



TM: And our guest today is Candace Gorham -- Candace, thanks for being here.

Candace: Hi, thanks, I'm happy to be here.

TM: So you have a fascinating background -- I got to say there's quite a culmination of facets to your life. Tell us about that background before we dive into the book.

Candace: Well I guess -- like you said my background is -- as far as especially my religious background I would say is -- is really diverse. I grew up -- um, well, my early early early years we were Jehovah's Witness. My mom wasn't really that into it, you know, she just sort of did it because that's what my dad was doing. But then when they separated -- um, when I was in third or fourth grade I guess -- we stopped going, but I was so into it that I continued to study, actually; I was the only person in my family -- you know my mom, I've got [indistinguishable] older brother and sister, and of course you know my mom and dad split so my dad wasn't there -- um, and I actually came -- met -- some other Jehovah's Witnesses one time -- I guess they were coming through our neighborhood and I went, oh yeah, I want to study again. And this is me, fourth grade, fifth grade, and I wanted to study Jehovah's Wi -- with the Jehovah's Witnesses some more, on my own. So, you know, as a child, like, I always took it very, very seriously. So I continued to study and I met with them weekly and I would go to the special conventions with them -- it was a family, and they basically sort of adopted me; they would come and pick me up and, you know, check on me throughout the week to see if I need -- I mean it was just really -- and you know that's one of the things about Jehovah's Witnesses, is that they really have this sort of embracing, really create a sort of family vibe, you know, we're really here for you, but then when, if you do something that they don't agree with, they're not so quite so forgiving [chuckle], or loving, let me say. From there, um you know I got to middle school and, you know, middle school is middle school so I became a little less interested in religion; I stopped going for a while. And then I actually ended up reconnecting with one of my dad's sisters, and I started going to what was like "the family church," you know, the church that my dad and all of his siblings grew up in, going to. So I ended up going back to church with her, which was a Methodist church. And, um, and I was -- I went through confirmation, I was confirmed in the Methodist Church, and, you know, I was in the choir, and we did all of that stuff again; I was very, very, very serious about this, you know and I remember in the eighth grade telling -- trying to get one of my friends to come to church with me. And now the thing about this Methodist church is kind of funny because this Methodist church had some very Pentecostal vibe to it, like, they used like anointing oil and, you know, if they were praying and some one fell out in the spirit, so to speak, you know, that was normal; there was shouting and stuff which is stuff you don't typically see in most Methodist churches. And it's funny because when some of the sort of sister churches in the area would come around -- you know, course it was mostly white Methodist churches and they would come and they would just be so blown away at how energetic, you know, our congregation was -- and so I remember being in eighth grade and having some anointing oil that my aunt gave me and I was like putting it on my friend and I was like you know, you got to get saved, girl! and so this is me, eight-grade me, you know, trying to, trying to minister to my friend who was like, I really need you to wipe this oil off of me! [chuckles all-round] And, uh -- but you know, we laughed and stuff -- and so again, you know I did that for a couple of years with my aunt, then got to high school and got a boyfriend, you know a serious boyfriend in the tenth grade, so by then things happened and I was no longer going to church. And when I was eighteen my sister married a minister and so I started going to church with them. And he was actually just starting up, like he had previously had a church and then he had to close it down, and so he was actually just starting up sort of his second ministry so, you know, there weren't many of us at that beginning stage. And that was really where I started getting into the, um, like shouting, laying on hands, anointing, speaking in tongues, we did all of that. Um, you know, and again, I was very serious about it, you know: I would fast, I was the type of person -- I would fast, you know, sometimes, I think maybe, I've gone maybe three to four days with no food, just water, and then I've gone, you know maybe um, five, six, seven days -- maybe about seven days, about a week with, um, with like maybe just juice. Yeah I mean that was where it really got going for me at that -- at eighteen. And um again, got to college, had a year or so where I wasn't going quite as much; it, it -- throughout those, the years, anytime that I was not in church, and not going on a regular basis, I was like tormented with, you know with guilt and worry -- just worried all the time that I was going to die and I was going to die in sin and I was going to go to hell, but you know, also at the same time, college student, smoking drinking having sex you know [laughs] it was like, I wasn't ready to give that up yet, either -- only because like I said see when I was in high school and I was eighteen and I started going to that church with my -- my sister's husband's church -- you know, I was there for a little while but then once I got to college my freshman year -- you know obviously I was about an hour away from home so, for a while I tried to go back and forth but of course you know how that is, you know it slowly started tapering off.

