

LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.
JACQUI LEWIS

**Believe Assiduously
with Nadia Bolz Weber**

Jacqui: Hey everybody. Jacqui Lewis here. Welcome to this second season of Love Period. This season, we're focusing our conversations on my new book, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness that Can Heal the World*. Each of my friends will be helping you to think about the themes in each chapter. Nine practical practices that can help us love ourselves, love our posse, and then love the world and healing. It all starts with you. We're going to give you practical tips to make these practices a part of your life. Today's episode is inspired by the ninth and final chapter of my book, *Fierce love*. Believe assiduously. Have faith in love. I asked my friend Nadia Bolz-Weber to come by for this conversation. Nadia and I have been following each other in social spaces for many years. When we met at Wild Goose the first time I thought, "Ah, a sister from another mother." She is an author, a pastor, and a revolutionary rebel. She knows what it means to believe fiercely in love. Nadia Bolz-Weber, I'm so glad to spend some time with you today. How are you?

Nadia: I'm good. But I wish we were in the same room, having pizza and gossiping, or something.

Jacqui: Yeah. What kind of pizza would we be having? What would you be ordering? Tell me.

Nadia: I do like just traditional cheese pizza, but I also very much like wacky pizzas. There's one locally that has bacon and roasted pairs, and goat cheese, and arugula. It's pretty life changing, with an olive oil base.

Jacqui: Oh, my God. Bacon, roasted pairs, arugula and goat cheese?

Nadia: Yeah. I'm telling you.

Jacqui: I want that. You know that you can go to a pizza place and they'll be having these Caesar salad pizzas and you think, [inaudible 00:02:08]. There's one, a new one, in our neighborhood at a pizza place called Marinara, I'm going to say their name, this Caesar salad pizza will make you want to slap somebody. It is so delicious, it is just ridiculous. You're like, "What?" The Caesar dressing is so yummy. The chicken is so tender and the lettuce stands up to the heat, girl. Seriously.

Nadia: My best friend, Jody, her social media profile, Jody Hogue, says that she's a good eater.

Jacqui: Is she a good eater?

Nadia: She's a good eater. Do you know Sarah Miles? Have you done stuff with Sarah Miles before?

Jacqui: I know who Sarah Miles is a no, and we must.

Nadia: Well, she and I have traveled before internationally a few times together. She has said, "Nadia, I love traveling with you because you like to eat."

Jacqui: Yeah. Eating is joy, isn't?

Nadia: Oh yeah. It's a very big deal to me. If I have to eat food that's not very good, it does pretty much bum me out for a while.

Jacqui: I love that. Well, we can't have that. We must have delicious food. I find myself thinking,

when I was a little girl my mama used to say, “Some people eat to live and other people live to eat.” I think I’m in the latter category.

Nadia: Oh, for sure.

Jacqui: Don’t be wasting my time with yucky food. Bring it. The bread of life and the cup of blessing, whatever’s in the cup.

Nadia: Correct.

Jacqui: Better if it’s red wine.

Nadia: Better when it was in the cup, is a good thing.

Jacqui: Nadia, the last time I saw you, we were at Wild Goose together, I guess before pandemic. Tell me, how you’ve taken care of yourself in these last 20 months, or something. How have you been?

Nadia: In some ways, I’m really good. I think it has to do with a few things. I’m very well loved by my beloved. So, I feel I’m really, truly well loved for the first time in my life. That changes everything for me. I think I’ve been really willing to sink in to how everything feels, in a way that allows it to be metabolized in terms of the grief and the pain and the loss that we’ve experienced in the pandemic. I feel, for whatever reason, I’m in a place in my life where I’m willing to be emotionally present to it, enough that I can also be emotionally present to the joy that’s available as well.

Jacqui: I love that. Does the well loved by the beloved, does that help the other, do they go together?

Nadia: I’m sure they do. Everything about me is just softer than it was six, seven years ago. I feel I’m more open into everything, I feel I’m more accepting of myself and other people. My ability to experience compassion is greater than it was before. I think my ability to experience the moment is greater than it has been before. Also, just being in your fifties is just hot. I like it.

Jacqui: [crosstalk 00:06:03] he said that. It’s good. Wait till you get to 60, girl, 60. I’m 62 now. I feel I’m like 50 12, or something, it does feel the fifties continues, but I’m 50 12.

