



Our Voices

podcast

by  OurPath

S4 Ep 6

When Praying Away the Gay Doesn't Work

Kristin Kalbli: Hello everyone and welcome to Our Voices, the Podcast for Straight Partners and Partners of Trans People by Our Path, formerly the Straight Spouse Network. I'm your host, Kristin Kalbli. Our guest today is Candace Czubernat. Candace has been a therapist for 16 years and is the founder of the LGBTQ+ affirming counseling and coaching practice, The Christian Closet, as well as the tele-therapy organization, Progressive Christian Counseling. In both ministries, she and her team meet with people from all over the world for online tele-health sessions as they navigate the many intersections of life with a Christian faith. Candace is a graduate of the Moody Bible Institute and the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. She identifies as a lesbian and a Christian. She lives in a small mountain town in Southern California with her wife, the love of her life Crystal, and their seven year old boy/ girl twins, Deacon, and Dylan. If she's not working, you can find her testing science projects with her kids, playing family board games, or wrestling with their puppy, Charlie Bones. Candace, welcome to the podcast. It's a pleasure to have you.

Candace Czubernat: Thanks, it's so great to be here. I have a huge smile on my face.

Kristin Kalbli: Good. Did I get Charlie bones name right? (laughter)

Candace Czubernat: You did get. We mostly call him Charlie but the kids like to remind me that he has a fuller, you know, a more full name besides just Charlie, Charlie Bones.

Kristin Kalbli: Charlie Bones. Candace, I wanted to have you on today to talk to you about your practice. But before we do that, I feel like we need to say you're a lesbian but you're not a (Candace: I'm a lesbian, so it's shocking to everyone) you're not a lesbian who married a man. (Candace: I am not) So I want to give our audience just that, you know, preface before we go further. So it's not an episode guys where we're interviewing a lesbian who married a man so it's not that episode.

Candice Czubernat: At one point in my life, I almost did marry a man.

Kristin Kalbli: You almost did marry a man. What, well, what stopped you? What made you go, no?

Candice Czubernat: You know, I realized that it wasn't going to change things for me because I had been told that it would. And I was in Chicago and I was on the aisle and I saw a woman around my age and I just immediately felt attracted to her and I looked at her and I looked at my hand with the ring on it and I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is not going to change." I've been feeling so anxious and I could not figure out why and in that moment it was like, "Uh, so this is a big reason why." There was also some strange, like spiritual abuse stuff going on on this side, which was painful so there was that, that was a part of the anxiety too. But honestly, I mean at that point it wasn't like, "Oh, now going to go be my best gay self."

Candice Czubernat: It was just like, "I can't do this. I don't know what's next but I can't do this." And I don't know if we want to get into it, but I think, you know, a lot of folks think, "Oh so now you want everyone to go be their best gay selves and like leave my marriage, my straight marriage, and all of that kind of stuff." And how I might feel about someone who is a straight spouse in a mixed orientation marriage or their relationship with an LGBTQ+ person. That genuinely is not how I feel.

Kristin Kalbli: Right. You're not like, well, since we're here, I think we should talk about it a little bit. Like, what does your fiance say when you - I assume you broke it off with your fiance?

Candice Czubernat: I did. Yeah. (Kristin: What did he say?) Oh, you know, it of course was very shocking for him and at the time I didn't have many words because he was one of the pastors of the church I attended. So, like I said, it was kind of - it was really mixed in there with some spiritual abuse going on where I had pastors and so all I could do was really say like, "I don't know, you and him might be right" because they really tried to use the Bible to have me stay. I was like, "I'd have to leave" and so I gave him his ring back and I actually never saw him again after giving him his ring back. It wasn't until a couple years later and I was in therapy and I would just was like, "Oh my gosh, that must have been so devastating for him. I need to reach out to him." And so I did, and I just was like, "I'm so sorry, like the shock and the pain of that must've been so hard." And, you know, he really still wasn't quite ready to talk with me understandably so. So he was pretty harsh in the conversation and that was okay and so I said my apologies and that was it and I would welcome any other further conversation he would want to have. It's been many years since that.

Kristin Kalbli: Were you being told that if you just marry him, your same-sex attraction will evaporate? Like what were you being told?

