

Coming out ~ Coming In
Faith, Identity and Belonging

SCRIPT

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Music

Bells

Nats from church

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord,
 God of power and light
 Heaven and earth are full of your glory
 Hosanna in the highest

Music up full

STEVE

I tore through scriptures and I was really surprised to find that there's very little scripture that addresses the issue of homosexuality.

TINA

In my daily conversations with God, I would ask Him if this is okay. Is this okay with You that this is who I am? But I do not apologize for being gay.

JEFFREY

I didn't even feel worthy to worship at one point.

LOIS

I struggled for many years, having two separate lives, Saturday night parties, Sunday morning church. It was tearing me apart.

BOB

I went home to my father's funeral, and we went into services, and when I came out there was a hate letter on the front of my truck. What kind of a person would do that?

Music up full

Title on screen

**Coming Out ~ Coming In
 Faith, Identity and Belonging**

Music out

NICOLE

I was told whenever I was growing up that God loves everyone no matter what race they were, no matter where they were from or anything, so why should people that are gay be singled out?

JOHN

I've always known that I was gay from the time I was very young.

ALAN

This is the way God made me. I didn't choose this.

MICK

I don't think it has anything to do with who raises us or how we are raised or where we are raised. From a theological perspective, God makes us who we are.

MONTEE

He already knows all of us just as we are. I believe that he formed me in heaven just like he did you and everyone else.

FAITH:

STEVE ~ LINA

STEVE *voice over*

I was born in Bristol, Tennessee, in a family that was very accepting, very loving. Mom and Dad went into seminary with three kids, came out with five and pregnant with the sixth. I had a lot of pressure growing up. People thought oh, you're gonna be a minister just like your dad, and I always heard that. I didn't date a lot. I dated a few girls and it was never anything very serious. And I, in retrospect, now I see a lot of reasons for that, that it never developed, uh, but at the time I didn't have a clue. I mean growing up in the late 50s and the 60s and the 70s, you just weren't gay. That was queer. It was just so derogatory. And you certainly didn't want to be a queer.

LINA

He was the very first young man I met on the college campus. He was hanging outside the freshman girls' dorm carrying suitcases in. And he was a beautiful redhead -- *laugh*—and he had a great smile, and in the next two years, although we did date once in a while, he was a really good friend to me. He had invited me up. He was working construction. It was June the 13th. He had a little apartment that he had moved into, and we had bought a bird bath to put in the back yard, and he was in cutoff jeans, and I was, too, and we were planting petunias around the birdbath, and he said 'I really think we ought to get married.' – smile—

STEVE

Sara was born while we were living there and then about 24 years ago we moved to North Carolina. I taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, served on a number of committees, worked a lot with Habitat and local helping ministries, was active with my son's Scout troop as an assistant Scoutmaster. I never dreamed that I would be a queer, you know. And so any feelings of attraction that I may have had were repressed, seriously repressed. And so it was in my mid forties that I finally came to grips with my orientation. The reason I even started looking into things is because Lina prompted me to. She said 'Steve, I know there's something going on with you. We're not connecting at the level we need to.' So I located a therapist in Charlotte who was a Christian, and his credentials were master of divinity -- and that was important to me -- and began just exploring my thoughts and feelings and through a number of sessions came to grips with the fact that I was gay, and I was finally able to say that: I am gay. I think that before I could come out to anyone else I had to come out to myself and to God, and that was probably one of the toughest things.

LINA

I wasn't going to be willing to close my eyes nor was I going to be willing to just walk away.

STEVE

And so one day she just said 'Well, Steve, what's going on with these therapy sessions? What have you found out?' And I said, 'Well, I'd like to share that with you.' So I got carryout Chinese and a bottle of wine, and we sat on the back porch – it was in July – and uh, we had a glass of wine, and I shared with her, and I said, 'Well what I'm dealing with is the fact that I'm gay.' And we sat and sobbed and held each other and talked and cried and talked and cried, and she was incredible, just, her response was very loving and very accepting – initially.

LINA

I don't think I was homophobic. I do know that I had pretty strong religious convictions that I had not reconciled. I guess it was easier to stand where it was comfortable to stand than to look for answers that I knew would be hard to find if I didn't have a reason to look for them. But all of a sudden I had a real reason to look for them.

STEVE

I think this was so traumatic for Lina that she really needed other people to know what she was dealing with.

LINA

And I had many, many friends walk with me in this, and I had a faith community that prayed for me, and my friends are people of faith. And this goes against everything that they believed up until then. And they haven't run away, and they haven't left me to my struggles alone. And I do remember standing up in a session meeting at my church where I was still on the session, while we were separated, because my session wanted -- had discussed at length -- some things that were going to be coming up at Presbytery and wanted to take no position. And I remember standing up and saying, 'You do not have the luxury of taking no position. I am in your midst. And you must help me find the answers.'

STEVE

I have all my life collected old bottles and have been fascinated with the construction of old wooden boxes. Only recently have I figured out that maybe my fascination has been because I bottled so much up and tried to fit everything into little boxes in my life.

