

S1:E17 - guided-by-faith-and-love-in-a-lgbtqia-life-jennifer...

Tue, 12/1 12:43PM 54:58

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

africa, life, faith, god, mom, church, years, feel, people, powerful, fear, child, writing, heart, post, rebecca, calling, love, reconcile, crying

SPEAKERS

Rebekah Chilcote, Jennifer Malcolm



Jennifer Malcolm 00:10

Welcome to the Jennasis Speaks podcast, The Transformative Power of Women's Stories, a platform that empowers women storytelling to promote collective vulnerability, acceptance and healing. I am your host, Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Welcome to the next episode of Jennasis Speaks podcast, The Transformative Power of Women's Stories where every woman has a story and every story matters. I'm your host, Jennifer Malcolm, president and founder of Jennasis and Associates. And with me today is my friend of almost 20 years, we were discounting this doubt, prior to recording Rebecca Chilcote. And I have a small bio to read about her and then we're just going to jump in and let her share her story. So Rebecca chunko has spent years using art therapy as a way to give a voice to children living in desperate circumstances. She believes her religious faith is a driving force that is centered around the world helping children who are homeless, living through war, living with AIDS, or at the end of their life. Faith is also the driving force that has helped Rebecca reconcile her sexuality with her religious upbringing. She joins us today to talk about her journey with faith. And her hope that she can be an inspiration for others in the LGBTQIA plus community, who might be struggling to reconcile their faith and their sexuality, or simply struggling to come out and live an authentic life. So welcome, my friend, I am so honored to have you here today. You are beaming, you have the biggest smile on your face. And it's such a joy to have you here.



Rebekah Chilcote 01:45

And I'm so honored. I've been looking forward to this coming down. This is the first time I'm really telling this part of my story publicly ever. So it is a momentous day. I'm just so glad that it's with you.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:58

That's awesome. And I am so grateful. We got reconnected as I was sharing with our team prior to this. Back at a gallon tines Day party, there was about eight of us being hosted by our friend Meredith, and just listening to your story in your heart. It just resonated with me. And I am really honored that you're here and that you're going to honor your courage to share your story and your voice in a very profound way. So you ready to go?



Rebekah Chilcote 02:25

Let's do it. Yeah.



Jennifer Malcolm 02:27

So let's just start about your upbringing in your faith. So I know that you're a Christian based faith is a huge part of who you are. That's how our lives connected 20 years ago, and your parents were missionary. So talk about a little bit of your upbringing and what that world was like for you.



Rebekah Chilcote 02:44

Yeah, it really was incredible. So my parents were both United Methodist missionaries. And my dad was in theological education, my mom, a pediatric nurse practitioner. And when I was seven, they moved our family to Kenya, very rural Kenya, no phone, no TV, no car for three years, living in the Great Rift Valley, on the edge of that, just the most beautiful and breathtaking place. And I really fell in love with Africa right away. And I feel like that was the beginning of my calling. But then when we moved to Zimbabwe, when I was 12, that's where God really really spoke to me about what I was meant to do with the rest of my life. And one thing I loved about my parents is what they modeled for us. And they really modeled this whole concept of faith in action. So, for example, when we lived in Zimbabwe, there was a terrible drought, there had been no rain for two years. And you know, you'd be driving along and there would be animals just dead on the side of the road. People were really starving. So some of my sisters were homeschooled and homeschool, you know, on a Wednesday would be going out and doing drought relief in

the villages. And so that was the early foundation of my faith was how can we love people that are in their, you know, at their darkest hour. And I was so excited in Zimbabwe, because my mom was her mission outpost was United Methodist mission station, an orphanage. And I was so excited to meet these kids. They were probably 45 of them all under age five. And it was just, you know, our car would round the bend. And I could hear the kids calling me when they heard the car coming. And they they'd be like, hey, Rebecca. Get there and they would knock me over how just all these little bodies just so incredible. And I knew each of their names. I knew. You know what they liked what they didn't like Like, and I just really felt like I was at 12. I was a mom to all these kids. And I would say one of my most profound spiritual experiences really were like, yeah, where I met Jesus where I felt his presence was that with this little baby Aaron. So it was Moses and Aaron, and they were best friends. And they were probably six months, eight months old. And they would always be sitting there in the courtyard. They were always together. They were very chubby, very happy. Just BFFs That's awesome. So one day, I went to the orphanage, and it was only Moses there. And so I became really nervous about, you know, where's Aaron? So we went over to the adjoining hospital, and he was unrecognizable, his whole face had sunken in, his arms were just taugth like, stick like that. And I couldn't believe it. This was maybe over two weeks since I had been there last. And I was so distraught. And I remember talking with my mom, and saying, you know, he needs a better doctor, can we bring him home? Is he not eating enough? And what's the problem. And I'll never forget what my mom said. And she said, you know, Aaron has AIDS. And he might not live that much longer. But as Christians, you know, we have to love him and not be afraid, and just love him with everything in us for as long as he has to live. And this was in 1992. So this was still around, you know, all the fear of the AIDS pandemic. And people had, people were scared, right. And he would, his crib would kind of be off in the back of the room off to the side, he would have like more tattered clothes, his diaper would always be dirty. And my mom would march in and she would pull out the best clothes, give him a bath, put these like beautiful clothes on him changed him. And we would sit there and hold them. And you know, she would give him to me to hold on. And I just remember looking into his face. And he just had this beaming, beaming face. For a little guy that was in so much pain with probably no medication of any kind, his face just lit up when we walked in the room. And I remember just holding him and looking into his face and feeling like I'm looking into the face of Christ. Wow. And this tangible presence of God was just so strong when I was with him. And so he actually died just around his second birthday. And so my mom was pregnant, she was about nine months pregnant with my sister, Ruthie, and she held him as he died in her arms and just this juxtaposition of life and death. And so that was deeply, deeply impactful for me.



