



EUDAEMONIA **Values, with Charles Fowler**

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Kim Forrester 0:00

What are the values that guide and shape your life? Are you consciously aware of the virtues that matter most to you and how these factors shape your behaviour? You're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. I'm Kim Forrester, and today it's time to highlight the vital importance of values.

Intro 0:21

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 0:40

Charles Fowler is chairperson of the Human Values Foundation and member of the steering group of UK Values Alliance, which is the driving force behind World Values Day, held in October each year. During his long career in law and business, Charles became increasingly involved in values and came to appreciate the vital role they play in personal development, mental health and well being. It's my absolute honour to be connecting with Charles today to discuss the importance of values, and to learn why a flourishing life is more attainable when we recognise, reflect on and practice our personal value system. Charles Fowler, thank you so much for choosing to be here on the Eudaemonia podcast. How are you today?

Charles Fowler 1:28

I'm feeling great today. It's a rather dull day in London where I'm based, but I'm just wishing I was somewhere sunny and warm like Singapore,

Kim Forrester 1:37

Charles, in our search for well being I think we tend to overlook the entire concept of values, but you maintain that values are actually critical if we want to flourish in life. How so?

Charles Fowler 1:50

Well, it's a really good question because this connection between values and well being has been a real challenge for those of us involved in values. I think, first of all, the connection between values and well being is really, really key. But as you say, it's often overlooked. And that's a real shame. I personally believe that being aware of what our, you know, our most important values are and living to the full in our lives is really fundamental to well being. But why people aren't making that connection, I think is a lot to do with a way that we look at values. Certainly in the sort of popular press, the popular media, values are often looked at in a pretty superficial way. And I think that's

given people the wrong agenda for them. They're looking at the wrong kind of well being, really. In my view. I'm not talking about people who look at them seriously, like you, Kim, and all the people listening to this podcast. But the concept of well being can sometimes be reduced to where we have feelings of pleasure, we don't have any feelings of pain, we feel life is going well. And that's fine, but it's quite superficial. And the sort of remedies that people come up with - or the programmes they come up with - tend to be, you know, equally fine, but quite superficial. So we're told, you know, we should work out more, we should relax more, we should be a bit more mindful, put on some music, stroke a cat, you know, read a novel. All these things are great. But you know, they're not going to produce what I'd call long term well being; lasting well being. Interestingly, Aristotle got it right. And he called, as you know - I think because you've called your podcast Eudaemonia - he called well being eudaimonia. And the way he put it is, you know, we need to live a virtuous life doing what's worth doing. That it's not just a question of short term fix. It's really something lasting and long term. And I think this is all to do with the purpose and meaning in our life, and we get the purpose and meaning from values. So what we need from our lives, I believe, we need meaning from our lives, we need fulfilment from our lives. And that's really where values come in. So to illustrate what I'm saying: if we bring up children, and most of us, it is a rewarding and meaningful thing to do. But it's really difficult, you know, it can be difficult at times. You know, so it's not a short term fix, it's a bit of pain and a bit of difficulty and hardship. But in the long run, they're part of what makes our lives really meaningful and fulfilling. So that's really what I see as well being. It's the short term stuff, but it's really having a meaningful life. And that's where we need values. Values are powerful things. I mean, they they connect us to who we are. They give us a compass through life, they guide us, they help us make choices. And that's how we get to have, you know, making the right choices, doing the right things, doing what Aristotle says. You know, 'doing what's worth doing' is what we find fulfilling. That's where we need to go. Each one of us is different. We all have a different mix of values, but our purpose, our fulfillment, is intimately connected with that. And I think that's what people miss when they don't make that connection.

Kim Forrester 5:05

You make a really powerful point there, particularly around, you know, raising children, which I've done. And it is insanely difficult at times, but it is incredibly meaningful and purposeful as well. And I know in the last 150, 200 years for instance, we've had this sort of hedonistic idea. Right? Hedonism has come back to the fore again, and we believe that happiness comes from eliminating pain and amplifying pleasure. But I love what you're saying there because there's an implication, Charles, that when we are living a purposeful life - so when we are aligned with our values, and we are anchored into those values, and we're living them out - that it may become unpleasant at times. Is that what you're telling us?