TM: That's quite a trip if you have an hour [chuckles] to get there and back.

Candace: Well, what's funny is that after -- I ended up getting married at twenty -- my husband and I, I met him in college, and I brought him into church, um you know, and we were dating for a while and I tried to break up with him 'cause I was so convicted I felt so guilty and I tried to break up with him and he didn't want to break up. And I was like well look, you

know I don't want you to feel any kind of way, you know, I don't want you to feel like any kind of pressure or anything, and so he came to church and he got into it, like he really got into it! so, being, you know, I was surprised because he didn't really grow up with any kind of religion or anything you know he was -- his parents taught him God and be good and that sort of stuff but he didn't really go to church. And so I was actually surprised that he sort of jumped into it, and we ended up getting, you know, we, we supposedly got a prophecy, that we were supposed to get married, and so, that's what we did -- we were being obedient to, you know, the man of God who said he got a word from the Lord that we should be married. So that's what we did. We got married at twenty and what ended up happening again -- now we were both in school, a hour away from the church, and so even though we were in school, even though we had just got married, even though we worked jobs and we did all that stuff, we commuted that hour every single Sunday, sometimes two or three days a week, to be at church. I ended up getting -- becoming ordained as -- well I don't know how many different titles I had, uh [chuckle] you know I was an evangelist, I was a prophetess, and then my husband was ordained as a deacon. So again, you know, we were really serious about this thing, you know and -- we tithed, we were the crazy, we were crazy, like we tithed on student loan refund checks -- right, like I'm waiting on the government to arrest me today over student loans that I tithed though [chuckle] you know I mean I'm exaggerating but you know what I'm saying, like: how do you tithe on student loans?! That's crazy.

TM: Yeah so you were very committed to your faith and you grew up with this and now your new husband has joined as well. What happened from there?

Candace: Like I said again we were, we were just very serious, we -- there were several years we, uh, you know I believed that I could cast out demons, um you know I was definitely praying in tongues, I was prophesying, we were just really into it you know, we were both, um, my husband's a musician so we would both, um, [indistinguishable] I was one of the praise-and-worship leaders, and he's a musician, so we did that together. It was just what it was, you know we were just fully, completely immersed in that for so long. So, so yes, so we were going, we were very serious, um, and actually then my sister and her husband moved to another state so that church ended up closing. It was always a really small storefront-type church: we were moving, every time you turn around we were losing the building that we were in, and then we'd have church in a hotel for a little while and, you know, as you can imagine it was primarily single black women with children -- single mothers, you know, that's what the church was basically consisted of, and, I don't know, it was just -- there was always something, it was a very stressful experience, like I said because we were constantly, like financially diminishing, it was constantly teetering on the edge of something. And those of us who were giving 'til it hurt, you know we were frustrated too because we were like, we couldn't figure out was it God, was it us, you know, or, where's the mistakes, why are we doing everything that we believed that God is telling us to do -- we're tithing, you know we're doing street ministry, I'm out in the summertime, in a hundred-degree weather, you know goin' and knockin' on doors in the projects, you know, with characters hanging around making you feel -- you know what I'm saying? like I'm -- or, or at night, like I remember one time even still being in the projects at night, and me and my partner, we were like, we've got to go! -- or I -- that's what I was thinking but at the time he was sort of familiar with the neighborhood and he was like, oh no now we're okay and I was like, I'm ready to go! [chuckles] But that's the kind of stuff you know we put ourselves in those kinds of situations because we believed we were doing what God was telling us to do. So we ended like I said so that ministry ended up closing actually and my husband and I ended up joining another non-denominational church but it was, I guess technically it's considered a mega-church, it was one of -- it was like a small mega-church, it was over a thousand members I think. And again we were on the praise-and-worship team there -- jump in! you know -- we went, and as soon as we went -- you know, it was like after the first or second time we went we immediately went to the pastor and was like, hey I sing, Keith's a musician, how can we get involved, you know so we were ready, you know, we were constantly like ready to do something for the Lord, you know. So again, that church wasn't quite as extreme as the previous one: they didn't shout as much, but they did some; they prayed in tongues a little bit but it wasn't out of control, you know, but it was definitely a Prosperity Gospel/healing, you know, faith-healing type ministry. You know, even though it wasn't to the extent of you know rolling around on the floor and spitting and carrying on. Which I have seen, by the way, we used to tell people that if they were praying and they started coughing, that that was a demon coming out of them. So it wasn't quite that extreme. And again, we can -- my husband and I, again -- you know, we're young college students, you know, we ended up having a baby, and we, you know, we're broke, we didn't have any money. So, you know, we're losing cars, we, our house was foreclosed on, we were just, you know, I was depressed, I was suicidal, and, you know, and just one day we both just kinda stopped and we're like, what are we doing wrong??? You know we are tithing, we're at church, we're fasting -- my husband was, my husband lost so much weight because he was fasting all the time, because he was trying to get the answers, you know. So that sort went, it started to crumble for us; it wasn't so much that we were angry that things were going wrong; we were scared that we were doing something wrong. And I think that's where people don't understand the distinction. You know, people, when I talk to people who'd know, you know who knew the old me that was extremely religious, they say oh well Candace you know you went through some hard times and -- you know they try to tell me that it was like my experience, the type of whatever I had -- that, I had bad experiences and that's why I, you know, left the church. Well what I'm trying to explain is that it's not that I was angry at the church or that I was upset at the ministers or -- it was that I was afraid that I was doing something wrong, and that's what then lead me to start studying. Now even though I was a minister and now remember I was a [indistinguishable] you know I was a preacher so I read the Bible plenty, you know I preached messages plenty, I was familiar with The Word, you know I read the whole Bible, but it