Jennifer Malcolm 08:04

Yeah, of I, I can be the hands and feet of Christ in this world. And that's what my parents modeled for me, that that's the essence of faith, you know, not just standing in a building, you know, speaking, some wrote prayers, but living it out. And that's powerful. Because there is that that dichotomy in any religion, where it's the head knowledge and the rote knowledge of saying the words, and then there's the action, the action piece of really living that and I think modeling I'm looking at, you know, my my kids are almost 16, almost 18 and 19. And, you know, the fear that as a mom, like I don't want my kids to get sick, but how your mom modeled that fearlessness and trust in faith, just put that faith in action. And and I put love in action and put love and action. And what an honor have a place that your mom just passed up a ton to you? How did how did that as a child turn into because I know that a big piece of your work from early on has been an art. So at what point did art start becoming you know, that essential or connectivity piece for you with other people?

R

Rebekah Chilcote 09:21

Yeah, so I always loved art making myself I was just a very creative, sensitive soul. And so when we left Zimbabwe, I was 14. And it was that was very, very hard for me to leave the kids. And we came back to the States. So I was back in the States through high school and through undergrad. Okay, so that eight years I felt as soon as I left Africa, I really felt like I need to dedicate my life to getting back to the kids and having something tangible to bring to them. And so art therapy, my mom had heard about it and she thought that would be really Good for me. And that's also when I started writing creative writing to process everything that I had gone through with leaving Africa. But I was always kind of focused. So an undergrad, I did psychology and art, with the intention of getting back to Africa, but it was very powerful. Because in my senior year of college, I ended up getting a Fulbright grant. And I had never expected that this would happen. But this was very exciting. And God just open all the doors for that grant. And at a time when Zimbabwe was really struggling as a country, and so I didn't even think that it would be approved for me to go there. But I ended up going back as a 22 year old, and doing a psychology study looking at the use of art with children orphaned by AIDS. But it was the most powerful homecoming because I went back to the same orphanage. And after eight years, and this, this blew my mind. So I, I finally get there. And people didn't really know that I was coming. Like Mindoro, she was the mother of the orphanage, she didn't know that I was coming. So I just round the corner. And she sees me and she's cutting vegetables where she always was. And then all the kids are just, you know, jumping all over me. And she took my hand. And she's crying and crying. And she said, You have to see this. And she led me to the back wall of the courtyard. And there was another baby that I had really loved as a child Juda tea. And so that was like my baby. And she always tied on my back. She was with me every day. And so she leads me to this courtyard wall. And they're in my 12 year

old handwriting. It was written Rebecca and curatives Oh, wow. And she said, I never let anyone wash this wall for eight years, because I knew you were coming home. Wow. And crying and crying. And then only later, did I discover that she had a T ID. So it means vision. So how powerful is that, that I was the mother quote, unquote, of vision with this baby. And that that Mark was still there, and just all the beautiful things that God did. With bringing me back to Africa.



Jennifer Malcolm 12:25

That's amazing. And if you feel like you're more African or American,



Rebekah Chilcote 12:32

I always say I'm American with. I'm American with an African soul.



Jennifer Malcolm 12:38

No, I love that. Because I mean, you're when you're there's at such a young age, like how much of that is your normal in your culture and, and in your life? And I can't imagine going back and be like, Alright, well, this is just a very, very different world over here. And



Rebekah Chilcote 12:53

yeah, oh, yeah. And I still I mean, to this day, I still do laundry in either my bathtub or little, little tubs handwashed. So I carry a lot of that, which is awesome.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:07

How long were you there that time on that with the Fulbrightgrant? How long ago? That



Rebekah Chilcote 13:11

So thatwas two years. Great. Yeah.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:15

So as you progress, you came back through college? What were some of the things that you are now experiencing back here in the States? You know, were you pursuing your education? Were you wanting to get back and get back to Africa? were you working on your art therapy? What was that next season of life for you?