LINA

For reasons that I may never understand this side of heaven, there was a purpose in the row that God chose as my row to hoe. And I want to hoe it faithfully and well.

STEVE

God is love. And I think that's what really speaks to me. The essence of God is love. Probably the biggest hurdle for me has been self-love. And it's still a hurdle.

Dip to black

PERRY

For me, coming out is a little bit like the resurrection in that something in you dies, something that everybody believes you are, dies, but who you really are comes through.

ELISHA

I don't pray and say I'm a Christian to anybody; I just try to act Christian and act like a normal gay person.

LOIS

And so they would say, 'We love you but we don't want those people here. We already welcome everybody. Why do we have to make a statement?' And finally, I couldn't live with that anymore, and I had to change churches. I had to give up my church that I had been in for 31 years.

ALICIA

I never felt like anybody would love me less because I was gay, but I never felt that the church people could know that I was gay.

ALAN

We've all been hurt by the church. You know, we're always trying to rescue people all the time that are just scared to walk in the front doors of a church because they've been so wounded.

RICHARD

What could I see the church do? It's the exact same thing that I would like to see me do. It's the sin of omission. It's the sin of not being there when somebody needs you there.

IDENTITY:

JEFFREY ~ KEVIN

JEFFREY

We know our neighbors. Our neighbors know us. We all get along well. They know that we're gay. They're comfortable even with children coming over. We kind of all know each other. We look out for each other and help each other. There's a scripture on the doorknocker, which talks about 'a choosing ye this day who you will serve.' As for me and my house, I choose to serve the Lord. Kevin and I have been together going on nine years. I grew up Baptist in Johnston, South Carolina. I am the youngest of eight. I have six sisters, one brother. My father

died when I was twelve of lung cancer, so it's been pretty much my mother and sisters raising me. I didn't really know what it meant to be gay or what. I'd heard the word homosexual. I kind of knew it was men who like men, and that was pretty much all that I knew. And I knew it was a bad thing, because that's all I ever heard. Being gay and African American -- it's extremely difficult. Most of the things I remember... damnation all the time, being gay and being condemned to hell, all the time. And feeling uncomfortable being there, but feeling obligated to be there. Even after coming here to Charlotte, I still had some of those same experiences attending a church where I was told I was a disgrace to the Black race, and I left the church for about three years. But being as important to me as it was, I went out searching, and I even went back, went to a church that still kind of, still had some of those same type, fire-hell-brimstone-type of sermons, but I needed that spiritual part so badly that I was willing to still hear some of that.

KEVIN

I was working as an HIV case manager with an AIDS service organization, and Jeff was doing some outreach work as a volunteer. It was pretty much love at first sight. Church was never really a big part of my life. I smile because it is now, and it has been since I met Jeff, because I saw how fulfilling it can be. First thing he does when he gets up out of bed is he kneels by the bed, and he prays -- every morning and every night.

JEFFREY

I found out on a Thursday that I was positive, and I went home two days later, that Saturday, to tell my family. The first year all I could think about was 'I'm gonna die.' The longer I lived, the more and more I dealt with it, the more and more I became okay with it. I don't look at my HIV as being a curse or a punishment from God. I think God gives us free will. In that free will I made a choice. And this is the consequence of that choice. It's not, I don't look at that as being a punishment.

KEVIN

He will talk about being HIV positive if he thinks there is somebody in that group that will benefit by him coming forth and talking about it. He keeps me very grounded and he gives me hope for the people that I work with because he does the right things, he takes his medication, he sees the doctor and he has a fulfilled life. He is one of the strongest people I know. I guess that's why when he is really sick, it bothers me because he is so strong, and he doesn't ask for help. Because I think

most of his help comes from his belief in God, and he misses that time on Sunday morning at a church. And there have been so many Sundays he says 'I wish we could go to church somewhere.' In the midst of rejection and difficulty in us finding a church now, he knows that we will, and he's not going to give up on that.

JEFFREY

I believe in my faith with the Lord. I believe in prayer. I believe God loves me, and that He didn't make any mistakes. Every single night, every morning, in my prayer is "Lord, if there's anything that's in me that's not of You or anything in my life that You don't want, to remove it, that I don't have the strength to do it myself and I know You do.'

Dip to black

NICOLE

I'm welcome to attend worship. I'm welcome to tithe. I'm welcome to join, be baptized, come for clean-up day. When the church says come and worship, come and participate, but you cannot minister, and we will not bless your union, the church is saying 'I love you, but...', and God doesn't say 'I love you, but...'

BOO

Those of us who practice infant baptism may have to be careful about who it is we baptize. We take that baby and we walk them up and down the aisles and say, 'This person, this child, is one of us.' And we claim them. And then they grow up and they are gay. I think you have to be very careful if on the front end you're gonna say, 'You're welcome, no matter what,' then you really ought to mean it.

ASHLEY

Don't play God. Don't judge other people for who they are, whether they are gay or not. I just always ask how can an all-inclusive God be exclusive to a certain group of people?

ALISHA

Whosoever, you know, Jesus didn't say, 'Whosoever but those gay people.'

BOB

You're probably sitting in the wrong pew if you are in a church that really isn't thinking love, that isn't thinking in terms of opening its heart to everyone.