was just something that just sort of clicked for us one day that was like, what are we doing wrong??? we were really really freaking out. And it [indistinguishable] started to sort of slowly crumble because my husband got into studying the tithing portion of things and it sort of slowly started crumbling for him there because he saw some information -- he had different places that felt like, the way that we had been taught about tithing is not necessarily the way that it's talked about in the Bible. But there were some things for him, you know with him for that -- and for me, I was just like, you know what, I was just depressed. I remember going to that pastor of that mega-church, going in one time and saying I'm depressed, and actually -- no I take it back I went, I made an appointment to see the pastor's wife, and I said I -- look I'm depressed, you know, I've had thoughts of death and suicide, like I, I just, I just don't know what to, what to do. I intentionally wanted to talk to her; I did not want to talk to pastor because the pastor was a Afro-male type personality who was not very sensitive to the plight of his parishioners. [chuckles] So I intentionally -- I wanted to talk to the wife. Well what did she do? She doesn't know how to answer my questions so she gives up and goes next door and -- to the office next door and asks her husband to come over. Exactly what I did not want! And so he was nice -- he was definitely nicer than I expected him to be. You know, especially once I started saying you know no I'm not just depressed y'all I'm suicidal-depressed. You know then he really started softening up -- but the message was still the same: you need to pray, you know, you need to come to church, make sure and now -- it wasn't so much I need to come to church because I was there but what I wasn't doing was going to the eight-thirty Wednesday morning prayer. Now I was there on Sundays, I was there on Wednesday Bible Studies, I was there for Thursday and Saturday choir rehearsals -- I was there. But his advice was that I was missing a service so I needed to come to this other event because you're missing something -- you know what I'm saying?

TM: That your suicidal depression -- the proper treatment was to pray and come to church even more than you already were which is more than most people ever go to church.

Candace: Eh right exactly, exactly. And so I remember, that the reason I that went to see her was actually because I had gotten a referral from my doctor to see a therapist. And I didn't want to go. I honestly felt that it would be -- it was sinful for me to go talk to a secular therapist. And like I said I remember I left the office and I got in the car and I cried and I made my appointment to go see my therapist -- but I mean to see the therapist because I was like this is, this does not answer my question, like you know even without my religion I knew that didn't answer my question. So I started going and like I said then, as I was going and I started taking medication -- and I was mortally embarrassed that I was taking medication; only my mother and my husband knew and I was like, if y'all tell somebody I'm gonna kill you! -- that felt embarrassing you know, I was to, to be getting therapy and taking medication. So we were really still in the church for a while, even as I was getting therapy, which again didn't -- my pastor didn't know; wasn't going to tell him! So again, after another year or so, was when we really started studying that deeper type of studying where we were cross-referencing materials and we were reading stuff that we just had never read before. And yeah, so it started to crumble from there. I guess that, that's still the brief overview of my religious life. [chuckle]

TM: So how did that tie in then with your own becoming a therapist? The therapy that you're attending helped, and as you're -- it sounds like your faith, yours and your husband's, were, uh were on the same crumbling trajectory -- how did that all come together? Tell us about your professional career and [how did] that took off.