R

Rebekah Chilcote 13:32

This is after the Fulbright? Yeah. Yeah. So I came back and I started my Master's in art therapy and counseling. Awesome. And, yeah.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 13:43

So there's a time during this journey from, you know, being a missionary in Africa, going to undergrad, going back to Africa, getting your masters, where you had this realization that you're not heterosexual. And, yeah, I mean, about that time when you're like, Alright, this might be different. And who was the person who was the first person that you shared that with?

R

Rebekah Chilcote 14:12

So it's very interesting, as I reflect back on my story, that the same year that God gave me my calling in life in Zimbabwe was also the same year that I was realizing that I was gay. And so around 1213. And as that realization was hitting, it was incredibly painful, because I don't know how exactly but I had internalized all of these negative messages. And so I remember, you know, I told my mom and then I remember writing in my journal, I always had journals from about as early as I could write. And so I had this journal, and I wrote, I am gay, and then I took Sharpie and I crossed over that word and I took marker and anything I could have just crossed it out. It was just too terrifying to even put in my journal. And then following that sentence, I said, you know, I'm going to go to prison. I'm a bad person, I'm so scared, something's wrong with me. And just this deep seated sense of this is the worst thing that could be happening. And really, the orphanage was such a respite for me, because I was having a lot of psychological symptoms, you know, anxiety, some OCD, depression, as all of this was kind of emerging, but the orphanage was really the one place that I got outside of myself, and I could just breathe, and I had relief from some of those things. But it wasn't probably until college. So I was around 20 or 21 that I came out to my best friend. And she's just so great. And I think you know, her suborn um, she was at the gallon tines day. Yes. So, I was so nervous about this, because really, I hadn't told anyone since I was 12. And I feel like her reaction was just so classic. And she said, kind of so what, like, that's who you are just, just, it's okay. Yeah, you know, and she's just normalized it so much, and made me feel so at ease with myself. And she's really been such an ally for, you know, 20 years. Awesome. But it was gonna be a long road for me to get there.



Jennifer Malcolm 16:26

Right? When you first came out at 12, it might have been like, in your journal, or very quietly, you know, what was? Was, did you have any support? Or was it very, was it dismissive at the early age?



Rebekah Chilcote 16:40

I think it was hard in my family has had such a beautiful journey. And I think, so I told mom at 12. And her lens was always more of the psychology of it. So you know, what could have happened in your childhood, let's get you counseling. And it was coming from a loving place of a mom that saw her child was hurting, and wanted that help. But then I think for me, I kind of internalized that as something's wrong with me. And that needs to be fixed. But that and that's a long, beautiful story of just my mom's journey to be a full ally. And now, you know, when I come home, she leaves rainbow stickers on my pillow. Oh, and she, she's just so great. An agent is a fierce, you know, advocate for everything good. And I



Jennifer Malcolm 17:31

know, because raising teenagers and being a mom, like we screw up, I screw up all the time I try to Mother, I try to give perspective. I try to lead out of joy and faith. But you know, I react out of fear or, or ignorance or, and I'm far from perfect. And I am and I through the story of what you shared earlier with this year with me. I know your mom was loving you and trying just to be an advocate of for who you are. Yeah, your daughter. And then as you're dealing with anxiety and depression and some other stuff, I'm sure like that fear of like, Alright, how can I best help Rebecca through this was her heart and intention and obviously come full circle to where she's now that support is absolutely still demonstrated there. And we do our best as parents and sometimes how we say things and how I realize my especially my daughter's interpret things are night and day. And I'm like, that's that wasn't the intention. But that's what how they hear it. Yeah, they perceive it or how dare you know, young adolescent brain absorbs it. And I think that's very powerful to see the distinction. And your mom's here, or this as well.



Rebekah Chilcote 18:45

Yeah. So with my dad, it wasn't until and I was never going to tell him I was going to take that to the grave. Oh, um, and we've always been very, very close. I was kind of that quintessential daddy's girl just always with him all the time doing everything together. And he was just, you know, my best friend and I, I had this weight on me if I don't want to let him down and I don't want to break his heart. And, yeah, just that thought of in any way,