Charles Fowler 5:50

I think, you know, we all live lives which have difficulties; they have problems. We overcome those problems. So life, whatever steps you take or however mindful you are, whatever exercise you do, life is tough a lot of the time. But we override these things. So yeah, we need a goal, we need a purpose, we need, you know, we need something that's based ... a purpose and a goal that is based on what we really believe; what's most important to us. And that's what values are, what are most important to us in life.

Kim Forrester 6:22

So that's one sort of misconception we have - that maybe, you know, if we're living a life that is aligned with our values, it should be pleasant all the time. We can, I think, dismiss that; dispel that myth. But are there other misconceptions about values, our own and others', that you feel that you would like to dispel?

Charles Fowler 6:42

One of the biggest misconceptions about values is that we have great values, and people immediately around us have, you know, good values. This is what we think. But other people have really rather rotten values. This is not my opinion. This is what's shown by loads of surveys being carried out around the world over recent years. So we see that, when we're asked about our own values, we use words like compassion, honesty, caring, trust, respect, all these sort of what we call good values. Positive values. And when we're asked about, you know, our immediate community, our families and the immediate community around us, we come up with good words, too. I mean, that's all positive. And then when we're asked about the broader society that we live in, we come up with all these terrible words like violence, and crime, and corruption, and blame, and conflict. These words are taken directly from, you know, a survey that was done in the UK, and it's the same around the world. In other words, what's happening is when people have direct experience, you know, themselves, of the people around them, they see values in action. They see people with basically good values. I mean, not perfect by any means, obviously, but good values. But when they think about the wider society or the wider world, they have a different conclusion. They think the whole thing's rotten. And there's some discordance there, because how can we all have good values and how can we all think other people don't? And the reason I think is that - you know, clearly we've got a false perception. But the reason is that we're getting our information from the outside world - this far off world - from all sorts of different sources: from books; from media; from social media, these days; from rumour; from gossip. You know, and the news is only - as we know - that the thing about news, the thing about the media is it only reports bad news, because that's the only thing that, you know, that catches people's attention.

Kim Forrester 8:34

So following on from that, if we have this misconception that most people in the world, outside of our immediate circle, have got, I won't say no value system, but their value system is one that we certainly do not agree with. I think it follows that we can feel like that, if we live by our values - if we tap into honesty and integrity and, you know, tolerance - that somehow we're actually going to miss out in life, Charles. I feel like there can be a perception that, 'If I live by my values and all those people out there, choose not to, or live by values that are actually really destructive, then I'm going to fall behind. I'm not going to be able to compete, I'm going to miss out, I'm going to be taken for granted.'

Charles Fowler 9:22

Yes.

Kim Forrester 9:22

Is it possible to compete in this world and remain loyal to our core values?

Charles Fowler 9:30

I absolutely think it is. But I think we do need to look deeply into what we want out of life. There are, again, a lot of studies showing that, if we get more money in life, for instance - which is, you know, often to do with our perception of other people's value systems; it's do with perception of their money grabbing and so on. If we get more money out of life, it's good, isn't it up to a certain point? That's what the studies show. You know, the impact of having more money is really, really big. The impact on people's well being, I mean, and their happiness is really big, up to the point where they, you know, move out of real need and poverty, and then it tails off sharply after that. So additional money, additional wealth after a certain point or after the point where you have enough to get by, becomes less than less meaningful in terms of people's happiness. Whereas other factors like you know, health, relationships, a sense of purpose, meaning in their life, are much more important then. You could say, the meaning in your life when you're really, really poor - and your values - are to do with survival, really. Absolutely understandably. And so you are focused on yourself, your own survival, then your family's survival, and your community's survival. But you don't really have time to take in these these other factors; this wider purpose. But as soon as you're above that, which actually most of the world is now, then you're free to develop a rather broader sense of what your life should be like, and your relationships with the broader community, the world as a whole. And your values become to do with what you can do for others, as much as what you can do for yourself. So it doesn't mean to say that, you know, you can't have, you know, successful careers and absorbing careers. It doesn't mean that at all. It just means that, I think, we need to be clear about, you know, where our values are, really. Are they in just getting more money? Is that what we're doing? Or are we actually looking for something beyond that?