Candace: Oh yeah um, me going to therapy actually -- my therapist himself suggested that I go to school for counseling. Um, and he went to Wake Forest University and we were in Greensboro so we're about thirty minutes away. And so, you know, this is something that many, you know depending on who you talk to, they say this was, it crossed some boundaries. But, you know, he said, look, let me take you over here to the school and, you know, I can introduce you to the professors and show you around, and you know he was really serious, like really encouraging me to go to school, to go back for this Master's in Counseling. So he did, [indistinguishable] one day out you know it wasn't a therapy session it was just meet me here and he took me to the school and show me the school and the professors and I applied. So he was, my therapist you know was the reason that I applied to a master's program. And by the time I started school was when the crumbling had already started to happen, so you know I started school September, that summer was, all the crumbling was happening. So even though I -- even when I went back to -- you know going to school I was still very religious and I remember, you know some of my -- some of the -- I'm still friends with everybody now, and they laugh sometimes because they were like, Day One, you know I walked in the door talking about God and Jesus and my faith, and you know you do the get-to-know-each-other/go-around-in-a-circle and I was God and faith and Jesus, everything about me. so even at the beginning of the master's I was still very much committed to my, at least my religious beliefs -- I wasn't going to church quite as regularly, but I was still committed to the belief, you know. All of my life, or I would say my adult life, I have always -- I remember I used to say, I'm going to write a book and I'm a' call it "Jesus Is All You Need: And Other Lies the Church Tells." And that was me as a minister! And because I felt like even back then, as committed as I was, I always felt like there was a piece of something that was missing. There was a piece of something that we were not giving our parishioners and I, and that to me was, was always just sort of the mental health support part of things -- you know more, just really more of the mental health and then actually, you know, just sort of practical things, you know, everything was always spiritually-minded and spiritually-oriented that I felt like there was plenty of real-world [indistinguishable] my every-day life stuff that was not being addressed.

TM: Yeah and it sounds like that understanding and that transformation and how you looked at the world is part of what lead you to write the book we're talking about today, "Ebony Exodus Project."

Candace: Exactly, exactly. 'Cause -- in a master's program, you know you get assignments to write papers and I know in the very beginning I sort of -- one of my very earliest assignments was, I did some research of sort of like a meta-analysis of the research you know about -- and my topic was depression -- but I don't know if it was specifically black people and depression or it was just depression and, you know, and faith, sort of looking at how does faith mediate depression or how much it does or not, you know, does not -- it was a lit-review basically so I read all these books and research, you know, articles and so I had to sort of synthesize it. So after that I was so interested in that one topic that as I went through the rest of the program, every time I got an assignment I somehow connected it back to that thing, that topic. So I guess you know, yeah even back then I mean I didn't think about writing a book that way -- you know like I said I, from years prior I had this idea of a book, I had you know I always had this sort of thing in my mind, but it was definitely not depression and Jesus or depression and God. And so you know and of course -- and still even in the beginning [indistinguishable] my master's program I was of the mindset still that religion could alleviate depression symptoms. So you know I'm doing my research and going along and, definitely being in that program and having the time to really think about it and really more and more research about depression and religion and realizing that almost everything you read says, yes spirituality is essential to alleviating depression, you know, everybody says that -- there's a gajillion pieces of research that says that. And so I was -- even though that's what I believed, I still needed to find research that takes the opposite stance, you know, and I couldn't and it was like, wait a -- I -- there's got to be some research out here somewhere, and, you know, there wasn't really much, and, you know -- so all that, all of these things happening to me in the master's program, you know really started challenging me, even things like, you know even things like diversity class and you know dealing with homosexuality and mental health and how, you know -- again, in the beginning, I was just black-and-white, oh homosexuality is wrong, nothing else to talk about here. You know! And so of course being in that sort of program, I couldn't say that -- I couldn't do that, you're not allowed to just say, no I'm close-minded to that topic. You know and I found that -- which is what's supposed to happen -- you know I started becoming more sensitive to other issues and, you know, really sort of, my black-and-white way of viewing the world really started to, you know, fall apart. As I'm in this program.