you know, crushing him with this news. It was just really hard. And so I didn't tell him until I was 31. And until you know, I had fallen in love with a woman for the first time. And I felt like things were at a breaking point where, you know, people needed to know I needed to start to come out. And it was really powerful. I was so scared. I called the family and I'm like, clear the house I need to be alone. And there was a fire going in the fireplace and I was just shaking and crying and crying before I even walked in the door. And I sat there with him and I said Dad, all I've wanted my whole life is I want the same chance that my sisters have and the same Transfer love. And, you know, I've fallen in love with this girl and I want to bring her home I want I don't want to be hiding, like separated from you guys. I just want to be, you know, I want to have a place at the table a seat on the couch. And I was just sobbing and, you know, he cried one of the only times I've seen him cry. And he just looked at me and he said, I love you from the bottom of my heart. And if you love someone, and that person loves you, how can that be wrong? Then he said, if you if there's someone that you love, and you bring that person to my home, you will always be welcome here. Wow. And it was, it was incredible. And I, I'll never forget it. And I think he's had his journey as well. Because that was his initial reaction. But then when it did become more reality, it was hard for him. And so he would go on to have, you know, another decade of processing through it to become the full ally that he is today. And so it's been a journey for everyone in my family, but I'm so thankful for them, and just how they modeled Christ's love for me as I walked through this for you know, almost 30 years, basically. And I think it's powerful the humility that you had in your heart and that desire, desperation to be known and to be fully loved. And it could have gone either way, you really put a risk up there, it could have gone either way he could have been like, nope, sir, the door and don't ever come

J

Jennifer Malcolm 21:34

back again. Because you You and I both heard those stories where it's like, oh, yeah, you get, you're out. So you really went to the gambling table to say, I'm putting my cards on the table. And here's what I want and hope. And I'm giving you that opportunity, dad. And that's powerful, powerful response. And that's going to be something that you will live with your entire life, that gift of unconditional love and acceptance, and allowing him to take the next 10 years to you know, fully come into his own space and acceptance and becoming an ally. So that's powerful.

R

Rebekah Chilcote 22:10

Exactly. Yeah.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 22:13

So as you've continued this journey, and I know that this is part of the last several years or last year of really coming with your faith and your sexuality, do you feel like you're getting acceptance in that space? Do you feel like you have to choose like, you're the people who are like, yep, you can be on the faith side? Or, yep, you can be on the gay side. But you can't have both? Or do you feel like you've really been able to find a community where you've been able to integrate both sides of your heart?

R

Rebekah Chilcote 22:46

And it's a very good question. So I always come back to stories and how things have happened together. I feel like it was probably when I moved back to Cleveland, so that would have been 2017. And that all of this was coming to the forefront. You know, I had my missionary life, I had all of my contacts, you know, in the more conservative church world. And then I had this small tribe of you know, love warriors that were like, coming alongside me. And I but I think for me, I had to come to terms with everything for myself, and with myself and God of Okay, God, what is it that you're saying to me, you know, if you have a husband for me, I'm open to that. And I just, I don't want to get it wrong. And I want you to tell me, you know, what is the truth here and what's going on with me. So it was really incredible. So I have this friend that I used to work with. And he was a spiritual director and a chaplain and just an incredible, incredible man of God. And I feel like a conversation I had with him was kind of the impetus for all of this change in my life. And so this would have been Yes, last year, sometime year and a half ago. And it's funny, I call it the dumpster confessionals, because we were taking trash out at the end of work one day, and it's January, it's freezing. And I'm holding these trash bags, and I'm like, there's something I have to tell you. I'm gay and I'm torn and I don't know what to do. So and actually, okay, so flashback to an experience that I had in South Africa. Um, so I was doing a mission training school with youth with a mission why Wham and that was six months. At the time, I was still dating the girl that I was in love with. And we were trying to make it work but that's when I really felt the fire of everything. conflicting. My calling and my love. story. And that was the quintessential problem of my life was how do I have? How do I reconcile my calling and my sexuality? These things don't seem to mix, right. So I was at this worship night in South Africa, and our leaders had all these stations set up, they had a station of the cross, where you could write, you know, a prayer and put it on the cross and footwashing. And I sat at the cross, and I was just torn. And I wrote everything on this piece of paper, you know, my relationship with this person that I loved, my calling the deep pain that I had all the internalized shame and wounds from, you know, feeling that I couldn't be gay and Christian, or I couldn't be a gay Christian missionary. So I wrote it all down, and I put it on the cross. And I just sat there crying, and it was so funny. I had a burning question on my heart. And the burning question was, Oh, my God, am I going to

have a biological child? And I felt a resounding yes. In my soul. Yes. I and I asked the question again, and I heard, yes, again. And I asked it a third time, and I felt Yes. And I became incredibly infuriated. Like, I do not want to be with a man that this is not. This is not possible. This would be like growing a tail are unicorns born, this is not gonna work. Very angry. And I'm like, Okay, how is this pop? I don't understand. So this was the only time that I did something really crazy like this with God. So one of our leaders, he was an American man, he, his wife had just had a newborn baby. She was about two weeks old. And he was carrying her around the room. And I just I prayed, and I prayed the silent prayer. And I said, Okay, God, if this is a yes, the only way I'm gonna believe you is if he walks over and puts the baby in my arms. Hmm. And then I close my eyes, and I was just sobbing and the clock was ticking, and nothing happened. And I said, Okay, all right. I, I won't have a child, it's fine. And then I feel like someone's standing over me. So I opened my eyes. And he's standing there with a baby. And he had around, put her in my arm. Wow. And I asked him afterwards, you know, why did you do that? And he said, God just told me to walk over and give you the baby. So I did. So that was very, very clear to me that God was speaking. And God answered my prayer and how humbling that was. But I think, the next five years, because that was around when I was 31. So for the next five years, I kind of took that to mean that I had a miracle husband, I broke up with my girlfriend, I went on this journey all over Africa, kind of in search of that miracle husband. You know, serving children in desperate places, poured my heart into my calling, I really felt like I chose Africa, and maybe the hope of a family but only if I could be straight, Rebecca. Wow. So all that happened. Okay, so back to the dumpster.