Candice Czubernat: Yes, that's exactly what I was being told. You know, I confessed that to my pastor and it was like, "Listen, this is very hopeful. Here's what you need to do. You need to marry a man and cut off anything in your life that has to do with being gay." So quite literally, I mean, it sounds silly now, but even things like art, I loved art so I didn't do art anymore. I didn't hang out with any of my artsy friends. I didn't listen to secular music anymore. I just dove into ministry. I dove into my church, anything social identity had to do with the church. If you know me, I kind of dress with a combination of masculine and feminine and then I went super feminine. And the way attraction works is kind of interesting because for a time I didn't have attraction for any women. I was so busy with ministry and I was dating this great guy and so I thought it worked. It was very exciting, like oh my gosh, this thing has finally gone away. But I think it's just because I'm not walking down the street attracted to every woman I see. Right?

Kristin Kalbli: Yeah. You can - it is possible to, you know as a straight girl, it is possible to walk down the street and not be attracted to every man I walked by.

Candice Czubernat: I know it's shocking and to realize like that this is just how attraction works. It's in fact, this is kind of a challenging part of dating is you're going to probably find more people you're not attracted to than you are. And so I really believed it and I wanted that because I thought that's how I could honor God.

Kristin Kalbli: I'm so glad we're having this conversation Candace because I feel like so many of the people that we support who particularly come from Christian faith spaces, but not just Christian faith spaces, there's also Mormon faith spaces and there's also Jewish and Muslim as well. But that in religious communities, that this idea that just marrying straights will cure you. And I feel like the pastors and priests and preachers who counsel this just have no idea what they are sending their flock into, their parishioners into, when they recommend this. Because we see at OurPath, formerly Straight Spouse Network, we see on the other end, like 10 years down the road, we see the aftermath of that.

Candice Czubernat: That's right, that's what we see in our practice too. And I like to remember that I really believe that these pastors and mentors and church leaders, you know, if they knew what was 10 years down the line, I believe and I hope that they would say, "Oh my goodness, I'm not going to direct anyone on that path because it's so wounding for everybody involved."

Kristin Kalbli: Everybody. Right, they would change course.

Candice Czubernat: Like my pastor really believed. Candace this is - he didn't know that I was - I would like to believe that he didn't know the kind of pain that it would have caused everyone involved. That eventually, if I gotten married, I would've gotten married, would of had children and eventually I would have ended up in the same place.

Kristin Kalbli: And your husband would have been calling us.

Candice Czubernat: He would have been calling all of you and our children would have been having to go through the pain of that. And it's unfair, but it's also not intentional.

Kristin Kalbli: Did you question your - you've mentioned spiritual abuse. I assume that it may have been more than what we're talking about but to say to somebody that if you marry straight, you will be cured is spiritual abuse because it's not true. But did it make you question your faith as a Christian? Because in your intro I read, you know, you identify as a Christian. So did you have - did you go through a period where you're like, "Do I want to be a part of this religion Do I want to be a part of this faith?" Or how did you grapple with that?

Candice Czubernat: Yeah, it was less of like, "Do I want to?" and more of like, "I'm not sure where God wants me." I'm not sure because a lot of these Christians, most of these Christians I know are telling me that there is not a place for me. The only way for me to have a relationship with God, to be close to God, to honor God, to be able to be called a Christian would be to get rid of this homosexual thing. And I really tried, I tried everything and it just didn't work and so it wasn't until I realized, "Oh my gosh, like, no God is good with me. God is actually in this."

Kristin Kalbli: What made you realize that? What what was the moment that you said - that you realized, "You know, God still loves me. I'm fine the way I am." Was there something that made you kind of turn a page on that?

Candice Czubernat: There was an intuitive of you to notice. There was a moment and it was many years after this broken off engagement. Actually two and a half years or so after that broken off engagement and I hadn't dated anyone and I had fallen in love with my best friend, which is a horrible feeling that happens to many of us.

Kristin Kalbli: And we know the other side of that. There is so it's always the best friend, like the husbands come and they're like, "Oh, my wife and her best friend and his..." (laughter)

Candice Czubernat: And I'm so grateful that it didn't have to happen in a marriage.

Kristin Kalbli: In a marriage. Yeah.

Candice Czubernat: The working through of that trauma being cheated on and lord that's so painful. But anyways, that wasn't my story. So it came in our first kiss because I did not know she was falling in love with me as well. She's not my wife and I have been told if you kiss someone of the same gender, you will feel far from God. You will feel so convicted by the Holy Spirit and you'll pretty much want to die and so I lived by that.