TM: So tell us a little bit about the book itself: you get the subtitle "Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion - - And Others Should Too." I'm taking it that's a central theme. [laughs]

Candace: [laughs] Yeah, so, so my thesis, the sort of the, my um, my mantra that I tell everybody, that I tell say all the time is this: black women are the single most religious demographic in the United States, yet we are the bottom of the totem pole on practically every measure of quality of life. You know, when you think of mental health, physical health, emotional -- you know financially, all of that. So the idea of the book, you know what it all centers around, is that the black church -- and you know religion in general but especially true in the black church -- tells us that, again, Jesus is all you need, you know: if you pay your tithes, you'll be wealthy; if you fast and pray, you'll be healthy; you know, if you're submissive and obedient you'll have a happy marriage. Those are the primary tenets. Yet we're not happy, we're not wealthy, we're not healthy. So my point is that, if the church wants to take credit for the good stuff, then they going to have to step up and take some of the blame for the bad stuff. You know you don't get to claim all of the credit for, you know, the civil rights movement for example but then don't want to talk about the crack cocaine epidemic of the '80s and don't want to take any of the blame for, you know, why didn't Jesus heal all these crack addicts in the '80s -- you know what I'm saying? Just sort of looking at it like that and just sort of highlighting the fact that the Bible and the church is telling you that you should be healthy and happy and you're paying all your tithes but you're not. Why is that?

TM: Yeah so Candace tell us, in your experience, why do we have this situation of a very religious demographic of African-American women supporting the church but nonetheless having very little power within [indistinguishable] institution and it's not helping them. Why do we have that? What are some things that contribute to it, do you think?

Candace: You know obviously you can't talk about anything Black American without referencing slavery. You know so obviously that -- I think that plays a part in it, being that -- in that -- if you're in this situation where you're being abused and you're being, you know, told that this is what you have to -- you know what I'm saying being in slavery and all the negatives that go with that and then you're hearing this story that, about, Moses, you know, and Moses lead the captives out of slavery and, you know you're hearing these stories and if you think about the Africans coming over were already spiritual in nature, you know, many of them were probably polytheistic, and so, in my mind at least, this is you know the way I'm thinking about it, you know, it's not a stretch to, it wouldn't have been a stretch for them to want to worship a different type of god. And you know a lot of people say, I don't understand how they could worship, you know this god and he espouses slavery or supports slavery or allows slavery, but of course you know if you're thinking about the slaves themselves, they probably weren't being taught those messages as stringently -- I don't know; well, I don't know, I take it back, they probably were 'cause they probably were being told that, that you know that's your lot in life and this is what the Bible says and it's okay but -- I'm not sure why they would have been attracted to that but I think it's sort of like, I guess I'm sort of thinking maybe about the Stockholm Syndrome sort of thing, you know, you start to identify with your captors.

TM: Yeah I suspect that a part of it may be that, the situation that they would've been in being a horrible one, the promise of, you know after you die, everything is awesome! so just keep right on doing what you're doing and great things will happen to you some time later -- but for right now...

Candace: Exactly, I think they -- I think that the Moses story, you know, and being captured in Egypt and being lead out into the Promised Land -- I think that that story itself probably was very, you know, it's an enticing story, it's an exciting story, you know it would be anybody in slavery would be excited about that sort of story, to be told, see, this is the god that you're worshipping, he did this for these people, now he's going to do it for you -- he could do it for you, too, or at least that's what they're believing you know I'm sure the slave-owners weren't telling them that but that's what they would tell [indistinguishable] themselves I suppose.

TM: So Candace some of your themes in the book are about leaving the church, at the very least the institution and perhaps the faith itself; what are some things that might help change this situation; is it possible to change the church from within or do you think the only real choice is for black women to leave? What are some things that can change this?

Candace: Well I, I mean it goes along with what you -- you know what we were just talking about, how did they get there in the first place, you know, I mean even getting outside of, you know, racism and all of that, sort of the black culture, you know is very centered around family, you know it's very group-oriented, it's very you know you're-not-supposed-to-think-about-self you know you-think-about-your-family, the whole takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child and, you know all of that. I think most people, most research, and you know and most people would agree, you know that Black American culture is very family and group-oriented. And so you know when your family and your group has been cemented for, you know a hundred years or two hundred years or however many years it's all been evolving around is religion, you know, your great-grandmama's -- their family was evolved around -- revolved around religion, and it just sort of keeps going and I think -- so answering the older question, your previous question which is how did this happen in the first place, I think you know that the whole, it just became so enmeshed, religion became so enmeshed with family, and family and you know being part of the group and supporting the group and all of us pulling together, I think that was, I think that's sort of a natural outgrowth of you know African tribalism and that sort of thing. And then also dealing with slavery and racism and stuff you know you pull it together as a group, and then the cement in all of that was religion. So then your next question is, how do you get out of it -- you know [laughs], you got to bring a jackhammer! To some you know -- you talk about a big block of concrete with cement -- I think that it's just going to have to all be broken up completely. You know, I don't -- personally I think that religion is harmful; you know I think it -- especially the black church in America! I feel like the negatives outweigh any potential benefits, and even the benefits themselves, I would -- my question is always, but you can have those benefits without being a church member, right? [laughs] You know...