Jennifer Malcolm 28:24
dumpster confessions. Yeah.



Rebekah Chilcote 28:27

So I'm standing at the dumpster with my friend. And I tell him that story. Because that was still, it was still messing with me. And I couldn't sleep at night thinking like God, if you have this for me, my hands are open. I am wide open for this. My dear friend Kelly told me you've left no stone unturned. Wow. And my faith was so important to me. And my calling was all that mattered that I had pursued that to the very end of year, literally



Jennifer Malcolm 28:59
all around Africa to find my unicorn husband miracle,



Rebekah Chilcote 29:05

all right, I will go to every country, I've been to 29 still waiting for that. So I will never forget what he said to me. It changed my life forever. And he said, Rebecca, I don't discount the fact that you heard from God, that God was speaking to you. There's no way around that. But he said, You know, I've worked with so many people. We are both grief counselors. You know, so many people at the end of life, so many people who are grieving and traumatized. And he said, we just can't always understand what God is saying. And he said, I don't doubt that that was God speaking to you. But the interpretation is not always accurate. We have our human minds. We have our limitations and our boxes, right? And he starts crying and he just looks into my eyes and he says um, I know you Rebecca, I've known you for all these years. And I think it's just okay to be who you are. I think you know who you are as well, and God knows who you are and you can be who you are.



Jennifer Malcolm 30:11

That's awesome. That's powerful.



Rebekah Chilcote 30:14

I went home and I cried, I cried that whole day, I think I cried for eight hours. And I felt like this weight was lifted from me. And I could breathe. And God just really spoke through him that it's okay, I can lay that down, and I can finally just be myself,



Jennifer Malcolm 30:32

right. And I have a similar story, because this is one it's in my journal. It's in the book I'm writing. It's the story right after I got divorced. Because I was the one that filed for divorce. I'm the one that pursued it. I'm the one that was angry and bitter and pushing through my divorce. And as soon as I got divorced, it was like two days later, and I heard the scripture that says, Can these dead bones live? Okay, and I'm sobbing, like, I just got divorced, like, literally two days ago. And I did the response, okay, only, you know, Lord, like only you know. And so I actually went on a almost two year. I'm trying to reconcile with my ex husband, and trying to atone for my choices, like first forgiveness, get into counseling, and actually jumpstarted a lot of healing for me that I desperately needed. But I had interpreted it of Alright, my marriage will be restored. And through that I got angry and brokenhearted because it didn't, it never happened. And as a decade went by, I realized that part of it was a dead bones on my own heart. And I interpreted, I interpreted it to my marriage. And I was I was more as I'm looking back a decade later, it was like, can you be the woman that you're called to be? And can I revive your dead bones and you know,

even 10 years later, look at this, like the podcast, and I want to empower women, and I want to give women encourage, even through tough times, you went through, like devastating brokenhearted bad choices. Unknown things, that the interpretation piece is Yeah, is is unknown. And we are we are human. And that is been has been a struggle. And I think that was powerful. I love the dumpster conversations. I have it on my notes here. And I was like, I have no clue what that what is that? What confessionals or whatever. That's great. So as you got this wow moment from this gentleman, and you were able to now start putting some reconciliation of that piece from a decade earlier to you know, that day with this, this gentleman freezing in January. What what steps to do then take from there.