Kristin Kalbli: Oh my god. Yeah.

Candice Czubernat: It was intense and I was committed to that. But we had our first kiss and in a matter of seconds it was like, "Oh my gosh and everyone had been wrong, I had been wrong." I felt the Holy Spirit blessing us, blessing me and from that moment forward it was like there is not another human being who can tell me anything different about God because I am experiencing God right now in such a real way. Of course then it took me on a whole path of now what do I do about my community, what do I do about my friends and my family and there's a whole other story there. But as far as God, I knew we were good, but I just feel so much compassion for those folks who have to discover that within a marriage.

Kristin Kalbli: Well, I want to say two things. Like as I'm listening to you talk about kissing your then best friend, now wife - and yes, thank God it happened not in the context of a marriage to a man. And your fiance, as much as I definitely understand his pain, I'm grateful that you spared him the pain of the marriage piece like that. I look at this as like a dodged bullet kind of a thing (Candice: totally) because we know that - I don't know if he realizes that yet but I can tell you spared him and so there's gratitude for that for very much so. But then as I'm listening to you talk about kissing your - I'm over here like, "Awww " (laughter) The little romantic in me is kind of activated and I'm very happy for you. I have a big smile on my face.

Kristin Kalbli: Like this is the thing about myself personally and I think OurPath organization would agree with me. Like I make a point of saying at the end of every podcast, that my views are not necessarily the views of our organization or the board of directors but that when love can happen in the right context between the right people who are meant to be together, it's a beautiful thing and we celebrate that. And it just makes me so happy that you listened to your intuition and said, "I can't do this." And even if you didn't have all of the pieces yet, you still - some part of you said, "No, can't do this." And in that spared yourself and your then fiance and any children. So I want to celebrate that and lift that up and be like, man, if you were in the same city, I'd be having you over for a glass of wine tonight, to toast that courage and that bravery because I would be - I'm just so grateful. And on behalf of your fiance, I don't want to speak for him because obviously he has his own journey and own feelings, but on behalf of many straight partners who we've experienced the way that it can go the other way. Thank you and congratulations on making that important discovery that you're still worthy and because I just - that's what a great way to find out in a kiss. Yeah. I love it. It's like a Hollywood moment.

Candice Czubernat: What a great way to reframe it. You know, it hurt him but it actually spared him a lot of pain .

Kristin Kalbli: It's spared to him a lot. He maybe doesn't know it but it spared him alot.

Candice Czubernat: I'll give you his contact. (laughter)

Kristin Kalbli: Like I'm telling from the person who wasn't spared, I et me tell what you were spared. But let's take a quick break a nd then I want to talk about your practice because that's the reason why we wanted to have you on today. So many of our listeners are Christian and of the Christian faith and their spouses would have been told the same thing about if you just marry straight. And so we're going to talk about your counseling practice, your Christian counseling practice, and who you see come through your doors. So we'll be right back with more Candice Czubernat. (background music) Hey, everyone Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving to help raise awareness of charitable causes and encourage donor generosity. Facebook will match \$8 million in qualifying donations made on Facebook during Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday, which happens on November 30th, 2021 kicks off this year's annual OurP ath year end fundraiser. Matching begins on the 30th at 8:00 AM. Eastern time. Matches are made on a first come, first serve basis and will continue until the \$8 million fund has been met. Please consider amplifying your donation to OurP ath by giving on Giving Tuesday this year a nd thank you for your support. (music ends) So Candice we're going to talk now about your practice as a Christian counselor, Christian therapist. So can you talk about your journey, in what made you decide to become a therapist then.

Candice Czubernat: Yeah. You know what I remember graduating high school and all my friends were like, "I don't know what I want to study. And I was like, I'm going to be a therapist." I just know, like, this is my whole life. I've been a listener of people's pain but I didn't know that my own journey would really be the thing that guided me to the population that I would work with. And so it wasn't until I came out and accepted myself that I realized, "Oh, I want to journey with other LGBTQ+ people" and realizing that they can have a beautiful, full faith in God, a relationship with Jesus, all of these things. Right. So that was sort of this obvious work that I love and get to do. What I didn't know is that there were all these other people that, like yourself, did go through with marrying someone who's straight and that would be a part of the population that I would be meeting with and serving.