Nadia: When I was younger, I never heard women who were older talk about positively about what it’s like, very much. I think it’s important to ... Your body is going to do what your body’s going to do in terms of the aging process. There are ways that we can be kind to our bodies and try to give gifts to our future self by our practices in the moment. But, at the same time, I think it’s important to talk about the positive aspects of being older, because our culture just worships youth, which is ridiculous, man. I wouldn’t be in my twenties again for all the money in the world. I had really good abs, but other than that, I had nothing going for me.

Jacqui: You had really good abs. I love that.

Nadia: That I did.

Jacqui: I had a good booty. I had a really good booty.

Nadia: Fair enough. But what else? No, everything feels a crisis when you're in your twenties. You can't deal with shit when you're in your twenties.

Jacqui: That's really true. I think you were going to say something about us about eating when I was asking, how are you doing? You've been eating well and you were going to say ...

Nadia: Well, I try to eat food made out of food, and move my body and just take care of her, a little bit.

Jacqui: She deserves that, Nadia.

Nadia: Yeah. She's carried me through every day.

Jacqui: Every day. We are still in the middle of a pandemic. I just cannot even believe it. As we record this, it's in November of 2021, and Nadia and I live in different parts of the country and we're in this space. We'd rather be together eating pizza, we've established this. But Nadia, the world is on fire. When you think about your words, your writing, your teachings, what sustains you, the love of the beloved and also food, that's food. Can you just say a little bit about what do you believe in right now, and how does it source you?

Nadia: Yeah. Well, since I, like you, am a preacher, and I'm preaching this Sunday. If I'm preaching the coming Sunday, then anybody who asks me questions during the week, my answer is going to be about whatever I'm perseverating on around the text. You feel me?

Jacqui: I totally do. That's right.

Nadia: You're in it. It's reign of Christ, or Christ the King, Sunday, this coming week. I've been thinking about this thing where Jesus says like, "My kingdom is not of this world, I was born and came to testify to the Truth. Those who belong to the Truth, listen to My voice," all of that stuff. I'm like, "What does it mean to belong to the truth in a post-truth world, in a fake news world, in a world in which we are being fed lines of bullshit, and told it's the truth every day of our lives, in which our worst instincts are being manipulated in order to create click bait?" Headlines are manipulated to be sure and trigger the worst instincts within us are moral outrage about the world and about other people, and all that content and being manipulated. Why? So that we click a link? Why? So somebody gets ad revenue. That's the game. In a world in which what I'm told is true, what I'm told about my fellow citizens, what I'm told about my fellow Christians, what I'm being told about the world and myself feels fairly unfucking trustable right now, because of the ways that it is only trying to manipulate the worst parts of me so that other people can be enriched. What does it mean that Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world? Because we know what the kingdoms of this world look like. We know that it looks domination and manipulation, and greed, and vengeance, and all those worst instincts of within ourselves projected onto the world. We know that's what the kingdom of the world looks like, but what does it mean when Jesus says that His Kingdom is not of this world?

It means that we have all of those instincts within us, every single person does, but it will always, always lead to death. None of that leads to life. Right now, I'm thinking a lot about the violence that is within me, even though it might not manifest itself in physical violence. Because if Jesus said His Kingdom is not of this world, I think that's what He's saying. He says, if it was, there would be a violent uprising. That's not who I am. That's not what I'm about. So, I guess if you ask what sustains me, it's trying to constantly remember, whether it's in a meditation, or a prayer, or while I'm walking, or during my day, that I am connected to this divine source, that I get to tap into when I don't have enough, when all of my instincts have gone awry, when all of my desires are really, truly around resentments and vengeance, or greed, or anything like that, that that's just my broken human wiring, but that there's another part of me.

It's the part that is connected to the divine. It is the part that belongs to the truth, as Jesus says. To go, I accept that I have these broken down parts of me, everybody does. But also, I choose to remember in my practices and in my life, as much as I can. Sometimes that's a hundred times a day that I am connected to my divine source. That source is an endless well of mercy and of compassion, and of love. When I don't have enough, there always is enough, because there's the connection.

Jacqui: Oh gosh, Nadia, that's beautiful. Are you preaching that on Sunday?