Kim Forrester 11:33

Well, you bring up a really important point there. You're talking about when people are struggling when they're below the poverty line, their value is going to be quite different from those who are on - I believe that it's about 75,000 US dollars a year where our happiness and our well being, our life satisfaction, does not tend to increase after we're earning that amount of money. Do our values actually remain the same throughout our life, Charles? Or do they evolve depending on our age, our experiences, or our life circumstances.

Charles Fowler 12:04

Yeah, I mean, I think they do evolve. There's actually quite a lot of controversy about it. People get very excited on whether values change or whether they don't. But in my view, it's pretty clear that as we progress through life, just in terms of chronological age but also, as you say, in terms of, you know, if we start off really struggling to survive - you know, \$1 a day, which is extreme poverty - once we get to, you know, \$2, \$4, then we begin to change. Our values begin to change. We're switching from survival values to values which are, if you like, more altruistic values. And so yes, I think that values do change over time. It's not so much - sorry - it's not so much that your values change, but your prioritisation of those values changes over time in response to your different circumstances through your life.

Kim Forrester 12:58

So here we are with seven billion people on the planet; seven billion individual and unique sets of core values. Seven billion different people in varying life circumstances, and prioritising certain values in their particular moment. There has got to come a point Charles, where our values conflict

with those around us. And I certainly think now, you look at the headlines today, and you can see where people who are valuing personal freedom highly are conflicting with people who value social harmony. So, how do we navigate society, Charles - is it possible to navigate society - when personal values clash?

Charles Fowler 13:46

Absolutely, and I think values are really the way we actually navigate it. So the values are clashing, or seem to be clashing. But actually we can use the values to really become more aware of what's going on; be more aware of how they're clashing, what we can do to resolve those clashes. To take an example, really. At the moment, we've got a - in my country anyway - we've got a clash, and in some ways it's a clash of values, of wearing a mask or not wearing a mask. The value might be here, among the people who don't want to wear a mask, it's to do with freedom; it's to do with being free to do what I want to do unless it's harming other people. And that might be the key to ... that might give you a clue. And other people feel, you know, to wear a mask is something that we do for the sake of others. So, it's a way we can make a difference in society, it's a way we can care for other people and protect other people. But I think, rather than sort of be in a mindset where we're going to clash with someone - you know, go up to someone without a mask and say, 'You should be wearing a mask. How dare you!' - you don't get anywhere with that sort of aggression, really. No one's going to be persuaded if you come up to them in an angry and accusing state. What's much better is if you think to yourself, 'Well, look, that person's actually got his values. You know, he may be unconscious them, but he's still acting on them whether he's conscious of them or not. And what are his values?' He's got a right to his values. He probably is a decent person who looks after his - he or she - you know, cares for his family members and, you know, probably helps his neighbours. But he's got, or she's got, this particular block on masks. So, you know, it doesn't give you a perfect answer to the clash of values but if you can understand that the other person isn't, you know, a nasty evil person, most probably. He's just someone who has a different take on their own values, and you have a lot in common with them. And then at least you've got the basis for a dialogue. And there are ways that you can then actually talk to each other. Values are very powerful as a tool for resolving all sorts of conflicts. It doesn't have to be masks; it can be, you know, the conflict between civilizations, it can be a conflict between, you know, really, really, really incendiary contemporary issues that people are rightly excited about.