Kristin Kalbli: Yeah. So you didn't know - so when you first started becoming a Christian counselor for LGBTQ+ folks - because when we talked before we talked briefly on the phone before and you were saying you really wanted to work with the LGBTQ+ population and especially the Christian LGBTQ+ population as they navigate their faith and being LGBTQ+. And then there's this whole other set of people, the straight partners, the straight spouses who you realize are part of this equation too. Like when did you first start to see that there's this whole other population of people that are touched by this?

Candice Czubernat: Yeah. I mean to be fair when I started I was like, "I don't know if there's another gay Christian so..."

Kristin Kalbli: Okay. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Well, that's really isolating. That's really isolating.

Candice Czubernat: Very isolated. I mean my wife and I, we didn't really - we were in a straight world. So the idea that there would be not only other LGBTQ+ Christian folks, but there are people married to that. It was just, you know, not something - this was way before social media was really huge and so it wasn't until probably seven years ago or so and people started reaching out, "I don't know, Do you do this work?" and I was kind of like, "I haven't but I could." And then of course throughout the years we just starting to see more and more couples come to us and say, "Please help us." And the stories of both of these people in pain saying, "Okay, so I did this thing. I found someone who is my best friend. We have built a family, a community, a life together. We love each other but we don't know what to do now because it has now changed. My spouse is still gay and now we don't know what to do."

Kristin Kalbli: When the couples come to you, do you find that they both already know that one partner is same-sex attracted? Like it's something they've been dealing with in their marriage already and that they've been told by a pastor or priest or minister that they need to just stay in the marriage and work on it in order to get the gay to go away. Do you find that, or do you find that the straight partner doesn't know at all?

Candice Czubernat: It's interesting. So what I have found in my work, and of course there's other folks who have a different story, but I found it in my work that with women who ended up coming out as gay, lesbian or bi, they did not know until sometime into the marriage and the men, gay men, gay and bi men, were told that they did know before they were married. And a lot times even told their spouse or wife and that was a part of their journey of kind of honoring God and becoming straight. So it's kind of an interesting difference that happens with the gender there.

Kristin Kalbli: When you started to see these couples show up in your practice, in your therapy and counseling practice and saying, "It's not getting better, the gay's not going away no matter how much we pray." Are they in a faith crisis as well? Are they sitting there going like - are they coming in to figure out if we have to divorce? Can we even be Christian anymore? By the time they're in your office, what are their questions?

Candice Czubernat: Yeah, so many questions. Also, but needs to be a sure that the gay is not going away.

Kristin Kalbli: Oh, they just need to be sure. Yeah. The gay is not going away and on the back, no matter how much you pray.

Candice Czubernat: Yeah and I have to say these are brave, brave, brave, brave people. I mean, for both spouses, they're my favorite and also it is the most painful work because whichever way they go, there's a lot of pressure for everyone. And a lot of times the straight spouse is looking at me saying, "Okay, so you just want my wife, her husband to go be their best gay selves and you don't care about me. And if I'm angry or sad, you want me to just say that I'm a sacrificial lamb and I should be patient and loving, and I want it." And I genuinely tell people that is not how I feel. I want you both to find the way forward that is best for both of you. I'm not interested in you getting divorced. I'm not, that's not what I want.

Candice Czubernat: I actually want - if I were to say I have a bias, my bias would be for you all to find a way to still stay a family, honestly. That obviously doesn't get to happen all the time and that's what's so painful. But your question is very intuitive and obviously you've been through this and it is absolutely is a question of identity, of faith, of community. What do we do? Even if we stay together, can we still be friends with our friends? What does God have for us and what does God say to us? And even a lot of times what ends up happening is it kind of a shifted a change in the way that they have experienced God and the faith. And so, gosh, suddenly their church doesn't really kind of feel like a great fit anymore and there's the process of coming up to children and it's a lot.

Kristin Kalbli: I was wondering about that. Like I was wondering if the relationship to the faith or the religion changes and do they find that they have to, at some point, find maybe a different church community or faith community that is more embracing of either the LGBTQ+ partner or understanding of the straight partner. It's kind of weird for the straight partner because it's not like you need to be embraced for your sexuality, you already are so that's not the issue. But a lot of the straight partners in the Christian space find that, I don't want to speak for all of them, but they find that when they - there's a different, there's a range of different responses. Okay. So they come out to a pastor and they say, my spouse or partner is LGBTQ+ and the pastor either is like, "Okay well, you guys just need to work on it together.

