

# LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.  
JACQUI LEWIS

**Finding Balance Through Radical Love  
with Jamia Wilson**

Jacqui Lewis: Hey. Everyone. I'm Jacqui Lewis. Welcome to the third season of Love Period. In this season we are exploring what fierce love looks like in a time of trauma, when all around the globe folks are trying to figure out how to be the best version of human they can be in these difficult and traumatic times. Today my guest on Love Period is Jamia Wilson. She is an author and a publisher of books. When Jamia joined my church, I was thrilled to imagine someone like her finding Middle Church and found in her a little sister with similar story. Both of us in these powerful interracial marriages. We put our foot in that conversation today, and I hope it is insightful to you as we think about racial dynamics in our nation. Jamia Wilson, welcome to Love Period.

Jamia Wilson: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be with you. One of my favorite humans.

Jacqui Lewis: Mine too. Sometimes I pinch myself, I think, ah, we're in the same publishing world and she's a member of my church. I'm so proud for her. How's your family? How's everybody doing?

Jamia Wilson: Thank you so much. I feel it's springtime. I love spring. Although we are in a time of change, I can feel like it's pivotal. I can feel there's that thrust of uncertainty that is uncomfortable about the change of seasons. I do feel like there's a positive energy in the air of change and things that are going to set things that have been unsettling in the right course. I feel that in my family. There's been a lot of grief and loss and illness and just a lot of things that happened in the past five years.

But I see also coming together that is happening now that after things came undone. And so, that's just been interesting to look at in the context of the world and trying to find my place in it as everyone else is talking about reemerging in this sort of new environment, new phase of the pandemic. I've realized I'm reemerging into myself after experiencing the depths of grief and that metaphor is not not connected.

Jacqui Lewis: Yeah, absolutely.

Jamia Wilson: So really, just thinking about that a lot.

Jacqui Lewis: Do you feel comfortable saying more about that happened before Middle's fire, before COVID actually, you had a series of sorrowful events. Just if you feel comfortable telling us, because I also think of you as the most joyful, coming back with some love person, one of the most joyful people I've ever met in my life. So when you talk about that, take us all the way to how you end up feeling emerging with joy. Talk about that some, please.

Jamia Wilson: Oh, thank you so much. I thank you for reflecting that back, because it's good for me to feel that you have seen my joy.

Jacqui Lewis: All the time.

Jamia Wilson: Thank you. You learn about yourself, right? You learn about parts of yourself. There was sort of a dark part of my shadows that had come through in the past five years that I hadn't been comfortable with around what happens within me when I'm really feeling sorrowful. For me, I just thought, oh, the way that I deal with pain is different than how my husband and my dad deals with it. What can I learn from that? Then, how do I apply that knowledge to how

I see the rest of the world?

So I was seeing up until recently that it started when my mother passed away on Christmas Day of 2018. She was my soulmate on this planet. She was just one of those people who really understood me. I just wish everyone had the love that I experienced from some other person in this world from that connection. I know she said that she had that for me. Of course, she had these beautiful, loving relationships with other deep loves in her life, but that there was something special between us. Her mother would say it. My father would say it that. And I was her mini me. Everyone would call me little Fria.

I really would say, oh, it was when mom died. But I've realized in recent days, since the fog started lifting, that it wasn't the day she died. It was the moment that the cancer started to progress and we were in the anticipatory grief and the slow, and then fast direction, of knowing that all we could have is faith, pray for a miracle, and be present, and that was it. And so, I'm actually just going through how I don't think I'm the same person that I was before that, and yet at my core, I am. I have been finding joy through that just saying those parts of me that came into this world when God brought me through her into this place, who already knew her, already knew God, already knew my dad already knew this soul posse, that part of me still still remained. But the part of me that had an experience, the really, really dark calls of grief and had to step into sides of myself and responsibilities and pain that I hadn't experienced before is changed.

There was something, the minute that my dad called me downstairs and he said, Jamia come downstairs, I knew she had died. I just felt it. Something was in me that I didn't even need to see her. I knew. And I knew I was changed. I knew I was going to have to show up different, and that I felt like there was some way that ... and especially in the days right after she died. There was almost an energy of how my vertebrae was being bolstered by something that I couldn't quite describe. And so, I like to say it was God and her support helping me stand up.