Nadia: I don't know, maybe.

Jacqui: That's beautiful. I was just talking to someone I admire a lot and haven't had a real conversation with ever before, but talking about truth and what is truth. Because, I have this whole thing in my book, *Fierce Love*, where I'm saying the truth will actually set us free, and speaking truthfully will set us free. He was pushing around in that like, "What is the truth, what is the truth?" And I'm like, "There might be more than one truth, to be honest, I think that's truth. Whose truth is the truth we're talking about?" But maybe when Jesus says that, maybe what's in that bucket called truth, is this love, love that will not let us go. This source that will not ignore us. This bountiful something that has enough for you and me to sustain our flailing and our wrestling, and our pushing, and shoving, are becoming. When I say that stuff, it sounds kind of woo-woo to me, but also it feels true to me, that there is right.

Nadia: Yeah. We do live in a time of what I call abject subjectivity. To say, "Oh, well everyone has their own truth." Well, everyone has their own perspective. Everyone has their own context. Everyone has their own viewpoint, and that is valuable and it's good to know, and it there's a richness to that. But at some point, even in this post enlightenment world, as Christians, we got to say something that we got some big T truth.

Jacqui: Yeah. Let's talk about what those are. What is it?

Nadia: Okay. The way in which it's different than, I guess, the way we usually, when you think, "Oh, I know the truth," it's like I possess it. Like it's something that I can have and then exert other people, in a sense. But the way Jesus talks about truth, he's not

saying it's something ... It's something you belong to. It's not something that belongs to you.

Jacqui: It's something you belong to.

Nadia: Our perspectives, our standpoints, our opinions, our context, all of those things that people say, "Oh, this is my truth," those are all fine, but that's not the same as belonging to something big, big, big, big.

Jacqui: Yeah. If you were asking me, Jackie, what is the big T truth that we belong to? I think it is this love that I'm trying to talk about that is not ... I want to meet your beloved and know the one who's loving you well. And I think the source of the love that loves us well, my John who brings me water for every podcast and it's warm, but also listens to my junk all day long, poor thing. I know tries to have a fresh idea on my repeated questions, that maybe that love is the thing that holds us all. Or the truth that we belong to is that there is a love that is so amazing, so divine, to quote Him, but so strong, so resilient, so elastic, so nimble, so unjudging, so wondrous, to quote another Him, and there's enough of it. There's enough to go around, and we can dip in it, I'm picking up your metaphor a little bit, we can dip in there. We can take a cool drink of water of it, we could throw it around our bodies and make a blanket of it. We could just take a bath in it. We could consume it as food. It's just how we need it can come to us. This is what I'm talking about, Nadia. I want to convert the world to love. I am so sick of the squabbling, and so sick of the fighting, and so sick of the crap and the bullshit. Is that what's underneath it all for us, a yearning? Dr. [inaudible 00:18:26] used to say for the face that will never leave us, that will love us no matter what. How does that resonate for you?

Nadia: It's funny. I've gotten just very, I don't even know how to say it, simple in my theology. I feel my theological standpoint continues to simplify. So, on some level, I always think about how rare life is in the universe. You see those films where they'll pan into someone's backyard, and then they pan out and here's their city, and their state, and the country. Here's the continent and here's the planet Earth. Then here's our solar system. That's the point usually that I'm like, "I'm good. Stop panning." I'd be a good medieval person, just the dome. I feel comfortable with the dome, and that's it. But they keep going, and they're like, "And here's our galaxy, and that's part of this. That's a little pinpoint of this cluster of galaxies. That's a pinpoint of this whole ..." And it's like the human mind cannot conceive of the fastest, of the universe. The only place we so far have discovered life, as we know it here, is here. Either it only exists here, or it's exceedingly rare and, either way, what an unbelievable gift that we get to eat pizza, you know what I'm saying?

Jacqui: Yes.

Nadia: We get to be here. We get to experience puppies and love, and sex, and joy, and laughter, and tears. All of it. We get to walk through the mountains and experience the wind on our skin. All that stuff. How unbelievable. That we get to ... We get to be alive. It is only through grace. God did not have to overflow the heavens and create life here. It didn't have to happen. Yet here it is. It can be horrible and it can be magnificent. But that, somehow, the source of all of it is the heart of God. God's heart couldn't be contained. It just overflowed into what we know as life and creation. So, that's our original home. That's our homeland in some way. So it is, that's our source. Everybody's source.

