

NURTURING HEALING LOVE
2nd in a Sermon Series: “Secrets of the Blessed Life”
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The Church of the Covenant

“Nurturing Healing Love” is the title of a book written by Scarlet Lewis, the mother of Jesse Lewis, one of the first graders killed by the gunman at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, December 14, 2012. In her words it is the story *“about how we can face, endure, and survive the seemingly impossible, and find courage when we think we have none. It’s about choosing love instead of anger, fear or hatred, and standing our ground, as Jesse (her son) did.”* (Nurturing Healing Love, Scarlet Lewis, p. XXI). As a Christian and as a human being we basically have a choice and it is between choosing “nurturing healing love” or something less; to respond to the calamities and trials and impossibly cruel circumstances in life with anger, fear or hatred, as the world does, or to make our stand in the power of the love of God. Choosing to love, regardless of our circumstance, is one of the secrets of the blessed life...

I cannot imagine the pain and despair in losing one’s child. I cannot imagine a worse scenario in life than losing a loved one, let alone to lose one’s own child. As a pastor I have walked with many people over the years through their darkest moments, but I must say, my observation is that there is no darker moment than when a parent loses a child. And when that child is taken away by some random act of violence, I do not know how someone could process that, let alone have victory within it, let alone to come to a place of blessedness in relation to it. That is why I am using the story of Scarlet Lewis in the loss of her own son to try to explain what I mean when I say that choosing to love is one of the secrets of the blessed life.

Scarlet Lewis writes: *“When the first blasts of automatic gunfire echoes through the hallways of Sandy Hook Elementary School...Jesse (her first grader son) didn’t run. And when Miss Soto, the first-grade teacher he loved so dearly, tried to hide the children in the bathroom...Jesse remained by her side. Jesse stayed by his teacher even when the armed gunman...walked into the classroom and opened fire...The kids who survived reported that even with (his) head wound, Jesse stayed on his feet and faced the gunman. And then it was that Jesse did what I am now certain he was put on earth to do: he saved lives. When something happened to the shooter’s gun and he was forced to stop for a moment... Jesse yelled to his classmates that this was their chance to escape. He shouted for them to run. To run as fast as they could...9 first graders were saved...the gunman killed 26 in all, 20 children and six adults. When the first responders arrived on the scene, (Jesse’s mother writes) they found Jesse’s lifeless body on the floor next to the body of Miss Soto.”* (Ibid., pp.IX, XX)

How was she able to write that? How could this mother process this? How could she get through it? ---
--Only because of the power in nurturing healing love.

Throughout her initial grieving process Scarlet Lewis was shown the hand of God intervening into the midst of her terrible loss. As a family before this tragic event they had begun to go to church. Jesse saw a video of Jesus and said of Jesus: “He gave up His life to save someone else.” (Ibid., p 14) The little boy, his mother believes, had a premonition of his own death. On the day in which he died, hear her description of the last time she saw him: *“When I turned to kiss Jesse good-bye, I saw him standing beside my car with an ear-to-ear grin. He’d written a note to me in the frost on the passenger-side window and door –‘I Love You’. He’d etched little hearts all around the sweet words.”* (Ibid., p. 11) God kept sending her little messages in so many ways. God’s love kept trying to break through the darkness

of her despair and the stout walls of her grief. Sometimes we have to open our eyes to see God trying to break through. She went on a trip with her other son to Florida and had just prayed to release Jesse into the arms of Jesus, and there written in the sky by a airplane sky-writer were the words, "Jesse and Jesus" with a backward "J" just the way he always wrote his name. They stopped and took a picture of it. And then the sky-writer wrote "U plus God equals a smiley face" (Ibid., pp.67-68) You plus God equals the blessed life. And then there was what Jesse had written on the chalkboard in the kitchen at home. She had failed to notice it but it was there. He had written in his imperfect script and with the imperfect spelling of a first grader –*"Nurturing Healing Love"*. God is always trying to break through to us; God is always trying to speak to us; God is always trying to bring the healing love of Jesus into our heart and into our life, especially on our darkest day.