My mom had asked me to do the eulogy at her funeral, and I had done it at my grandmother's funeral three years before, and I had a bit of a meltdown at three o'clock in the morning, the night before. My dad said, "You got to do this and we have all these people here." I thought, "I cannot do this." I've done this before. We just lost grandma three years ago. All these people coming here, hundreds of people, and somehow I couldn't even write it. Then that morning, I wrote it. I wrote it that morning, which was I still don't know how I did that. I got to the church somehow. I still don't know how that happened either. I kind of remember a little bit of it. Then somehow when I got up and did it, and there's a video that said it happened, so I have proof it happened.

Jacqui Lewis: You had true proof you did it.

Jamia Wilson: Exactly, but I don't remember, but it's on YouTube. I did it and I felt like she just was there and that God was knitting together each vertebrae by vertebrae with sort of a light source of constellation or something. And so I just, I've been kind of riding on in the pain, finding that. Where can I find that feeling within me, that I knew something was going to hold me up and something was going to give me breath, and something was going to put one foot in front of the other until I can start to stand again, until I can start to breathe again, until I

can eat again. Because after that day I didn't eat for a couple of days. I locked my door and people kept knocking, wanting to talk to me. I was like a feral animal.

Jacqui Lewis: I'm so sorry, sweetie, for that loss.

Jamia Wilson: Thank you.

Jacqui Lewis: Frida's presence in your body and your soul feels to me like something I'm familiar with. My mom died a few months before your mom in April of 2017, which blows my mind. But she's here. I mean, she's absolutely here.

Jamia Wilson: She is. And your mother, I remember feeling her presence in your sermons many times. And when you spoke of her and feeling a great sadness, I heard about her passing because I always felt like she was there with you even when she was still on this planet. That I could feel that connection between you. And so, yes, thank you for giving me the opportunity to say her name and with your mom's name too. That just, it changed me. And in a way, the timing of it all helped me be a support to other people.

So when my husband very unexpectedly lost his dad the same week that he had a cancer diagnosis of his own, that came out of nowhere. There was something that same sort of knitting together the vertebrae, the light, that came there. And I knew how to be there for him, even though I was grieving too. I said, "This is a club I did not want you to have to be in ever or in a very long time from now. Yet I believe we were brought together by spirit because we're both only children and have a unique understanding of what this is like for each other." It was the moment that I also realized, oh, the divineness of the bringing together of people who come together. That I uniquely understand what it's like for you to now be wanting to be able to hold your mom in a certain way as I feel that I need too with my dad. And so, I'm grateful for that as well.

Jacqui Lewis: And you speak that. I wish you all could see Jamia, always speaking with a kind of effervescent knowing, a kind of settled piece. I don't know if I'm saying it right, but it feels that way to me. That's how I experience you in the world. I wonder what would Travis say was if he was here. Does he see that too? And how's he doing?

Jamia Wilson: Oh, thank you so much. So, what would he say? It's so funny. He is so great. I am so grateful that I found someone in my life to be on this journey with who really sees me and I see him. When we met, I said, "Oh, you are so familiar to me. I feel like I've known you my whole life." Like a shoe that you put your foot in and you've always worn it. This was when we were both dating other people and we were met by mutual friends. When we both didn't even think this was going to happen between us. We were in the same friend orbit. But I thought, "Oh, he's like somebody I've known for a long, long time." And so, what I think he would say is he has said to me sometimes that his only gripe with me is that I'm an extreme empath who does not yet know her own power.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, my. Well, thank you, Mr. Travis. That's funny.

Jamia Wilson: He has said that to me and I take it with love. He said, “You are very powerful to the point where you don’t have to say much to move things. And if you really trusted and believed in that, as much as those who really know and love you do and paid attention less to those who are afraid of that, that is your medicine.” It’s part of why I love him, but also something that my mom was really trying to teach me, too. She had said that I was born 35.

Jacqui Lewis: [laughs]

Jamia Wilson: I think that’s a little bit of that too that they said when I was a baby. My great-grandmother’s apparently looked at my eyes and they were saying, “That kid has been here before.” That’s what they’ve all said. And you know how they say that. But I heard that that’s what they all said when I came here.