Jacqui: Yeah. That feels like a big T truth for me.

Nadia: That's a big T.

Jacqui: It's a big T. That's a really big T. It feels to me like what we hope to be true. Let's say even if it wasn't true, which I think it is, I think that the core of our souls, we want that to be true. That there is a source that is abundant and affirming, and good, and that it causes our goodness, and it flows out of our pores as love. I know that I want that. My congregation wants that. I find myself thinking what would happen if we, you and I, who preach, and the others, the rabbis, the imams, the bodhisattvas, and the ... I don't know, all the folks who have a thing to say, the yoga teachers, what if we all could sync up, this is my little girl dream, that we would sync up and we'd say, "Okay, enough. Let's just believe assiduously in love, take a season, and just preach love," could we seed a revolution? Could we rewire the next generation or the one after that, Nadia, to where we don't traffic in so much us/them hatred?

Nadia: I think love is not always easy. It's not always easy. Sometimes, being loved can sting, because of the ways it reminds me of all the times I've not been loved well, or at all, or the times that I've loved poorly. Good love can have a sting to it. There's so many things that we're told in our lives are love, and are not. So, our whole relationship to that idea is complicated. And yet, it's such the basic original truth. Our homeland, like I said, that even if we feel like refugees, it still remains our home and the place to which we long to return, in some way. Yeah. I don't know.

Jacqui: Yeah. I don't know either, but I'm having an insight that maybe we're constructing, and I say, we, the collective human we, in different pockets in different places, maybe we're constructing gods with a little G, to make us feel safe when we're afraid or to answer the existential question about, "Do we matter?" And like, "Oh, this is stuff of our nightmare." Actually, we're saying, "Oh, this is God. This meanness is God. This anger is God, this punishment is God, this big wad of money is God. This house is God." And what we really want is just for someone to look at our nakedness and go, "You're okay. You're all right. Just like you are."

Nadia: Yeah. There are absolutely endless ways in which we feel like we have to strive in the great human worthiness competition. And also rank ourselves, the comparison to others. I was listening to ... My favorite podcast is Hidden Brain by Shankar Vedantam. It's so good. There was one that was talking about self compassion and I was talking about, I think it was maybe a happiness researcher, but they were saying, "In order to feel like we are good, we have to feel somehow above average." If someone listened to my podcast and I said, "What'd you think of it?" And they're like, "It's average," I'd be devastated. In order to think we're good, the mark has to be above average. We have to rank ourselves above other people. In order to consider ourselves beautiful, we have to see people around us who we consider less beautiful. It's just this constant ranking system in our minds. Who has more money, who's more attractive, who's more successful, who's more charismatic, who's more famous, in order to know where we stand. The ways in which that actually impedes are flourishing, are enormous. We can actually be satisfied with something, I'm satisfied by a small candy bar until I see somebody, "Oh, but they have an ice cream Sunday." Now, this isn't satisfying anymore because I see somebody else has that. It's so nonstop. Of course, social media is

the perfect medium for this artisanship. I don't know. I think that there's a certain way in which the human beings' wiring repels choices that lead to our flourishing, over, and over, and over again.

Jacqui: Absolutely. That's true. This idea of [Ubuntu 00:27:29], that I write about and in *Fierce Love*, this [Umuntu 00:27:33] and Ubuntu, and [Abantu 00:27:35]. This is my showing off my Zulu for you, which I probably said very wrong, but a human is a human to wear the humans. If we could just pause. I think in regress almost, to the first time we knew we needed each other to survive. What was that moment? When someone was like, "Oh my goodness, wait a minute. We need some fire." Who-

Nadia: Right.

Jacqui: Or we need ... Who's going to watch the kids? Well, some of us go hunt and gather. I don't know. Those first moments of coming together from out the cave or out of the water, whatever it was, to say, "Okay, I need you and what you have for me to be okay. And you need what I have for you to be okay."

Nadia: Instead of I need for you to have less, so I'm okay with what I have.