TM: You can still practice compassion and kindness without a religious institution to brand it.

Candace: Exactly. Exactly. So I think people are going to -- I think black women and black men and -- and everybody, you know, whole American culture, I think that in general, you know, the mindset that you can't have, there's no goodness with -- there's no goodness without God, you know I think that as people start to see that there are good people out there in the world who, you know, don't believe in God, you know obviously that's one thing and -- one of the things that I actually talk about at the very back of the book, and one of the things I really, really, really believe whole-heartedly in, which is what you were saying at the beginning before we started recording which is science. I feel like science education -- it is going to be one of the key factors towards like a mass outpouring at least in my opinion you know because again like I said when my friends look at me, and my friends and my family, they look at the emotional trauma that I went through, they look at my depression, my anxiety, they look at my financial ruin, you know they look at all these negative things in my life and they say see that's why. But they don't understand that, that might have kick started it, but there's evolution, you know, there is all -- there's all this other stuff out there in the world, you know, there's the archeological evidence that there was not a flood, you know, five thousand years ago. And I think that sort of stuff, where you can actually -- I feel like attacking the truth of the far-fetched claims, to me is more meaningful than anything. That's what solidifies it for me, you know and I've over the years -- yeah I've had my moments of times where I've felt like [gasps] -- you know, suddenly became afraid that, oh I jus -- what if I'm a' go to hell, you know gosh what if I'm completely wrong and I end up in hell. But then like I said but then I'm able to go back to something concrete, like science [chuckles]. And so I think that I really, really would like to see the black community put more emphasis on science education. A lot of black atheist movement folk, you know, will bring up, will say, you know, black people, we're more concerned with issues of social justice and social change, and which that does tend to be true; you know that is what you see more of when you [are] talking to black atheists. But I would see it extend further than that because I think that the science education -- that concrete stuff that you can touch and see and feel -- that's how you oppose the metaphysical stuff that you can't see, that you can't touch, that you can't feel, being the spiritual stuff, you know and it -- the harmful metaphysical stuff, let me say that, because of course I do believe in things like meditation and that sort of thing. But [indistinguishable] you know what I'm saying, the harmful [cross-talk] -- yeah --

TM: Yeah I'm with you and I think that this situation is going to change a great deal; in particular I'm looking forward to seeing how black participation in science programs increases after the new series "Cosmos" comes out -- they're redoing, uh, Carl Sagan's -- with Neil deGrasse Tyson running it. And he's a phenomenal speaker, he's brilliant, and what a wonderful banner and model for African-American children in our society [indistinguishable] -- look, here's science and this is the black man doing it and leading it and doing it beautifully! Those are the kinds of icons I just love seeing that more and more.

Candace: And Neil deGrasse Tyson's not stuffy or, you know, pretentious or anything like -- maybe he'll hear this podcast; somebody please share this with Neil deGrasse Tyson 'cause I just told my husband last night, maybe two nights ago: I want Neil deGrasse Tyson to be my father, like [all-round laughter] I said, I said, I love my daddy, I have no daddy issues, but Neil deGrasse Tyson is just so awesome. Like, maybe he'll adopt me -- I'm, yeah, I'm about to be thirty-three; please adopt me; it's never too late.

TM: If you happen to have an in to Neil deGrasse Tyson, I -- of course we'd be delighted to have him on The Secular Buddhist; that would be terrific. So let's take a segue to something else that you're involved with: in addition to the Ebony Exodus Project, and the website that you have for that, [ebonyexodus.com](http://ebonyexodus.com), you're also involved with The Secular Therapist Project. Tell us a little bit about that for a few minutes.