Kristin Kalbli: You need to get in counseling, you need to stay together." Or it's like, "Well, that LGBTQ+ person is betraying you and you need to get out of that relationship." You know, there's like a range of responses, not many of which seem very helpful. You know, like that don't seem particularly helpful to the straight partner in navigating this particular experience. So I'm wondering if the straight partner, it seems like it'd be more obvious to me for the LGBTQ+ person to be like, "Okay, well I need to be in a different church, one that's affirming" But the straight partners is like, "What do I really need out of a faith community? You know like what do I - my sexuality is already affirmed in this church, so that's not what I'm looking for."

Candice Czubernat: It's not but it's a little bit like I can talk crap about my family but don't even start talking crap about my family. Like I need you, other person, I need you pastor, I don't need you to hate them. I don't need you to say that they're bad and they're sinful because I already have that inside myself and I need a safe space to feel and process it and if you are the one who's like filling up that space then I can't, I'd have to be defensive of that.

Kristin Kalbli: Right, okay. That's huge because I didn't even really think about that. That wasn't even part of my sort of worldview about like, if I'm a Christian, I have to process the idea of sin because I'm not - I mean, I was baptized Catholic, but I'm a horrible Catholic, really bad Catholic. So I have to process the idea of sin and what it means to be a sinner. And so they have to - and if the pastor or priest is sitting there saying all of that about your spouse, then there's no room for you to grow like process through that.

Candice Czubernat: Exactly. Yeah. So here's an example that has nothing to do with this. My best friend, Jackie, she's amazing. I can go to her when I have issues with my marriage or my wife because I'm a human and medium and I know she's not going to say, "What the hell is going on with Crystal?" You want to just leave that woman but she's like, "I know Crystal, I love her. I'm fighting for you. I'm fighting for your marriage." And that is why I can go to her because I don't have to be defensive. I can say you're going to remind me of her goodness and the goodness of our relationship and so that gives me space to struggle. And the straight spouse, that is exactly what they need in a faith community. They don't need a pastor to say, "Your spouse is horrible and disgusting as a gay person." No, they are loved. We love you both and we know that they did not choose this right now. They might've made some painful decisions along the way. They might've only been able to be thinking about themselves and that's painful and traumatizing and that needs space to be able to be worked through. We don't need to like take them down.

Kristin Kalbli: Right. Right. Well, I want to take a quick break and when we come back, I want to talk more Candice about what you're seeing with the straight spouses. Like what their grief process is and what their needs are and how you meet those needs? So we'll be right back with more Candice Czubernat. (background music) Hey everyone, OurVoices Podcast is proud to announce that we are celebrating 100,000 downloads. We want to thank all of our listeners for tuning in. We hope this podcast has made a difference in your life and that it has helped you on your path toward healing, post discovery or disclosure, 100,000 downloads. That's huge. Imagine for a moment, if every person who downloaded and listened to an episode had given just \$1 per listen, that means that the OurVoices Podcast would have generated \$100,000 for Our Path. That's money that could fund the zoom lines for our virtual support group meetings.

Kristin Kalbli: It could fund a grant writer to help us identify and apply for grants. It could help pay for podcast, production, engineering, and editing. It could support video production so we could tell more stories in video form. It could support sending guest speakers by paying for airfare and hotel costs from Our Path to conferences, such as the American Psychological Association Conference to raise awareness and speak on behalf of Straight Partners and Partners of Trans People. That's an awful lot of supporting Straight Partners that can be done when listeners support the podcast. If you have already donated, we thank you. If you'd like to support the podcast, visit our Donation page at OurPath.org and become a donor today. (music ends) And we're back with therapist, Candace Czubernat. And what about your Straight Partners when they come in and they sit on the couch, what do you feel you have learned as a therapist? I'm sure that they are teaching you things that you didn't ever expect to be taught as a therapist. So what would you say that working with the population of Straight Partners, as part of a couple, what are they teaching you?