Jacqui Lewis: Absolutely. I know how they say that. So you and I have in common, this loss of our moms, the kind of presence of an absence and the absence of a presence, I would say, is what I feel, right? Mommy is here. Her fierce love is here. I am changed because she passed away. Maybe I kept growing up after she passed away. I’m older than you, but I feel like there’s some kind of something she gave me that pushed me further out of the womb, pushed me into being more authentically myself. Does that resonate?

Jamia Wilson: Oh, my gosh. I love that you’re saying that because I feel like now I’m in my early forties and I have an awareness now that is a really powerful time in one’s life, should one be blessed to be in their forties. I’m really leaning into it, and I think it’s because I have friends who have known me since I was so young or a teenager going through other things, who can reflect back to me the kind of growth they see on the other side of this grief. I also had the privilege and experience of going to an all girls, feminist Episcopalian boarding school.

Jacqui Lewis: Wow.

Jamia Wilson: Having all that together, you can imagine what that’s like. And so, all my roommates were like sisters to me. I still text with them every day, and other people they’ve brought into our lives through their friendships in college, et cetera. We’ve been through a lot together. And so, they have also helped me see that I’ve been growing up and emerging, that I’m in a new stage and a rejuvenation. And the way some of the things they’ll tell me that I said when we were 15 [laughs] I will think, oh Lord, I said that?

They will always say, “Oh yeah, you did say that.” But yeah, I feel that, and I feel really blessed to have that reflected back at me. Then also, the thing that I feel a little brief around, but I think it’s a beautiful thing and I think it’s part of life, is that there’s so many things that my mom tried to impart and to teach me when she was in her forties or fifties or sixties or her seventies, that I did not get until now. I just hope that where she is, she knows. I’m sorry, I wasn’t ready yet, mature enough yet, evolved enough yet. But I also know that she understands. One of the last things she said to me when she was in hospice was, “Mommy is so happy. I see that you’re learning. And I know that you’re okay.”

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, those last mama words.

Jamia, you are married to a beautiful musician named Travis, who is a white guy.

Jamia Wilson: He is. Oh, very much. Very much.

Jacqui Lewis: And I'm married to a beautiful United Methodist minister named John, who's a white guy. So I've been thinking, as I was thinking about our conversation, friend, that we've not had a chance to talk about that in the context of American racism and craziness, and in the context of Roe v. Wade explosion. And how Roe v. Wade is contemporary to Loving v. Virginia where our marriages were not legal until 1967. How do you and Travis as a team navigate what I call whiteness. But the systemic racism that has us all shackled in some ways to itself. Do you feel comfortable talking a little bit about how you all do it?

Jamia Wilson: Oh, I love that you're asking me this question because everyone listening who has not become a member of Middle Church yet, and if you haven't, you should definitely join. It's the best ever. Now, I took so long to officially join myself. Don't as I do. Do as I say. But I just wish I had been more involved in Middle sooner. One of the reasons I joined was seeing you and seeing your family and knowing, okay, this is a place where we can completely be ourselves. We're around a lot of other families, multiracial, LGBTQ, people who aren't Christians. Just people who are love-filled. People love period who want to be together in spirit.

One of the things that I was excited about was seeing you and your grandchildren. Seeing that you have a multiracial family throughout and how beautiful that is and how I think that we need more of that kind of representation and conversation in our society about this. For us, it's really interesting. I feel as if one of the conversations I want to have more is about the link between Loving versus Virginia and the link between Roe v. Wade, and to talk about what it means for those of us who had to have our identities encoded by the Supreme Court because we aren't included in the constitution, and that being the moral problem that we should think about as American.

Also, to really think about how we spread the word about that connection to many of the people who don't even know that they will be affected by these laws, because they are a part of multiracial families, including families like some of the Supreme Court justices who are supporting these bad bills. So, I'm glad you asked. I think for me, one of the things that's been helpful is I feel like I am constantly reminded of the truth beyond the noise that we hear in the misinformation and the vitriol and tension and division in culture, by just what I see in my family and what I see in our love. That's not to say that every day is a good day. That's not to say that we haven't had differences of seeing things, or that I haven't been hurt by his family members saying things or him hurt by mine. It's more that we have both been thrust into because of the vows we've made together and the life and love we're in to really every day have to do this work in the most intimate of ways.

Jacqui Lewis: Yes, yes. Oh my gosh, I co-sign that, right? John and I say, we work on racism 24/7 from washing the dishes to doing protests together, but we are always working on it. Would that every team, every family had the opportunity, the desire, and the maybe must do to do that kind of work.