R

Rebekah Chilcote 33:05

So it was a very soul searing season, but it was so good. And I really took about a year of just journaling for hours a day, and having hard conversations with very important people in my life, you know, friends and family members. And I had a huge, beautiful heart to heart with both my parents and I have, you know, this is who I am. I know, it's been so many decades, but this is what God is speaking to me. And it all led to, I'm finally officially coming out. And it's so funny to think of myself before and after. It's like who was that girl, she was so scared, but and I love her as well and all of her fear. Um, so it was Labor Day weekend. So just about a year ago that I ended up officially writing my coming out post. And it was crazy. I was in Columbus, I was in my high school hometown with my best friend. And God just took me out into the woods. And I just I'd never been able to write this post of exactly what I wanted to say before. And I was out in the middle of the woods and I just it came out of me and I wrote the whole thing out. And it was crazy. I put my pen down and church bells start playing joyful, joyful, we adore thee. Wow. And I just sat there and cried and I said okay, God, all I've ever wanted is to know that you're in this and that you're blessing me in this and now I have my family's blessing. I have your blessing. I have my own internal, you know, compass, and it's time. Um, and it's it took a long time because I had wanted to come out in May. My friends had this fabulous coming out party for me. But it really took and I said to I'm not going to do it until I'm absolutely ready. Yeah. And until I'm sure that this is what needs to happen. And so from May to September, was a lot of soul work that needed to be done. And then I hit, you know, I was sitting in the sleigh bed with my best friend in our pajamas, and I hit post. And okay, so my original plan was, I'm going to hit post, put my phone on airplane mode and leave the country. Oh, yeah, let me hit up like Madagascar, let me go to somewhere. The Seychelles, you know, just wait it out, wait a couple years until it just settles. And but within seconds of the post, you know, going live, I get this message from someone that I didn't know very well, I actually wrote it down because it just it made me cry, you are beautiful. You are perfect. God made you and his image his glorious, perfect image. Wow, was the very first

comment. And then it was they just were flowing in one after another from all over the world, from Africa, from friends in different places from Taiwan from, you know, and it was messages of love that were just saturating my soul. And I think I wasn't expecting that in a million years, it was almost 200 comments of people just pouring their love and support and scripture verses and you know, what they saw in me and that my calling and my sexuality could be reconciled. And I stayed up all night, I did not sleep that night. And I just lay there and I just cried, and I worship God. And I read the messages. And it was so healing like nothing I've ever experienced. And I think I just wasn't expecting that I was not expecting that there could be so much love on the other side of fear. And if you just make that one step and like, Look what's on the other side, you can be so close to it, and not even know that it's there. You know?

J

Jennifer Malcolm 37:07

Isn't it amazing? How fear paralyzes you? Yeah, and how you take the fear and you write the narrative, every which way that's all negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative. And you experienced the exact opposite. You experienced that if I can get through this fear barrier. That love is a waiting and Joy's a waiting and freedom is a waiting on the other side. Yeah,

R

Rebekah Chilcote 37:31

I mean, a powerful example that I just thought of. So I wanted to find a church in Cleveland that was accepting and reconciling. And so in the Methodist Church is the reconciling ministries network RMS. So these churches are 100%, accepting supportive of lgbtqi people, and really powerful. Um, so I found one in Lakewood. And I drove to it on a Sunday morning, I got all dressed up and ready. And I sat in the car. And I could not walk in, I couldn't do it. And so I call support, and I call my best friend and I'm like, I'm outside. I feel like I'm supposed to go in but I can't. And I've driven around the church like 10 she is she just tells it like it is. And she goes, Peter because our nickname is Peter for each other. Yeah, she was like Peter, I think to the voice of love. Are you listening to the voice of fear? Yeah. And I said, uh, the voice of fear and she was like, get yourself in touch. That's, so I went in, and it was so powerful. I found out that, you know, Pastor Laura was deeply connected with Zimbabwe with the United Methodist mission where I went as a child, she had been there numerous times. And she was, you know, her position in the church had her connected with old Mutare mission. I had no idea about that. Pastor Dan preached the first LGBT affirming sermon that I had ever heard preached from the pulpit, and wow, incredible. So I never would have had that if I had, you know, gone to Whole Foods, which is what I was going to do if I hadn't gone to church. Like I'll just set up the grocery store.

J Jennifer Malcolm 39:20
You'll make a bet you'll make a good lunch instead.

R Rebekah Chilcote 39:22
Yeah, exactly. I'll go get get something to eat. As a side note,

J Jennifer Malcolm 39:29
no, and I think it's interesting because you use this phrase earlier in a just a quick sentence that I quickly jotted down, you use the word love lawyer. And I know that you and I both are avid followers of Glennon Doyle. And that was the name of one of her earlier books. And that was before she came. That's before she came out, but she was setting the stage. And then I remember hearing afterward that she came out and I was like, What? Like, that is not that I was like, oh, wait reading her last work and like, I know that we both are avid followers of her, but you are emulating the same thing, like you had to have your love. You have to trust it on the other side of fear is love, and acceptance, and community, and beauty and laughter and joy, and had you been paralyzed in fear and I love that you have support and that you that she's like, Alright, let's go get your ass in there. Let's go. But that you could have other people say the opposite like, Alright, just you know, if you're doubting, just leave now and that you have such an ally to you know, really help you press through those fear barriers. So

R Rebekah Chilcote 40:44
yeah, exactly.

J Jennifer Malcolm 40:46
So how are you helping others now cuz I know this is a part of your current state your your current work of using art therapy, writing your book, opening this conversation to those beyond just your immediate community, you know, so what is in your heart to you know, help others in the situation really wrestle with? You know, can I have a calling? Can I have my faith? Can I live my life and you know, have a love life and have, you know, identify with my sexuality?