Candice Czubernat: That's such a great question. And, you know, people ask me like, "Oh my gosh, do you have the most depressing job ever? I mean, you just sit with people in there pain every day." I love like, " I am the luckiest person. I have the most hopeful job and I received so much wisdom and beauty and spirit of God in my work." It's lovely. I get to grow and learn with folks every day and so I just love your question because it is - I absolutely the ability to hold opposing things at the same time, is a great strength and fairly hard to do and that is exactly what these people are trying to do. They're trying to hold - they loved this person, their gay spouse and they want them to have a full, happy life while also say, " I don't want to lose you and also perhaps you've even, also really hurt me."

Kristin Kalbli: Right.

Candice Czubernat: Holding the two opposing things at the same time.

Kristin Kalbli: Two opposing things, like two seemingly contradictory things can be true at the same time. That's right.

Candice Czubernat: Yeah.

Kristin Kalbli: That's what I find a lot in this work as well myself. Like multiple contradictory things can be true at the same time and that's a really tricky thing to navigate.

Candice Czubernat: Oh, it's the worst. I just liked things to be simple and only one thing is true. But honestly, that applies to all kinds of lives and really is the thing that helps me still be a Christian. Is that is exactly what I see in the Christian faith and in Jesus, it is not so simple. There's opposing things that are true at the same time and when you can walk this road of holding both of those things - because people come to me and they're like, "We don't, there was no path so what do we do? There's no one to say, "This is for sure the path we go down." But that is how they find their way as if all folks can hold both of the things at the same time eventually they start to be able to find their way to decisions.

Kristin Kalbli: Right. Okay so this is the question I have about people in religion in general, because I'm not particularly religious, is that do you find that people are like, when they first show up, are they like, just tell me what to do? What's the script? What's the Christian script? What's the answer? And then they get confronted with this idea of like, "Uhhh, there is no playbook for this." You're confronted with this idea that you have to figure out what's best for yourself and for a lot of people, if they've been handed a religious script for them - and I'm by no means am I'm trying to be disrespectful or invalidating to our listeners of faith, et cetera. This is kind of a personal question for me just out of curiosity because like I said, I'm not religious. Do you find people have to grapple with this idea that, okay, well, if there's not like a script I follow as a good Christian and I have to figure this out what's best for us or me on my own, is that - do you find that's the thing that they've got to grapple with and work through?

Candice Czubernat: Yes . I kind of joke with people I like, "I'm not sure you want to come to the second session because this first session is probably kind of disappointing because you wanted to have an answer and a script and I can't give that to you." But I joke and of course they come back and I'm grateful because then it is a process of asking those hard questions, imagining together and see if there is a way to do things totally in a strange backwards way and also where do we need to start grieving. And there is a lot of grief and that is painful and hard but in grief there is such beauty and possibility and things that you did not anticipate happening that ended up being really cool.

Kristin Kalbli: Right. Like if you - we had Debbie Silber who a couple of episodes ago and she talked about indications that people don't - one of the factors in whether or not people heal from this trauma or any trauma, is the ability to accept what is happening. Like okay, "This is our reality, this is what's happening now." As opposed to resisting or fighting it and then the opportunities and the gifts, once that acceptance has happened like, "I don't like it. I don't like that this is happening, but I accept that this is happening." And then there's room actually for sort of the, I mean we're talking about Christianity, so let's say miracles. Like there's room for the grace or serendipity or the unexpected things to come in and help heal. Would you say that that's when you find that the couples begin to like really work with their circumstances? That that's when unexpected sort of possibilities open up?

Candice Czubernat: Absolutely. Yeah. I like to say the small quiet voice of the Holy Spirit comes into those places of deep grief because eventually there comes quietness after the raging and yelling and the ugly kind of snot is just like pouring out of your nose. Like the bargaining of like, "If I adjust this to a front door, if you had just done that different." And then the feelings of just deep depression and sadness, and when all of that comes through, and there's just quietness, you start to hear the quiet, still small voice of God. And in that comes those miracles of like, "Whoa, I didn't consider this other thing before. I didn't see this thing before. I didn't and isn't very hopeful." And that's why my work is so hopeful because I've been able to grieve with enough people and walk with enough people that I know eventually that does come. It's good.

Kristin Kalbli: I love about that, what I love about this Candace is the permission that you have for ugly crying and when the blame and the regret for me, the blame on you, both partners going like all the ugly. When we give people space for grief and anger and their full emotions are written, we allow them to have everything eventually that does like any storm it blows out. And then when that storm has blown out, then the opportunity to hear something different is available. I think the problem that happens so many times for so many Straight Spouses is they've never been allowed or their grief has not been sanctioned or given permission and then they feel like they have to package it, suppress it, keep it small, keep a lid on it. And all kinds of nefarious things happen when there isn't the space, the container for the grief.