Jamia Wilson: I love it you said the 24/7, because I remember once a really well-meaning white man in my life liberal said, we were at a Jeffersonian dinner and we were all talking about race and they were all kind of waxing hopeful that we could just have a day where we could just ... the color blind racism conversation.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, no.

Jamia Wilson: We could just talk about things and not have this be the focus la, la, la, la, la. So I just said, “Well, every day I have friction in my marriage and part of that is because my husband has a lot of privilege that I don’t, and it’s annoying to me that sometimes I’ll be standing outside trying to get a cab for 15 minutes and I’ll have to call him. He puts his hand up in a second and there’s three cabs fighting to pick him up.”

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Jamia Wilson: Then they’re confused. And so, one of the guys said, “Oh, I just feel so sorry for him because you have this attitude. It must be so exhausting for him because you are so negative about this and so fixated on race.” It gave me this opportunity to really say, “Wow, one, could you imagine how exhausting it is for me to have to go through this kind of conversation all the time because your privilege has made it so you’ve never had to really think these things through?”

Jacqui Lewis: Wow. Good for you.

Jamia Wilson: To the degree I’ve had to since I was six, the first time someone called me the N word.

Jacqui Lewis: Right.

Jamia Wilson: But also, just this other piece of how something my mom actually said to me when there were men in my family who opposed my relationship for a lot of those reasons that I don’t have to explain to you that everybody probably heard the same things and fears and distrust of what it would mean for me to be involved with a white man. She said, “Well, the truth be told, if you were to marry a Black man in America, with everything that’s happening, with Roe v. Wade, with patriarchy, with sexism, a Black man, no matter how low key he would be, would still not understand the intersectional struggle of what it is to live as a Black woman every day as you do.” So you would be doing the work either way.

Jacqui Lewis: That’s right. Good for you.

Jamia Wilson: It’s just a different kind of work.

Jacqui Lewis: Different kind of work.

Jamia Wilson: That changed me and it changed the trajectory in terms of how I see it in my relationships in general.

Jacqui Lewis: You are not only a publisher at our home company of Penguin Random House, but which with your imprint, you go ahead with your bad self. But you are a writer, you’re an author. I want to just really comment on just the trajectory of your ideas, the way you are pitching to

young people what it means to be gifted and Black and activists. And so, Jamia, let's talk about that. Why that? There are lots of things to put in the world, but why that?

Jamia Wilson: Thank you for asking. I would love to say that it was strategic and that I have ambition. I'd love to say that. But you are my Reverend.

Jacqui Lewis: You got to tell the truth. That's right.

Jamia Wilson: Exactly. [laughs] I got to tell you the truth. The truth is that the unhealed eighth grader inside me.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, the unhealed eighth grader.

Jamia Wilson: She needs every book that I write.

Jacqui Lewis: Oh, my goodness.

Jamia Wilson: Every book I write comes from a part of myself that felt alone and needed to see herself reflected in the pages, needed to see the questions that she was shamed for asking or told she asked too many of just heard. It's a form of resistance and also therapy for me. I know it's a calling and I think it's in a way my ministry, because I know I would do it if I didn't get paid.

Indeed, I do. In case anyone who has bought my book, I want to get paid. But I'm just saying that I would be doing this no matter what. I would be doing it because it's like water or oxygen. I need to be engaging in that conversation with my child self. But then also, I do feel called. I do understand that I have a strength of being able to communicate complex ideas to intelligent little people.

Jacqui Lewis: You do. That's right. That's right.

Jamia Wilson: Thank you.

Jacqui Lewis: I remember we were standing outside at King Day. The Monday, we did a service project and I got to be there with Elise and Daryl, two of our staff with the books of the people that in our church have written books. I mean, we're blessed. There's several of you. There's several of us writing. Poets and children's book writers. I want to put you in touch with Kerry Dougherty, a friend that you should have. But we were so proud of having your work there.

I was particularly proud to touch and hold your work there because books really changed my life when I was a little person, Jamia. I didn't have this kind of stuff, but my mom and dad were always sticking a book in my face. It gave me a thirst for reading. It gave me a yearning for reading. I think a gift we can give our children is to see themselves that representation. But also the gift we give ourselves is to heal the kid in there that didn't get what it needed necessarily as a little person. We can keep parenting, keep fiercely loving the child in ourselves, Jamia, until we get well. All the way well and strong. So, thank you for that. Thank you so much for that.

