

THE GIFT OF GOING SECOND

Fear is something we're all acquainted with. It's the voice that tells us to hide our mistakes when we mess up. It's what keeps us from telling others what we've done wrong. It is what kept Adam and Eve from confessing their sin to the Lord when He came looking for them in the garden.

► Read Genesis 3.7–13.

Obviously God knew where Adam and Eve were. Yet He asked, "Where are you?" to give them an opportunity to confess what they had done so that their relationship with Him would be restored. But in their fear and shame they hid from Him and each other. We have the same problem—when we mess up we hide from God and others. Anne's story is one such example.

ANNE'S STORY:

I grew up as a preacher's kid in a very small town in West Texas. Our home was very conservative and there were a lot of things we just didn't talk about. When I was sixteen, we moved to Dallas. I was bombarded by the prevalent sexual culture of a big city. Strip clubs and billboards lined the highways. I felt alone in this new place and had so many questions that I knew I couldn't bring to my parents. So when a youth pastor I trusted offered to talk with me, I naively went to his apartment. It turned out he didn't want to talk. Instead, he sexually abused me for six months.

Feeling alone, ashamed and confused, I innocently went to the internet to find out what was happening to me and

WHEN WE GO FIRST AND BRING SOMETHING AWKWARD OUT INTO THE LIGHT, WE GIVE SOMEONE ELSE THE GIFT OF GOING SECOND.

what certain words meant. What I found was images, videos, stories and chat rooms that were so awful... but so intriguing. Internet pornography quickly became an emotional escape for me. Somehow, viewing these outwardly flawless women fed a huge emotional need. I was able to put myself in the role of what I was seeing, and by doing that, I felt beautiful and accepted.

I moved out when I was seventeen years old. Now I had my own apartment with my own computer, and all the freedom in the world. I would go to work, come home, and look at porn almost every night. I hated the pattern I had fallen into. I think I knew it was wrong. Anything that caused this much obsession couldn't be right. But I couldn't stop. For five years I hid this addiction.

QUESTION: *There is a big difference between shame and conviction. How can you tell the two apart?*

A couple of years later, I found myself regularly attending church, and got to know a girl named Kristi. She and I became good friends. One night I was over at her house and she looked at me with a weird look on her face and asked if she could share her story with me. Timidly she confessed that she struggled with lust, pornography and acting out sexually. I was the first person she had told.

Her courage in sharing something shameful gave me the courage to return the confession. I didn't share out of guilt or pity, as to make her somehow feel better about her sin because in my head, my sin was worse. Instead, I recognized a bond between our spirits. I needed forgiveness and prayer and grace just as much as she did. And in that confession, a weight was lifted off.

Those kinds of secrets burden us and there is great freedom that comes with confession. Kristi did the hard thing by going first. When we go first and bring something awkward out into the light, we give someone else the gift of going second. Over the next few years Kristi and I were accountable to each other, got help and got healthy.

QUESTION: How can we help others feel accepted and loved and when they confess to us? What can we do to cultivate environments that are safe for others to confess and where we can find courage to confess as well?

Sometime later I was at a concert with a youth group I was working with. I noticed a girl sitting by herself and really felt God pressing on me to talk to her about porn. What an awkward conversation to start! But I did and after I was done sharing she broke down in tears. It turns out she had been trapped in porn since she was 10 years old. She never felt like she could tell anyone, and she thought she was the only one, so when I told her about my story, she realized she wasn't alone. She was able to start confessing and start healing.

Fast forward to today. This girl got counseling and eventually got licensed in counseling herself. Now she has a ministry to help women who are trapped in sexual addictions. I gave her the gift of going second and now she's giving that same gift to thousands of girls.

James 5.16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." The healing

talked about here is a spiritual healing. When we confess to each other, the weight of the dark secrets we're carrying is lifted off and sent away. Confession is only the beginning of the healing process, but it is a very important first step.

QUESTION: What is the biggest reason you may have a difficult time confessing something to someone?

Often as Christians we pretend like we have everything together. But why? If we weren't broken and hurting, why would we need Jesus? The truth is, we are broken, but Jesus has healed us. Now we can have hope, even though we're messed up. Through our confessions we can tell people about the amazing healing power of Jesus. We may get rejected or criticized, but those are the risks God has called us to. When we speak freely we're giving others the chance to speak freely as well.

QUESTION: When have you been given the gift of going second? Have you ever given that gift to someone? Who in your life could you commit to telling something you've been afraid to confess?

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FURTHER STUDY

- ▶ annemariemiller.com
- ▶ *Permission to Speak Freely: Essays & Art on Fear, Confession and Grace*, Anne Jackson (now Anne Marie Miller)

SONGS SUNG DURING WORSHIP

You'll Come, The Solid Rock, The Greatness Of Our God, All Creatures Of Our God And King, Christ Is Risen

Anne Marie Miller speaks at colleges, conventions and churches on topics of social justice, sexuality, health, addiction, and general Biblical themes of grace and restoration. She has traveled around the United States and to over 20 countries telling the stories of hope found in least likely places.

This Think Sheet was compiled based on a teaching at Engedi Church. It is a free resource to aid in personal devotion or group study. For more, go to engedichurch.com.

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