Kim Forrester 16:07

So I hear you saying there that one of the main things is to a) accept, and then b) honour and dignify others' value systems and allow them to have a value system and then honour that. However - and this might be a bit cheeky as a question - but, Charles, aren't some values more beneficial for us than others? So are values all made equally, or are there some values that are better for society than others?

Charles Fowler 16:37

I think there are. And this isn't just my opinion. There are certainly some values that are better for our well being, and also better for the well being of society. And actually, there's been a lot of work done on this, particularly by positive psychology. A lot of research on what the positive psychologists call 'intrinsic values'. I prefer using a term 'human values' for them because they're really values which are natural to us; which are, you know, part of our human nature and good in themselves. Compassion, caring, decency, honesty, kindness, generosity, appreciation, those sorts of values. Respect is a big one. And these are values which are, you could say, altruistic values.

They're values which are to do with the way we relate to other people, you know. We'd normally value friendship, and compassion, and justice, and all the other - and trust is another important one - for their own sake. But if we cultivate a friendship, for instance, to boost our status, rather than just because we care for somebody or respect them, then that's an extrinsic motivation, rather than an intrinsic motivation. So you know, we'd be looking for success and control. But if we actually behave in accordance with our natural values, our intrinsic values, we get neurological changes happening in our brain. And we get hormonal changes; you know, we get the oxytocin, the happiness hormone, and serotonin. So it has an actual physical change on us as well as a psychological change. And it changes us for the better. And this is even better with repetition. So you know, when we repeat something, it will have an even greater effect. And even when we look at somebody doing something kind to another person, it gives us the same - actually gives us a more powerful - effect than doing it ourselves. Isn't that interesting? So, we are wired to be a caring society. We're wired to be a society which is compassionate and caring for each other. And so it makes us, not only better ourselves, but produces a better world. It's wonderful. It's a win win.

Kim Forrester 18:52

We are extraordinary creatures. So when we express - when we live out - the values that are best for society, we actually benefit from it as well. That's what you're saying - on a physical and physiological level.

Charles Fowler 19:03

Exactly. And vice versa.

Kim Forrester 19:05

That's fabulous. However, Charles, we're all human. And there are going to be times when we don't actually live out our highest values. There are going to be moments when we are full of grief, or anger, or disappointment, or feeling isolated. And we can act contrary to our core values in those kinds of moments. Is it important for us to learn to forgive ourselves when we don't live in accordance with our values system?

Charles Fowler 19:37

Yeah, I mean, absolutely. I mean, none of us are perfect, are we? And we're constantly, you know, slipping and sliding as we as we walk down the path. We certainly need to forgive ourselves. I mean, the value of forgiveness is a really important value, however it's applied, and we need to forgive other people. But as with so many values, what we actually forget a lot of the time is applying our values - our important values - to ourselves. So we're compassionate to other people, but we're not compassionate to ourselves. And we forgive other people, which is harder to do, but we're very, very bad at forgiving ourselves. We don't sort of think about applying our values to ourselves. And that's really a process, I think, of accepting that we've slipped. Accept that we're angry that we slipped. Only if we can accept what we've done - forgive ourselves and accept - can we actually deal with them. And if we're in denial, you know, it gets worse. We just get into a vicious cycle. We need to accept and then we need to just, if necessary, think about it and reflect on how we can adjust our behaviour. 'Why did I do that?' And you know, maybe the next time when the situation arises, we'll behave better and we won't need to go through that whole process again, and feel bad about ourselves. So yeah, self understanding is absolutely needed. That's key. Why do we make

the wrong choice? How can we do it better next time? And values are really a way of being able to do that and analysing that.

Kim Forrester 21:04

I love that so much. Because what you're saying there is that, it's important for us to ensure that we are turning our values back onto ourselves; that we are nourishing ourselves with the same values with which we attempt to nourish others.

Charles Fowler 21:16

That's a beautiful way of putting it. I love that.

Kim Forrester 21:19

Charles, as parents, as caregivers, as teachers, as mentors, as examples in society, how can we learn to recognise and encourage children's values? Is it important that we do so?