When you think about sitting, God bless, listening to my stuff all the time.

Jamia Wilson: I love it. I love it.

Jacqui Lewis: What do you hope? If your eight-year old person inside you reads the books you wrote, what do you think the nation needs? Other women your age need, other people your age need, to move through this time? I'm really thinking about, you said, "Come to Middle Church if you haven't." But really the essence of who we are, what we're teaching, the essence of this book, Fierce Love. How



would you offer it to the world? You who are writer, what would you say is a recipe, a takeaway, an anecdote, a something, that would give our listeners, “Hey, and this too”? How would you distill that?

Jamia Wilson: So one of the things I love about Middle Church is that I realized, before I had the word I’m going to put up in a minute to describe how I see myself and why I do the books and all of that, is that I felt that Middle Church was breaking a cycle that I had been a part of around. Generational trauma, my relationship with the church with a capital C, my relationship with patriarchy, and all these things that going to Middle Church and seeing all the things I love about God and fellowship and community there, with a focus on the love and not of a fear of theology, that was a cycle breaking moment for me.

Then to see that there were people who raised me in a structure that I felt alienated from a lot, that made me dissociate from church and all those things, but also feel like, but I know I want to be there, but I need it in this other way, this other form where I don’t feel shame for needing it to be different. But that I know that I’m home, that it is a cycle breaker, because I then felt I could invite those people too to come to Middle Church and experience it. I have people in my life who’ve done that and to say, “See how this can work where everyone’s included. Now you can tell people in other spaces we’ve been in what that’s like. See how we have multiple Mary Magdalenes here, multiple genders?”

Jacqui Lewis: Can you believe it?

Jamia Wilson: See how that is, that everyone’s welcome? That is the true gospel. That is the true way that Christ wants us to walk in his path. So, for me personally, that’s been an important part of just the cycle breaking. So when I think about what I need, what I want for us, what I feel like I’m yearning for in a lot of the groups I’m in. I’m in interfaith circles as well, and I’m in some circles with other women and non-binary folks who want to talk about healing our relationships with faith and connection with each other across religion. That it’s about breaking cycles and creating new community liberation, moving from the self-care to community care.

Middle does that so well. I think we’re in a point of being able to envision a future that we don’t have to do it the way we’ve always done it. The message I kind of have is weird, but bear with me. It’s a little bit of something that came up for me in a meditation body work exercise I did where Kathleen Booker, who is this amazing breath work healer, who I see as one of my movement mamas, someone who’s just nurtured me and given me so much love, she did a ritual with me and some rituals before my mom passed to help with the transition, and then afterward in my grief. Kathleen had helped me come to the understanding of the idea that some of the places where I was stuck were places where I felt like I had to out of loyalty to my ancestors, stay with things that weren’t necessarily going to serve me or us. It’s what they needed to know and to do to survive.

But in the new paradigm, what I know to be true, what I need to heal to go with that, and that they’d bless that. But what I needed for myself to move on was to be able to say, “Thank you. I’m going to release that and then I’m going to take this with me that still helps and works for us. But I want you to know, I honor you and I honor those lessons too, and what they meant for you, and now I’m going to go on this other course.” And so, that’s what I would like for us to have more time, space, and conversations about as we talk about culture policy, the way that we love each other, how we pray. To really think about the cycles that we are breaking, and then what we’re going to create anew.

Jacqui Lewis: Mic drop. That’s our journey. That’s what’s next what do we take with us to the promised land, to

freedom, to liberation? What do we let go of and be grateful for? And how do we make a new thing that can heal us? I am so proud that you're in the world. I'm so glad you're in the world. I am jealous for some time with you and some conversation with you and some connecting with you. And thank you, Jamia. Thank you so much for you. You are a light. I'm so grateful to you. Thank you, honey. Be well, okay?

Jamia Wilson: Love, you too.

Jacqui Lewis: Sending you love. What a joy it was in this conversation with Jamia Wilson, to imagine the ways the theology at Middle Church freed her, cracked something open in her. The best feeling a pastor can have is that something you do really helps someone. I hope this conversation really unlocks something in you, maybe something you didn't even know was tied up.