R Rebekah Chilcote 41:21
Yeah, it's really, it's such a beautiful new season, and it's all very new. So I'm very open to

what God is doing. And I think it's just finding my voice and using my voice to empower others has been powerful, even in something very small. So early on, after I came out, I just started posting more on Instagram. And you know, as a gay Christian, it's okay to be who you are, I posted something, you know, that God had put on my heart to post and I got a message from several people that I didn't really know very well through a different church in another state, and you know, one of them said, Hey, I'm a by Christian. And I know that you're well respected within the church community, and that you're a woman of faith. And reading your words just made me feel like maybe someday I could have that too. And it that just meant so much to me that people that I might not even know, or strangers or someone could stumble across something, some part of my journey or my story. And I cried that day. And I said, Okay, God, it is not, I don't regret a second of it, I don't regret coming out, if even one person could be touched, and one person could feel that, you know, maybe they could be their authentic self, as well. So I think I'm just doing a lot of that in little ways. And then also, just through my church, they had started an art therapy and LGBTQIA art therapy support group, for allies to come as well. And so that I had just started, we made it about halfway through, and then COVID hit. And so I was kind of involved in the planning of that. And then I wanted to actually attend for myself, like for the first round of it, and then possibly, you know, leave that in the future. And so those kinds of things, I mean, really, it's brand new, and it's wide open. And even in just the writing project that I'm doing now kind of weaving in and praying about what stories do I weave in, you know, of my sexuality and my calling. So that, you know, people could maybe read that and be inspired in some way, or helped in some way.



Jennifer Malcolm 43:39

And that's, that's powerful. And that is the heart of this Jennasis Movement, is that through your story and through your courageousness you sharing it here, your your posts, your social posts, your community work, the things that you're you're writing now in your journals, and in your book, they're going to transform other people's lives, and you're going to do your courage of sharing, it's going to unlock shame, it's going to break down the walls, it's going to break down questions of acceptance, who am I worthiness issues? And it's that simple activation to say, okay, God, you know, I always might, here's my thing, and like, I said, I do this in my business, and I do it here. Like, if not me, then who so I'm gonna, I'm gonna say, like, I'm signing up. And, you know, as I continue to share my story, and I'm excited because we're outlining, you know, a deeper level of my journey and story that I haven't shared publicly, that I know it's going to transform our lives and it's going to bring healing, it's going to bring courage, and you're doing that so powerfully. And we have to get past that fear wall. And we have to just step into who we know that we're called to be the purpose of our lives. I've literally had people say You are glowing. Jennifer, when you talk about the work that you're doing now you're glowing by sharing

women's stories, you're glowing every time I see you. It's like, and they're like, do you think I actually had someone like, do you think this is your purpose in life? And I was like I do. I love it. I do, I feel like a 14 I'm 44, almost 45 that I'm finally stepping into who I'm supposed to be. And all of the junk, everything that I've gone through the good, the bad, the ugly, has positioned me right here, for this time in this space to unlock and break down these walls of shame. worthiness issue, I'm not enough, I'm not good enough. I'm not enough, I'm not pretty enough. I'm not sexually oriented enough, you know, to, to walk into you. And I and I want to honor your humility and your desperation to say, you know, I don't know what my calling is, you know, when you're when you're back in Africa, and just saying, All right, I'm, if I say I'm a miracle husband, and that's my purpose, then, you know, let it be and your humility, to just be that desperate and open to, to not miss what you're supposed to do in life. And those two things roughly got woven back together. And you're a powerhouse. Well, thank you.

R

Rebekah Chilcote 46:23

This reminds me a small side note with what you were just saying about the weaving. So the day that I posted my coming out post, and then the following day, I opened up Facebook, and the first thing that I saw was the first ever reconciling United Methodist Church outside of the US, they posted about it. So they basically had they're coming out as a church. And it was in Kenya in rural Kenya. Wow. What? Africa? I mean, how clear is that of God saying you can do this? Yeah, look at the bravery of this rural congregation, where this pastor had a heart, right to bring everyone in. And that they and they were standing there out in front of their church holding the rainbow flag and saying, you know, we love you, and this is what we're going to do. So I just thought that was really powerful.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 47:18

I are you doing any activation? Because I know that there's still so much of society, so much of just general society, let alone religious, the religious sector that, you know, are still turning away and thing. And so are you. Are you involved in any other like activation education besides your, you know, church right now? Or is it just right now? You're just slow and steady and being consistent with your own message? Yeah,