Charles Fowler 21:34

I think it's really important. I mean, as we all know the children are the future. And it's really key for children, during the formative stages of their lives, to develop good values. Actually, children have naturally good values and they're naturally so responsive to values. So yeah, we absolutely need to encourage children. And first of all, I think, you know ... what can we do? Well, we can be a really good role model. If we say one thing and don't do it, we do something else - if we say, look, this is the way to behave, and we behave in a totally different way - this isn't going to really go down too well. It's not going to encourage children to actually unconsciously model the right values, the right behaviour, leading from those values. But we can do it, not just as role models, but we can actually talk to children about values. And this is really, really powerful. Talking to anyone about values is powerful, but with children, they're so open and they can so easily become conscious about what values are. The key is not to, you know, not to lecture them - not to, as it were, teach them - but to bring out the values that are there already. And then they respond really quickly and naturally, I actually, as it happens, am Chair of a charity which actually helps children to do just this. And we go to schools and we have programmes which schools can use to help children talk about values and show them how to use values as a way of addressing all the, you know, development issues that children have you as they grow up. That's how to relate to other people healthily, how to relate to children and adults healthily, how to be confident about themselves, how to cope with difficulties. You know, resilience. How to think critically. All of these things can be done by alerting them to, you know, what's already inside them, which are their values. And we do it, as I say, not by, you know, telling them, 'You've got to be good, you've got to be nice. You've got to not hit your friend over the head when you have a disagreement, but you know, chat about it.' But we do it by asking them what they think. We show them stories and images, and we get them to discuss those; to discuss situations. 'What would you do? What do you think of what that person did in that story?' And then they come out with it and it's fantastic. And they pick up words like, you know, love and trust, and truth, and really quite complicated concepts as well. It's just natural.

Kim Forrester 23:53

Charles, the Eudaemonia podcast is about eudaimonia and a flourishing life. So I'd love to know, how has your life changed personally - how has it been enhanced - since you started getting involved with and promoting the importance of values?

Charles Fowler 24:12

Well, actually, there's ... I mean, it's a really good question. It'd be strange if there hadn't been a big change in my life and I think there has. When I first got involved with values, it was actually just to help raise money for that values education charity I mentioned a bit earlier. At that time, I was involved in finance, really, the financial services industry. I was a successful fund manager, international fund manager and I was completely absorbed in that whole world. I think, not because I so much wanted, you know, more and more money or anything like that - all the trappings of success - but it's really an exciting game and I wanted to win it. You know, I wanted to do well in this game. But it was when I ... actually it's when I saw the impact that values had on children that the first sort of stirrings began, really. And I understood, I was really impressed on the, you know, the transformation that children went through when they really became aware of values, and alert to values, and awake to values. But I didn't really understand how important values were for grownups until I joined ... we put together a number of charities and organisations and individuals, all involved in values in different ways. So I met all these wonderful people and understood - values had this transformative effect on grown ups, as well as children. And this was a real revelation to me. So all of this prompted me to think more and more about my own values, and how they've shaped my life. And I think, you know, that's I guess what's motivated me to get so involved in talking about, thinking about, writing about values and getting involved in organising stuff to do with values.

Kim Forrester 25:46

It sounds simultaneously so liberating and empowering, the way you explain it there, Charles. Tell me about World Values Day. So this is held every October. How do people get involved with World Values Day and what do you hope to achieve?

