

LL28-Can Love Heal?

I'm Doug Weiss, and I'm Alvean Lyons, Welcome to Love Life

The other day Alvean and I were on a radio interview show in Norfolk, Virginia and the topic was the role of relationships in health. We had as one of our co conspirators in this conversation, Dr. Keith Newby, a cardiologist and frequent contributor to that show, Another View with Barbara Hamm Lee, and it was a fantastic conversation.

I found Alvean's comments, in particular, incredibly insightful as they bore on the subject of how we can in our relationships, whether they are committed relationships or marriage, contribute to the health and well being of our partner. So maybe I will start off by asking you, Alvean, if you wouldn't mind taking up that topic again? What makes for a healthy relationship that that will build both emotional and physical health?

Well I think that a lot of it has to do with the way that we treat one another and the things that come with what it means to love. When one loves it's not just about yourself anymore, it becomes about the needs and the wants of the other individual and the ability to put someone else before yourself. Now that's not to suggest that you forget who you are in the midst of the relationship, but it is to say that it's not about just self fulfillment, but love is really about the investment and the wholeness and the restoration of someone else through our commitment to them. This can be seen very much in both romantic and friendship relationships. We were talking yesterday about Susan Pinkard who did some research on the secret to longevity. Her research suggests that quitting smoking, getting a flu shot, drinking and even exercise were reinforced by real connection with another individual. It's in that connection that there's a different level of accountability that says I will take care of me because I love you enough to want to be present. I teased about my husband in that he used to say that he wanted a motorcycle and I refused to let him get a motorcycle. Instead I got this beautiful print of a motorcycle that I put up in our library. That is the closest you're going to get to a motorcycle because I love you too much to want you to be gone. Love, in that same kind of protective way says stay here, be with me. It has a way of saying hey you don't look like yourself, let's go visit a doctor, or you're sounding a little different is something wrong? I see something on your face baby what's going on? Love has a way of investing beyond the superficial that allows us to take care of ourselves better than we would have if we were alone.

Well certainly the root of this is loving yourself.

Oh absolutely, loving yourself enough to be able to sustain a committed relationship with someone else.

And part of that is not just your emotional health, but also your physical health.

Let me put a fine point on this, Alvean, because our question for the day is really can love heal? And for the benefit of our listeners, I am not talking about the laying on of hands here, I'm not just talking about spiritual healing.

Well I think we are talking about that but not in that way.

The final question I want to put on this is can get someone who is physically ill, be healed by love? I want to tell a quick story. My experience with this was many years ago working as part of a team that did counseling for

cancer patients. My wife at the time had cancer and I was asked, because I had training, to be part of a team that would counsel and I was assigned to a group of men some of whom were cancer survivors, some were caregivers. One man told an incredible story. He had been diagnosed with a grade four terminal cancer and was in the hospital and near death. He wanted to go home to be with his family, particularly his wife, and his children. He didn't want to die in the hospital and he asked the doctor, what do I have to do to be able to get out of here?

Will you discharge me? The doctor said you're running a fever, you're prone to infection we would take such a risk in your last days to move you. And maybe the doctor just sort of invented this is a threshold, but he said to him, your temperature has to be normal before I'm going to let you take that chance. This fellow said he lay in bed and he thought about that and he said well I'm going to make my temperature go down. As he described it in his words, he willed his temperature to normal, and in fact within a few hours went from quite above normal to normal and he was discharged. He went home and was with his family and he got to thinking about what had just happened and his thought was if I can will my temperature down I can will the disease away.

The only thing I can tell you was that it had been eleven years since that incident when I met this fellow. It's an incredibly inspiring story. We know that there are instances of spontaneous remission of diseases and things that happen that are beyond our understanding. I'm not here to try and suggest that I know what was at work there, but I do know the depth of emotion that was involved even as he told this story eleven years later. It was evident that his love for his family, his love for his wife were so great, that his will to live quite literally was energized. We hear from doctors all the time about the immune response and it's relationship to our emotions. So what are your thoughts?

I think that's such a great point to make. There are so many of us who have had very difficult periods of time in our life, physically difficult periods of time being ill, going through challenges of various sorts and if you're a mother it's amazing what you can set aside because you need to be there for your children. You could have all kinds of things that are going on for you but because of how you love your child you are able to literally set aside your flu, you're able to set aside whatever your issue is. It happens all the time.

