, so that they can grow through them, feel pain. Discomfort is how we're shaped and moulded in life. This is a normal part of life and it's how we grow, how we thrive. And we have to have those experiences. So when we're parents, and we don't allow that, it's not out of too much love because you can't love someone too much. It's out of fear. Do you agree?

Kim Forrester 26:08

I totally agree. I completely see where you're coming from there. And I want to just flip it on its head, then Scarlett. In your darkest moment, you were surrounded by family and friends expressing their love to you fully. How can we best express our love to others, to our loved ones, to our friends, to our community, when they are suffering?

Scarlett Lewis 26:32

This is such a great question. Because I learned through my personal experience, that there is a lot of fear when we have a friend, or a family member, or a community member that's suffering from loss. And so many people are today. And there's so much fear in addressing that pain. And those that overcame their fear and were present for us, that's all that it takes - is the courage to be present with that person in pain. You don't have to say the right thing, because there are no words. In fact, that was the best thing that someone said to me. I remember they came up and they said, "There are no words". And I said, "You're right". You know, when when we try to fumble around and figure out what to say, it becomes awkward. And that's alright too, because someone's doing that with the intention to love. But there are no words. And just the presence. just figuring out what you think that person needs and providing it, is an act of love. You know, we had a lot of people that turned away from us during those times, but I know that it was out of fear. And I've done the same thing. That's how I recognised it. Prior to my tragedy, I would have even good friends who were going through a loss and I would say, "Ah, that's ... Oh, gosh, it's such a difficult time for them. I bet that they're surrounded by, you know, they're they're really close family and friends. I'm just going to give it

some time." And then, you know, it would be a holiday or something. And I would say, "Oh, it's a holiday. I think I'm just gonna let them have their first holiday without their loved one". You know. And then and then it got to the point where, "Oh, it's too late. It's too awkward now. Too much time has gone by for me to even say something. So I think I just won't help but just pretend like it didn't happen." I mean, I think I was the worst. And so I realised, I learned so much, from these beautiful people that had the courage to to come, even on that first night when I went back to my mother's house. I remember friends texting me saying, you know, "We're coming up". And I was texting them back saying "No, please don't". And they came anyway, and just to be with me; just to share the space and take on some of the grief, and help me hold it. Just holding it in that space. It was so beautiful. So I think that it's a lesson that I learned and that I can share. That it's not knowing what to say, it's not being knowledgeable in the moment. It's saying, "How are you doing?" to somebody. And of course, in our society, that's a rhetorical question. Because, I'll say, "How are you doing, Kim?" You know. And you would say, "Oh, I'm good". And you would not think I really meant it. It's saying it twice. "How are you doing?" "I'm fine." "No, really, how are you doing?" And it shows the person - even if they choose to say I'm fine - it shows them that you care.

Kim Forrester 29:58

Which comes straight back to that definition of love that you presented for us at the beginning of the conversation. It's all about connection. It's all about the being in the presence with someone else. Or, in this day and age, reaching out across the ether on the internet to show someone that you are with them. Just beautiful. Scarlett, my final question is one I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. I'm particularly excited to hear what you have to share today. Can you offer my listeners a morning reminder - so this may be a favourite practice, mantra, affirmation - something that can help my listeners tap into healing, nurturing love each day?

Scarlett Lewis 30:41

Absolutely, I do. First of all, what I do when I get up in the morning is, I think of something that I'm grateful for. And I usually look to my right, because the sun is rising from that window, and I have this stained glass rose window, of course. And so it comes up through that rose window. And I just think - I actually say - a little prayer. And I say, "Thank you, God for another day, and an opportunity to serve." That's a little prayer that I say every morning. "Thank you for another day, and another opportunity to serve." And then I say a little mantra, and it's an affirmation. I love positive affirmations and mine is, "I belong, I give and receive nurturing, healing love, and I have a lot of fun today." Notice, I don't say "I will have" because that puts it in the future. These are positive affirmations. You state them as if they're happening right now. And I say these mantras and I do a little bit of havening with them. Havening, it creates Delta waves and it helps get you in a beautiful space. I know some people wake up a little bit anxious for the day. So if you start by giving yourself a hug - it's high up, cross your hands over your chest, and put each hand on the opposite shoulder - and then just move your hands down the outside of your arms. I'm doing that now. It's called havening and it helps to relax you. And you're saying your mantra, "I belong. I give and receive nurturing, healing love. I have a lot of fun today."

Kim Forrester 32:44

What a truly delicious morning practice there, Scarlett. Thank you so much for sharing. Now, your book, Nurturing Healing Love, it's a few years old now, but it is absolutely well worth a read. And of course, you've got the Jesse Lewis Choose Love foundation that is doing good work in many ways. If people want to find out more about you, your book, and the foundation, where can they go?

Scarlett Lewis 33:10

Please go to www.chooselovemovement.org. Choose love movement.org. And there you will have access to lifespan programming, founded in Jesse's message of nurturing healing love, and the formula that can teach you to choose love in any situation, circumstance or interaction. We have lifespan programming. We have programming for pregnant moms, infants, toddlers, pre-K through 12th grade. So all age levels. We have programming for the home, and communities, and even businesses. And all of that is offered at no cost. And so please go on. This is being taught in over 10,000 schools, homes and communities across the country, in every state, and over 100 countries now. It is a universal message of love. And we can learn to choose love. So please visit the website and let's join the movement and create the world that we all want to live in.

Kim Forrester 34:28

A very timely message. And I want you to know ,Scarlett, that as I was reading your book, I felt love blossoming in every cell in my body. So I just want to take a moment to honour Jessie ,and to honour you and all that you're contributing to the world at the moment. And thank you so much for gifting your time and your energy here today on the Eudaemonia podcast.

Scarlett Lewis 34:52

Thank you so much, Kim. This was one of the best interviews I've done. So this is fantastic! Great questions. And I love you. Thank you so much.

Kim Forrester 35:03

As Lao Tzu, the founder of Daoism teaches us, "Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength. While loving someone deeply gives you courage." You've been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe, check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes, or come join me on Instagram @iamKimForrester. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself, and lean into love.