Candace: Um well The Secular Therapist Project -- actually you don't have to be a secularist or an atheist or anything; all you have to do is, you have to promise that you will provide completely secular therapy, meaning, you know you're not going to bust out a Bible scripture, you're not going to encourage the person to pray, you know you're not going to "go there," of course if the -- you know of course if a client wants to go there then you go there, but you're not going to take things there. Um, and The Secular Therapist Project was born out of Darrel Ray, because he's a atheist researcher, and does, he wrote the "Sex and God" books, and he's also a psychologist. And so he, you know, realized that there was a need for, um, mental health professionals that are not going to immediately go straight to religion, because that's one of the big complaints that you find with a lot of ex-religious people, that they want therapy, you know, maybe they need therapy, they recognize that, but every time they go see somebody it ends up being religious in nature or they feel -- or even if the person doesn't bring anything spiritual into the conversation, some of the complaints have been that the people are really uncomfortable dealing with atheism or, you know, are really -- I've actually had one client of mine tell me that she felt like she had a -- not felt like; she did have -- a previous therapist who told her that she couldn't work with her because she was an atheist; you know the therapist told the client that she couldn't work with her because she was an atheist, and that, you know, was really hostile towards her once the client came out as being an atheist to the therapist. You know so apparently, that happens a lot, you know which I as a licensed professional, I'm really embarrassed to think that there could be mental health professionals out there who take a very judgmental attitude like that. So that was sort of the purpose of the Secular Therapist Project, is that people can go here and know that they're not going to have to worry about that sort of judgment.

TM: Yeah, and that is a problem I'll say from my own experience one time, getting therapy during a down period in my life a number of years ago; started seeing a therapist, and she said, oh you have to read this book, and started reading the book, and the answer to my depression was Jesus. I'd been very clear with her upfront: I'm atheist; don't ever give me a book like this again. She says, oh, I have a different one, I'm so sorry, try this one. And it starts with our experience in the moment, so these are of course very familiar to me as a meditator, and there are a lot of good stuff there, and then you get to the last couple of chapters and the answer to your depression is Jesus. Again, as a -- I said, I'm sorry; we're done: you're here to proselytize your religious views. You're not here to give therapy. And that happens, and it's unfortunate, so I'm very glad that this has been set up because people need the opportunity to be able to share their psychological problems and get help for them without having to be coerced into a religious ideological point of view.

Candace: Mm-hmm. I mean, and this is -- you know people talk about white privilege; I think this is an area where, you know, any atheist or any ex-believer could probably recognize: the privilege here, the Christian privilege. Um, you know, so I, I sort of point that out to non-blacks to say, you know, here's an example of what privilege looks like in case you're having a hard time understanding what privilege is. [chuckle]

TM: [indistinguishable] I know you can't see it 'cause you're in the middle of it; I do understand that because we all have goggles on, I get that. But we can come up with scenarios where you can understand.

Candace: Right. I used to do a lot of supervision of bachelor's-level therapists or -- I mean they, you know, they weren't licensed professionals but other mental health professionals I used to do a lot of supervision -- and I can't tell you how many times it would come up that I would have to go, "You can't say that! That's your religious belief! You can't say that to a client!" Or, you know, "No! You can't offer to start a session with prayer!" Like if they want to start a session with prayer, maybe, and, but what the sad thing is, a lot of those people that I was having to constantly remind, were people who got their Master's degrees online from Liberty University. Or, or even you know, or even just, you know I remember one time I actually sort of fussed at somebody in a, in a supervision session in front of a bunch of people because she

said she was afraid to work with a client because that client apparently had demons. I was like, first of all, demonic possession is not a, um, mental health diagnosis! You can't say you don't want to work with this nine year-old girl because you think she's got demons, because she hears voices! You know...so.

TM: Yeah: what else might it be? [laughter] If we put demons out of the equation, you as a mental health professional: what other mental illnesses might fit into that? Well, Candace thanks so much for talking with me today. I wanted to mention that in early June of 2014, for listeners who are hearing us prior to that, the current plan is for me to join Candace in person, along with Daniel Strain, Greta Christina, and her friend Rick Heller for a panel on mindfulness that Rick has proposed for the American Humanist Association 2014 Conference in Philadelphia. So I hope all that works out and I get to see you there, Candace; it would be great to be sitting at the same table with you.

Candace: I know, I'm excited, can't wait!

TM: So our guest today has been Candace Gorham and I've been speaking about the Ebony Exodus Project. You can find out more about Candace's work on the website [EbonyExodus.com](http://EbonyExodus.com). Candace thank you very much for being here.

Candace: Thank you for having me.