Candice Czubernat: So you don't want to be homophobic, please don't be homophobic and be sad.

Kristin Kalbli: Exactly like you're supposed to go immediately from disclosure to celebration in a pride parade. You know what I mean? Like you're immediately supposed to pivot and be like, "Yay." And that's just not the reality of this. You have a whole world to process like, "Was anything what I thought? Even if you knew, even if your spouse told you I'm struggling with same-sex attraction but we're going to do a Christian marriage or we're going to... Even that there's a disillusionment in you were told by your pastor or your minister or whatever, that this would work out if you did what you were supposed to do and then the disillusionment of finding out that that's not the case, that has to be worked through.

Candice Czubernat: And your spouse who is queer, they worked really hard to have that be true and so you didn't experience a difference. You did not know that this other thing was going on and so in a sense, there absolutely was a betrayal. It was not on purpose but there were times where you were tricked and there is nothing more painful and disorientating than like, "Well, then what the hell is real now?"

Kristin Kalbli: Right. Like, that's the thing I think is so interesting in the relationships where the person, where the straight spouse did know about the same sex attraction is that there's - it's not like when it does fall apart, as in many cases, probably a majority of cases, at least by those data we have at, at OurPath, it's almost like there's a different kind of betrayal than the Straight Partner who didn't know anything at all. Right but they're still a betrayal of like, and I don't mean that the LGBTQ+ partner, but I mean about the expectation, the betrayal of expectations. Like all of these expectations that were set up, that if we prayed right, if we did it right, that it would go, that it would go away and that we would be living in a Christian marriage, et cetera. When that doesn't happen, like there's a sort of a different flavor of betrayal.

Candice Czubernat: Absolutely, with God or the people who originally had told you all to do your life that way. And even with your spouse when you think like, "Okay, it must be working for them, it must have happened. This thing that we've been hoping and praying when we got married. Oh, we're so lucky. It means he was healed or she was healed."

Kristin Kalbli: And it turns out not.

Candice Czubernat: And it turns out not, it turns out not and so I think people are surprised that myself and the other therapists on my team who identify somewhere on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, that we want to honor your sadness and your anger, we want to give them space. And then of course, I'm on my team with progressive Christian counseling. We have other straight therapists who also understand that and provide space for that. It's an essential part of healing.

Kristin Kalbli: What I love about this and the reason why we wanted to have you on today is because just in talking with you before, the thing that struck me was how much empathy you and your practice have for the Straight Partner. I think often times, Straight Partners very much feel left behind. They very much can feel discarded, set aside when, as you were saying when the LGBTQ+ person comes out and then if you're in a community where there's celebration and yes, now go live your gay life, your great gay life, your best gay life. the, The Straight Partner can often feel like kind of taken out with yesterday's trash and what I loved about our conversation before and now is the balancing of empathy. And that's why I wanted to have you on today because I wanted our listeners to hear from an LGBTQ+ person, who really is paying attention to what Straight Partners are going through and is really stepping into the therapy space.

Kristin Kalbli: And at Our Path, it's our policy not to necessarily endorse any particular therapist or anything like that, but what you're doing with your practice to me is what's needed in this space. Because so many Straight Partners come back to us and we're like, " You know, well, all we heard from our couples counselor was that I have to celebrate my gay spouse and I have to - I can't." I mean they really are, many of them really are told in couples therapy spaces that their grief isn't valid and that's surprising to me. But I think it's both a measure of progress in the LGBTQ+ therapy space. There's been so much work done in the last 20 years or so on being LGBTQ+ affirming in psychology and in therapy, et cetera, and training but then there's this other piece that it's almost like when the other way went the other way. Yeah. we're actually trying to get into the American, we're actually hoping to submit to the American Psychological Association Conference in 2022 to be able to get in there and start talking about what happens to Straight Partners. (Candice: That cool) That's why I wanted to have you on is because you're a therapeutic space that is actually really empathetic, like balancing your empathy so well.

Candice Czubernat: Oh, thank you. So that feels really just so good to have that reflected back to me. So I take that in the goodness of that. So thank you. And I think it's because myself and my team, when you do your own grief work, it's helps you be able to grieve with others and you see that things aren't so black and white. When you can also feel settled in yourself, you don't really need someone else to have the same story as you.