Jesse's mother, at one point was looking at the crowds of people around her in a public place and she wrote: *"They looked haunted, like the walking dead. All I was able to see was their despair and pain –no joy, no love and forgiveness, no spark of God...Oh Lord, am I just like them? (she asked) No! I do not want to be like these people. I am not dead yet! I refuse to exist just to carry my pain from one day to the next. I have a life to live...Sometimes I struggle and feel like dying, but I am going to choose life...I am going to choose love."* (Ibid., p. 64) Beloved, we basically have a choice. We may never face what this mother faced in her own life but we face our own sadnesses and loss and health issues and disappointments and frustration and we bear pain and grief in our own life. Life is basically a choice. Do we believe love wins in the end? Or do we believe death wins in the end? Do we believe in a power beyond ourselves who powerfully loves us and will break into our reverie if we but open our eyes to His presence? Do we believe HE seeks to plant nurturing healing love into our heart? Do we believe HE is trying to break through to us through His Holy Spirit every day? Do we believe that the love we have received in and through our Lord Jesus Christ empowers us to make a stand in life against whatever would seek to drag us down and rob us of our joy and blessing?

Our scripture proclaims: *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."* (1 John 4: 18) Elsewhere the Bible proclaims: that we are not to overcome evil with evil, but we are to *"overcome evil with GOOD"* It proclaims that what wins over evil is not evil but LOVE. We are not to oppose evil in our life, loss or grief or pain, with what the world who knows not God would do. But we who know Christ Jesus are to oppose this with NURTURING HEALING LOVE. We are to pray for our enemies not oppose them. Because God's plan is to convert our enemies by His love not overwhelm them with His power. We are to transform our world in the name of Jesus Christ because of HIS nurturing healing love HE has brought into the world through the power in HIS CROSS. Love casts out fear. Love casts out hatred. Love casts out sin and grief and pain. When we invite the LOVE of Jesus Christ to enter in and abide with us and take over every corner and every nook and cranny of our heart then that perfect love casts out everything that is not of God and replaces it with nurturing healing love. *"Love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God."* (1 John 4: 7) Invite love in...and it casts everything else out. That's what Scarlet Lewis did and that's how her pain was transformed into nurturing healing love.

Consider this. As our scripture states: *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through HIM."* (1 John 4: 9) Consider now that dark day at Calvary. God has sent His only begotten Son into the world in love that we might live through HIM. But the world rejected Jesus; the world spat on the Son of God and mocked Him and scourged Him and nailed Him to a tree. What God had sent into the world in nurturing healing love the world rejected and tried to kill. Mrs. Lewis, mother of Jesse, God cruelly and unjustly loss HIS Son, too. And as it is reported in scripture there was a great earthquake, and the dark storm clouds gathered, and the darkness came and a fierce storm broke upon Jerusalem and the faraway hill called Calvary. Perhaps

God had finally had it with us. Maybe God in heaven finally said, "Enough! This is too much! I have sent my Son Jesus into the world in love but the world has nailed Him to a cross." God could have brought His creation to an end; could have opposed evil with evil; could have smashed the scoffers and the doubters and the haters and the spirit of this world that would take a gun and shoot little children and brought the creation to a well-justified end. God could have chosen to do that, because God can do whatever God may choose to do. But instead, He heard the voice of His beloved Son crying out from the cross, "*Father, forgive them...they know not what they do...*" Instead of grief and pain and loss God heard nurturing healing love crying out from His Son at the cross. And the nurturing healing love, born of God and confirmed at Calvary, that love overcame the world in that instant. God did not return evil for evil but sent perfect love in His Son Jesus Christ to cast our fear and evil and pain and loss and grief. God had a choice and God chose love. And Mrs. Lewis had a choice and Jesse's mother chose love. And we have a choice, as well.

Beloved, choose nurturing healing love. It is a secret of the blessed life. Perfect love overcomes fear. Love casts out everything but itself from our heart and life. And in the end we believe that love wins. Death has died and love has won. Choose love. It is a secret of the blessed life. Let us stand our ground (as little Jesse did)...and our ground is Calvary. And Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*