Charles Fowler 26:01

Yeah, well, it's fun really. And it's been a wonderful experience. We started up World Values Day about five years ago and it was the group of people I described in the UK, but also other organisations and groups around the world. The purpose of it is a simple purpose. We're trying to get people to be more aware of their own core values, and what an important thing this is for them and how big an impact it can have on them and on the world around them if they are aware of them and put them into action. And the theme, actually, this year is putting values into action. And we feel that's really appropriate this year because, suddenly what happened was, you know, the whole Coronavirus crisis and everything. And what we saw around us was people putting their values into action. We saw - obviously we were hearing about a lot of suffering and pain - but also at the same time, we were seeing people rising to the occasion and providing compassion and caring. Neighbours, you know, just offering unsolicited help to those living near them. People volunteering in their millions to help out. So that's it. And it's a big world celebration of values but also, more than that, it's just trying to make people more aware and more practically involved in putting their values into action. So it's going to be ... there's going to be a whole stream of online activities taking place, ranging from, you know, lots of workshops and seminars, but also things for children. There's loads of things, which are exciting.

Kim Forrester 27:30

It sounds like a wonderful opportunity, a wonderful invitation, for people to become more deliberate, more conscious, in living out their values on a daily basis - on that day, on the 15th of October 2020, and onwards. Charles, my final question for you is one that I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Can you offer a simple morning reminder - now this might be a mantra, a simple practice, an affirmation - something that my listeners can start using today to help them identify and personify their core values.

Charles Fowler 28:04

Yeah, love to do that. Affirming your values is actually quite an interesting exercise. Affirming your values is actually scientifically proven to improve our resistance to stress, and reduce stress. There's an affirmation which I can go through. So this is the way to do it. It's really simple. The first time you do it, just make a list of five values that matter most to you. Really, that are the most central to you in your life. Take your time, don't overthink it. The best way that I found, anyway, for myself and other people, is to write down a long list of you know all the values you can think of that make some ... have some resonance with you. And then gradually narrow them down until you've got the top five. If you need any help - if you want a ready made list - there's one on the World Values Day website in fact. And then on ... after that, on subsequent days, just spend the same ten minutes in the morning thinking or, even better, maybe writing in-depth about any one of those values that has come up; that's particularly relevant to what you've been doing, what you're doing at that moment, or what you've, you know, situations you've just experienced. It might be to do with their family, your work, something that happened to you outside on the street the previous day. How you behaved with somebody, or how somebody behaved with you. Something to do ... something you've been thinking about to do with your beliefs, your faith. Whatever. So it's just ten minutes thinking about how that value made an impact on you, or maybe how you didn't quite live up to that value. Or maybe how you did, or how somebody else did, or somebody else didn't. Whatever it is, how is that value important to you? Why is that so resonant with you? Why does that come to the top of your mind at the time? And if you investigate that, it's really, really powerful. And you know, after a while you get into the swing of it and after few days you'll be surprised at the effect it has.

Kim Forrester 29:56

Well, I love it. It sounds so empowering. You become a consciously aware of what is truly important to you, as a human being walking through this world. And then, perhaps, giving you a foundation on which to make healthier and more authentic decisions regarding what's been going on in your life, when you're tapped into your values like that. Charles, World Values Day, how can people find out more? You have a website?

Charles Fowler 30:22

There's a website, it's www.worldvaluesday.com. We're also on social media: Twitter @valuesday. We're on LinkedIn, we're on Facebook, we're on Instagram. You know, so you can easily tap into what's going on. And as I say, it's dead easy to get involved, either as a group or as an individual, online or offline. Do your own thing or join in with other people, however you like.

Kim Forrester 30:51

A simple and inspiring way, I think, to tap into this global celebration of values. Charles Fowler, thank you so much for spending your time I'm here, with me today, on the Eudaemonia podcast. It's just been such a delight chatting with you,

Charles Fowler 31:04

Kim, it's been a real pleasure. I mean, there's something so exciting about talking about values. Anyway, as you probably gathered. I mean, it's a really big thing with me and I just love being able to talk about it. So it's been a total pleasure, Kim. Thank you so much for asking me onto this broadcast.

Kim Forrester 31:18

Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm with us, Charles.

Charles Fowler 31:21

Thanks a lot, Kim.

Kim Forrester 31:22

The incomparable Elvis Presley once said, 'Values are like fingerprints. Nobody's are the same, but you leave them all over everything you do.' 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 and check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself and be true to your core values.