R

Rebekah Chilcote 47:47

I mean, I think that's where I'm at right now is there were so many years that I focused on the negative messages or the fear of what the church would say. And now I just feel like deeply rooted within myself and who I am. And I feel like at least for right now, that's kind of my advocacy work, or my ministry at large is just being very solid in myself and trying

to let that shine out into the world however it does. But I think as I get further along this journey, God's gonna keep opening doors, and I'm open to all of it. You know, it's still so fresh, but then I feel like it was so long ago, but I'm like, Oh, that was only Yeah, I've only, you know, been really my true authentic self for a year. Wow. So yeah, and I mean, hopefully, I'll be able to get to Africa and visit that church, or, you know, continue, I have such a heart for, I mean, especially LGBTQIA Christians, or, you know, people in general in Africa, where it's even harder than it is here. So, I think there's a lot to be a lot to unfold.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 48:56

And I and as I started the podcast, I know that our audience can't see your face, but you are glowing, and your, your eyes are alive and your face appears Your smile is so bright, so it's an honor and, and I I will self admit to you like when you came out last year, I was like, What? Like? No, like, honestly, I had no clue. And you and I hadn't seen each other in probably 15 years. Yeah, social media or something. But I was like, what's like, like, my mind was blown. And then as I read your post, I was like, all it showed was love and all it showed was vulnerability, and, and the desire to be fully known in every element of your life, like, you know, like, if you're a holistic person and to leave one part out and be like, Alright, I have to put that that aside while I you know, come into this space like you're able to live that holistic life and and that like beauty, so, but yeah, you did for me, so

R

Rebekah Chilcote 49:58

I hit post. I'm like, oh, Man, here we go. That's all going out.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 50:04

So as as shared with you in preparation for today, you know, we we've created I've created Jennasis Speaks to be a safe place and platform to share stories to create connections to have a space of clock collective vulnerability and you've really modeled that today. Are there any words of enclosing, that you really want to impart and, and or an activation that you really want to give our audience as a key takeaway to close this up?

R

Rebekah Chilcote 50:32

So I actually brought my post with me and I it's probably a minute long maybe I was just gonna read that if you don't mind. And then I have a couple things that I would love to tell the world that



Jennifer Malcolm 50:46

platform is yours.



Rebekah Chilcote 50:49

Thank you. I am my father and my mother's daughter. I am the girl Africa took in her arms as a child and whisper dreams to holding me close up to her face. She called me the mother of orphans and I could not look away. I was only 12 when baby Aaron died of AIDS, it lit a fire within me that could never be put out a fire that burns to this day, I am still that person I am still the same. And I am the daughter of the Most High beloved in love with the one who made me Christ follower passionate in my faith. 29 countries in four continents, they call me my two tattooed so mother vision, none of this has changed. I am my father and my mother's daughter and I am also gay and I have been afraid to lose everything. With those five words afraid my life calling would be stripped away. That wasn't an option. For as long as I can remember, I felt I had to choose between my love story and my calling and the choice and impossible one to make. Until the day love took me by the face and fear was silenced. She took me in her arms and whispered, you are everything that you are. And that is okay. It hasn't been easy. It has been a long dust road on a dark night. But I can feel the wind pick up, I can hear the children calling Do you takuto carry me lifting arms up to be held and I can feel my heart reconciling everything to itself. I can see Africa with her arms outstretched like the father who stands at the gate and opens it from a long way off, I can see the light on the light that burned on my baptism day, the light that welcomes me home. So Oh man, what I have to say to all of you out there. As we're both like, kind of Lord, okay, keep going. But what I have to say to all of you out there is your light is beautiful, your light is strong, keep returning to yourself, return to yourself over and over. And over. As long as it takes you're a beloved you are a child of God, be yourself be all of who you are, it's possible things that I never thought on the face of this earth were possible have happened. People who I said would never accept me accept all of me for who I am. And that's possible for you too. So that is that is what I want people to know very passionately, very strongly. Oh, good. And, and contact me if you feel otherwise, because we can talk we can.



Jennifer Malcolm 53:16

And we will put your contact information out so people can you know, get a hold of you if they have questions or you know, that fear I want people to get past that fear. Because that fear law and activate that faith mechanism to step in, and to get past that veil and on the other side is such beauty. So I love you, I am so proud. I'm so proud of you. I am you've been on my heart truly since February when we really got to spend time together and we connect. And I am so proud that you have the courage to come out and share

your story today in a the most public manner that you have. And then the safest, you're so wonderful. So I'll go. So I really thank you and All right, we're gonna close this out today. And we will share with you some of Rebecca's ways to get a hold of her and help facilitate that as well. Because we want you to feel supported. We want you to feel loved. We want you to feel heard. And we don't want you to just listen to this and not know what to do. So we'll have information to get a hold of us, you can get a hold of Rebecca, and to really just start that path of healing and courage and to be true to yourself and the light. That is a thing you so thanks so much, everyone. This wraps up today and we look forward to hearing from you next week. All right, talk to you later. Bye. Thank you for listening to the Jennasis Speaks podcast. If you love the show, one of the best things you can do is to share it with a friend. Tell them what you like about it, how it inspires you and invite them to listen. Subscribe to the Jennasis Movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.