Kristin Kalbli: Right. In order to validate you or like when you're settled in yourself too you can hear all kinds of stuff without also being triggered in yourself. Yeah.

Candice Czubernat: I'm happy so I don't need you to go do something else for me, for me to be happy. Right?

Kristin Kalbli: Right. I don't need your outcome to mirror mine in order for me to be happy. Right. Right.

Candice Czubernat: And so I, we do and there's three different people on my team who used to be married to someone of the opposite gender and took that very personal journey and they all ended up getting divorced and are now partnered in some way with someone of the same sex. And even those therapists, it's an important part of the process to say,

Candice Czubernat: " I know it's painful as the LGBTQ+ person and you have been through pain and you deserve support and space that is only yours and a space where you get to also grieve because there's a lot of years that you feel, and you have missed out on in your life, and let's not leave behind your Straight Spouse." As much as you can slow down and be patient and let them have a process because there is a reality where they get to be in your life too. And there can be a beautiful family created on the other side of this.

Kristin Kalbli: Well, in those years of the life that the LGBTQ+ person missed out on lifes years, that the straight person missed out on, it's just inevitable. I t's there, something lost when you either realize that what you were living wasn't the reality or wasn't true or that you were living with somebody who couldn't really love you the way you deserved or longed to be loved. So there's loss of years grieving for years lost on all around. It was less than ideal to use the understatement of the year, was less than ideal for everybody. (Candice: Yes) Well, Candice, we're pretty close to time but I just wanted to see if there was anything else, I'm speaking to Straight Partners, if there's anything else that you feel would be good for them to think about as they either go towards looking for a therapist or what to look for in therapy situations, in terms of any other final thoughts for Straight Partners.

Candice Czubernat: Well both, us at the Christian Closet and Progressive Christian Counseling, we would be honored to work with any of you and I hope that through this podcast, you have been able to build a trust with us to know that we are a safe place for you. And it is a beautiful journey that there's so much hope in. The thing I want you to remember is that you are in a place where it might be dark and painful but that life, your life is going to be bigger than this and longer than this and that there's going to be a day where you look back and say I didn't think I could make it through that. I didn't think there would be goodness a gain. I didn't think there'd be happiness and love and joy but there will be . There will be life and God does is a lot bigger and wider than you can feel the magic.

Kristin Kalbli: That's a beautiful thought to end with. I thank you so much for coming on the show and I just want to give our listeners your resources. Now, again, we have to say as Our Path, we don't endorse any particular therapist or therapy, but we also feel it's important to have therapists on the show to engage in dialogue around healing and therapy for Straight Partners in our listeners. So if they're curious about you, they can go to the Christian Closet.com or Progressive Christian Counseling.com and they can find out more about your practice as well and make their own decisions about whether or not they want to engage or come to you. I so appreciate this dialogue around your practicing Christian therapy for mixed orientation couples. I think it's been really illuminative and super compassionate.

Candice Czubernat: Well, thank you for giving me that opportunity and trusting me and trusting the work that we're doing. I really appreciate.

Kristin Kalbli: Thank you again. I want to thank our listeners for tuning in today. Be on the lookout for all new episodes on the first and 15th of every month, don't forget to subscribe to our podcast. You can find us wherever you get your podcasts. This is a reminder that the views of the host, yours truly, are not necessarily the views of Our Path or its board of directors. I want to thank our engineer and editor Mia right here at Gwynne Sound in Cincinnati, Ohio and until next time, this is Kristen, your host reminding you keep using your voice. Transcribed by Designrr.

Candice Czubernat Biography: Candice Czubernat has been a therapist for 16 years and is the founder of the LGBTQ affirming counseling and coaching practice, The Christian Closet, as well as the teletherapy organization Progressive Christian Counseling. In both ministries, she and her team meet with people from all over the world for online telehealth sessions as they navigate the many intersections of life with a Christian faith. Candice is a graduate of The Moody Bible Institute and The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. She identifies as a lesbian and a Christian. She lives in a small mountain town in southern California with her wife, the love of her life, Crystal, and their 7-year-old boy/girl twins Deacon and Dylan. If she's not working you can find her testing science projects with her kids, playing family board games or wrestling with their puppy Charlie Bonz.