



LETTING SOMEONE IN

You've been there. A friend scrolling through social media noting "oh wow, she's dating a woman now!" A family member makes a harsh comment about "the gays" at Thanksgiving. A sibling making a joke that hits a little too close to home. You tense up. *Do they sense it? Can anyone tell?* Perhaps, most importantly, *who can I tell?* We all need spaces to share. We need spaces to be vulnerable and to be received.

For a Christian with LGBTQ experiences, we live at a strange crossroads. Trying to reconcile our faith, understand a traditional sexual ethic, and follow Jesus means that we aren't "queer enough" for some people. And simply having an experience on the LGBTQ spectrums means we aren't "Christian enough" for others. Sharing our experiences of sexuality, gender, and faith are deeply personal. You don't "owe it" to anyone. But feeling alone isn't great either. Telling someone can be relieving and encouraging.

SHARING FOR THE FIRST TIME

We know this can be a little intimidating. The older you get, or the longer you've known someone, the more pressure you might feel—it's been so long and this person doesn't know yet! Wherever you're at, no matter how long you've been processing this on your own, remember that this is *your* journey. This is where your feet are right now, and that's ok. When you think about who to share with first, here are a few questions to ask yourself:

Who "should" know? In other words, with whom would it be fruitful or beneficial to share? This could be a best friend, a close family member, or a spiritual mentor. If you are in a serious romantic relationship, naming this to your significant other will eventually be essential.

What am I hoping for in this interaction? Being honest about this can help you set internal expectations for the interaction. Do you just want someone to listen? Are you looking for accountability in a situation? Do you want insight in a particular area? This can also be helpful to name to the person in the conversation (i.e. "I'm not looking for advice, not right now. I just want you to know this is a thing for me.")

Who can receive me well right now? Based on what you need, this might impact the best first person to tell. Here are a few qualities we think are important in general:

- Trustworthy | Able to keep what you shared in confidence
- Disciple | Someone trying to follow Jesus and who will support you in living a virtuous life
- Wise | In touch with their own "stuff" and able to receive you with humility
- Listener | Lets you get it all out; won't interject or make the conversation about them

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE

Maybe you've shared with a few close people, but now it's time to take the plunge in a more challenging situation. Maybe your friends know, but telling your parents keeps you up at night. Maybe your spiritual director knows, but not your spouse. You'll get to a point where you'll need to share with a perhaps "unpredictable" audience.

Remember that your family member, significant other, friend, boss is, well, a person! They have their own story they're bringing to the table. They too have a relational history, deeply held sacred or secular beliefs, a cultural context. Before going into the conversation, consider the person! Of course, sharing your story with someone isn't really about "them" per se. We still recommend taking stock of how the person's context might impact their reaction, and factor that into your expectations.

We also recommend *patience*. For some people, your sharing will come as no surprise. For others, they never saw it coming. It may take them some time to integrate this new information into their understanding of you. There may be some awkward, even hurtful conversations. Make sure you are praying for those you share with! Invite the friends you shared with first to pray for these interactions. Remember, no matter how anyone reacts, it does not change your inherent dignity! In the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, "*Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.*" You and your story are necessary.

PERSONAL WITNESS

"*Why are you living like that?*" For Christians, you might not just be sharing your sexuality. You might be sharing your faith! People might have questions about why you're following a Biblical sexual ethic and Church teaching. Remember, you don't need to be a theologian! This is an opportunity to share personally about your relationship to Christ, your prayer life, and how you find a home in the Church. If a person pushes you or tries to start an argument, don't be afraid to stand your ground. You can be confident in sharing *your* reasons for faith! Gently remind them that, right now, you just want to share your personal experience. If they have more questions about doctrine, there are plenty of Eden Invitation blogs you can send them!

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

Some people might consider posting generally about their sexuality on social media. We do not recommend this strategy for initially coming out. Why? Because people can't actually receive you. We all sense that social media conversations can have a de-personalizing effect. When you post, your person is mediated by only a few lines of text. And another person can react instantly, mediated by only a few lines of text. The compliments give us a dopamine hit, and the critiques lack all context. When you share something vulnerable for the first time, create an environment that's personal and private. Share with someone you trust, who can honor your sharing and treat you with the dignity you deserve. Become more comfortable telling people, then discern what being "publicly out" means for you.