I want to interject here for our listeners who may not know this, you've spoken about this before on the podcast, that you're not just talking the talk, you have walked it.

I have, on two different levels. I have gone through some significant medical challenges myself years ago and I have a son who is a juvenile diabetic. And having had to move through whatever was going on with me because he needed me. It almost doesn't matter what you're feeling, or what you're going through because the love you have for your child is so substantive that it is your air, it is your breath, it is your energy. It keeps you going, and conversely the love that my son has for me and my husband.....there was a period of time in which his blood sugar had dropped so severely low that we almost lost him. And in his seizure he could see quite literally to whatever is on the other side and he spoke to whatever that was, to say I don't want to go with you, I want to stay with my mommy. To have such love that you will speak to death, to say to it that this is not my time to go because I'm not finished loving here, I can't even begin to put in words the gravity, the intensity, the weightiness of how powerful love can be. Anybody who has suffered addiction and anybody who's been through the edge of things will often say to you that it was some kind of love in their life that pulled them back from that edge and gave them the reason to keep going.

You know I don't want to go to the dark side, but to take up the obverse of this, many of us have had this experience of what I call toxic relationships. It's appropriate to acknowledge that it can destroy people's health, due to stress and worry and the constant clash between people. You spoke beautifully in our radio interview the other day about how loving fulfills certain mental needs. These are bi directional, though different for men and women. Right When those needs are being met, people blossom, they feel better about themselves, they feel better about their lives, and they are, in fact, physically better. We know from a number of studies that all of these things that we think to be true, have been statistically proven. People live longer, there's less incidence of cardiovascular disease and so on. So talk a little bit, if you would, about some of the points you made yesterday about how men and women reinforce or fail to reinforce each other, and either create a nurturing relationship or a toxic one.

I think that it's important for us to recognize that while we as men and women may ultimately want the same things in terms of our love and fulfillment, we sometimes come to them from different directions. Men particularly. I use the acronym RACE. Men are naturally competitors and there are some things that are fundamental to who they are. So, I say, one, our respect is fundamental to men. There is nothing that can undermine a man worse than a woman who is willing to disrespect him, particularly publicly. That's not to

say that it's appropriate privately either, but to disrespect him publicly is really one of the most emasculating things you can do. Respect is fundamental for men. A, Appreciation, when they do what it is that they do every day because that's what their job is. Most men will tell you that it's really nice to hear thank you sometimes, some kind of acknowledgement that communicates love and commitment. Then C, cookies. And we use that as a colloquial term to speak to intimacy, physical intimacy. It's important to keep that flowing naturally inside of relationship as most men are very physical in their affirmations. So we're communicating in languages that each of us can understand. and then E, encouragement. When a man feels like you are his biggest cheerleader, not that you don't acknowledge when there's work that needs to be done, but you are cheering for him to be the best version of himself, he does not look for an audience somewhere else. We see that is when we look anecdotally, experientially and in terms of research around men.

Then when it comes to women there are three primary things. We call them the three P's, passion, provision and protection. A woman wants to know that there's a passion for her, not just a desire but a craving where she is the only thing that he wants and nothing less than that will satisfy him. She wants to know that she'll be provided for. That you will do whatever it takes to make sure that we are OK whether the family is you and me or the family is you me and our children and extended family. Whatever it is, you'll do what it takes to make sure that we're OK. We don't need to live in a palace, but we'll be alright. And then finally the last, protection. We need to feel physically, emotionally and spiritually protected by you in each area of who we are. It is a priority for you to keep me safe. A woman that has passion, provision, and protection will do almost anything for you. We are fundamentally wired by slightly different things, but we all want love. We just come at it directionally in slightly different ways.

What a fascinating conversation. We could probably go on, but I think that probably is a good good place for us to stop and say to you, our listeners, that we'd love to hear from you on this subject or any other that you're interested in. Write to us at doug@lovelife.digital or alvean@lovelife.digital

We want to thank Chelsea Washington, our producer, Todd Washburn, our Recording Engineer and the entire Love Life family, including you, our listeners. We'll be back next week with another episode. Until then, have a wonderful week. Bye folks.