Jacqui: You're going to preach on Sunday, it's Christ the King, Sunday. I gave up my pulpit to my friend, Joey, who is a lay leader, who was a 9/11, was first responder, police detective, who has come out as Giuseppe Angelo Reali, who is a trans man. I just was so excited to give up the pulpit. At middle [inaudible 00:29:24] of God, Sunday, he's like a holiday, "Woo hoo. Here we are." But I just wanted to have Joey's voice talk about transformation, and change, and what it means to become who we really are. Deep down inside, I'm thinking, what if religion is about us becoming who we really are. You know the text that says, "All of creation is waiting like a woman in childbirth for the children of God to be revealed." What do you wish? What do you wish, Nadia, would be revealed about us as humans? Do you ever wish you dream-

Nadia: Well, first I should tell you whose pulpit I'm in on Sunday. It's Broderick Greer.

Jacqui: Oh my God. I do. You're going to be in Colorado?

Nadia: Yeah. I live here. I'm connected to three parishes in my call. I'm connected to the Episcopal cathedral where he's at, in [inaudible 00:30:21] Presbyterian and then new beginnings, which is the women's prison congregation. Those are the three pulpits that I'm in regularly. Anyway, so I'm preaching for Broderick. One of the things the pandemic has done is ... In [inaudible 00:30:43] recent book, she talks about how she has this friend who says, "When you first meet him, you're really just meeting his bodyguard." I just thought, I love that. Who is our bodyguard? Either our ego needing everyone to know we're important, or shyness because our ego says, "Hey, we're not really worthy to be taking up space." Bodyguards take a million forms. I am so grateful to my bodyguard. She was very adept. She was highly professional. It was important that she always be out in front of me because she made sure that I only showed people things about myself I felt safe showing them which, in my case, it was a lot of bluster and sarcasm.

Jacqui: Is that why sarcastic, Lutheran?

Nadia: Yeah. It's funny. That's my brand, but that's not really who I am anymore. Not at 52. She was off duty during the pandemic. I didn't need her in my apartment. Now, I think she's just getting a lot of PTO. Even though I feel less guarded, I feel less protected and defensive than I ever have in my whole life, and my emotions are closer to the surface having gone through this pandemic, than they've ever been. I think I am closer to the me that God has always known and loved than I've ever been. Because there are all of those layers, of all those protective measures that I felt like I needed,

and probably did need, but a lot of that stripped away from me now. So, I have described it as feeling closer to the me that God's always known and loved.

Jacqui: I love that, Nadia. Let me ask you a question. What do you know for sure ... [crosstalk 00:32:59]
No, you're good. No, don't tell us that. I love that. What do you know for sure about love?

Nadia: That I don't know that, between humans, it can be pure. I think we should never let that trip us up or keep us from receiving even lumpy, inconsistent love.

Jacqui: I love that.

Nadia: I think sometimes our ... We can get so idealistic stick about pure love between people. I don't know, human beings are disappointing and inconsistent, and have good days and bad days. I think having an acceptance of that, and yet still there can be love between us and it can be shared, and it beautiful. I just think the thing I really know is that even though I can't love perfectly and I can't be loved perfectly, that it's still worth it. It's still worth it to love each other and to receive it and to give it of-

Jacqui: Nadia, when I say fierce love, what does that evoke in you?

Nadia: A mother. I think the fiercest love is love that a mother has for her child, honestly. That's the fiercest love I've ever experienced, is that is the love I have for my kids. That protective, everything I have is yours, until you hit 18 and then for sure, not anymore. Everything I have is yours for 18 years. Got it?

Jacqui: I love that. Well, thank you. Thank you for mothering those kids, but also nurturing us, Nadia, with your gifts.

Nadia: Thank you.

Jacqui: Next time, pizza in person.

Nadia: Pizza in person? Yes.

Jacqui: Okay.

Nadia: All praise.

Jacqui: Thank you. Thank you, Nadia. Appreciate you.

Nadia: Total pleasure. Thank you.

Jacqui: One of the women in [inaudible 00:35:33]'s play for colored girls had loved someone assiduously for so long and had gotten no returns. I want you and I to believe assiduously in fierce love as a way to heal our souls and the world. How? It starts with you, my friend. Look in the mirror every day and love something about you. It will rewire your heart.