**BELONGING:
SUSAN ~ TINA**

Music up

TINA

I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I wanted to be the first female professional baseball player.

SUSAN

I was fascinated by microscopes and telescopes and weather, and so I thought I'd end up being a scientist, an astronaut, something like that.

TINA

I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I have eight siblings -- six brothers and two sisters. I am the youngest girl of three girls, and I also have a twin brother.

SUSAN

Both of my grandfathers were very Catholic. Both of my grandmothers were Protestant. So both of my families went through conversion processes in the thirties and forties, which really made for -- at that time -- what was considered mixed marriages, very difficult family transitions.

TINA

Faith was every Sunday -- go to worship and then to Sunday School or what we called CCD or catechism. I never even asked what CCD stood for. I just knew that it was a place where I was supposed to go versus felt excited going to. Unfortunately, the overwhelming memory is 'What time is it going to be over so that I can go to the store and buy my candy bar with my quarter and when do I get to go to baseball practice?'

SUSAN

I remember when I was about seven or eight, when you make your first Holy Communion. We lived close enough to the

church I could ride my bike there, and I would go to the rectory on my own and ask questions about different things, you know, they give you this little purse with your Bible in it and your scapular. And I would go there and just ring the bell at the rectory and just sort of show up and ask questions. I knew I was different from the time I was eight years old. I didn't know what it was, but I knew I was different. It was a very, very difficult time for me, the coming out period. I was in a very Catholic school, really exploring my faith and my own identity. At that point in my life I was going to church every day, so I was attending daily mass and really trying to understand what was happening to me, because I knew this relationship that I had entered into felt right. You know, I felt like I was in the right place for the first time, and I was very concerned about the status of my soul.

TINA

I admitted my sexuality to myself when I was a freshman in college. In hindsight, I knew when I was much younger because when a friend would invite me over to their house, I would gargle with mouthwash, brush my teeth, and brush my hair, and make sure I was dressed just so.

SUSAN

I contacted my best friend after about a year and said, 'I need to talk to you,' and said, you know, 'Chris, I'm gay' and she said, 'Okay, you know, so what?' She sent me some information on what Jesus had to say about being gay, and it was empty, there was nothing in there. And I remember thinking, well, okay, this is a good sign, maybe I'm in the right, maybe I'm okay now, maybe the status of my soul isn't quite so in danger as I thought it might have been.

TINA

Did I think that being gay was wrong? Yes. It wasn't so much that the church wouldn't accept me, so much as nobody would accept me -- except other gay people.

SUSAN

I never thought I'd get married, never. I never fantasized, as a child, about having a wedding, uh, you know, I wondered if I'd ever meet a guy that I really connected with. I just didn't buy into the whole idea. It didn't seem to fit for me.

TINA

This is for our dee-jay. This is where our guests will be staying at the Holiday Inn. Cake, menu, transportation. I never thought I would find Mr. Right. I thought I would have to get married — because I wanted to have children. So if that's what I had to do, I was willing to do that.

SUSAN

I confessed that I had become involved with a woman. And at that point, you know, it could have been very damaging, whatever that priest had said to me. He held a lot of power at that particular moment, and I remember him saying, 'Susan, do you believe you have sinned?' And I said, 'No, Father, I don't.' And he said, 'You haven't.' And I remember leaving there with the weight of the world lifted from my shoulders. And then he explained to me what the Catholic ruling was on homosexuality. He said, 'You know, there are many people who are Catholic and homosexual. All we ask of you in the Church is that you don't act upon it.' And I said, 'Well, that's a lot to ask.'

Music up full

TINA

Susan is that house on the rock. We cry together. We laugh together. We smile together. We worship together. Susan let me know that it was okay to be me---one hundred and ten percent, all the time, every day, morning noon and night. She encourages me to never hold back, to never apologize for who I am.

SUSAN

Nats from dressing room Mine will be different than Tina's. I don't know what her flowers will look like.

SUSAN

Up until recently, I've struggled a lot with the rituals of life that I didn't feel I got to fully participate in.

Nats from dressing room This is a whole image that I've never considered.

Music up full

SUSAN

I never dreamed of having a wedding for myself probably because somewhere deep inside I knew that I wasn't gonna be able to have one.

TINA

It feels like home. There's not one ounce of trepidation. There's not one ounce of hesitation.

SUSAN

I have a responsibility and to help make this conversation be known. I am very committed to that. To having people understand my life and understand that I'm very happy about being gay. I'm very proud to be gay. That this is who I am. And that I feel a real sense of injustice when I'm not fully embraced as a citizen of this country or anywhere else as a gay person.

TINA

When family members embrace your sexuality, it's like we give them extra credit. And I want the rest of the world to not get extra credit for accepting anybody. I don't even want to be called gay. I just want to be called Tina.

SUSAN

God has a plan for you, and it's a plan of goodness and not one of woe. And I believe that. And I believe that God brought Tina into my life, and that God wanted me to see the goodness in life and gave me someone to see that through.

Music out

MONTEE *singing*

Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me

MONTEE

God's word says that we should pray for those who hate us or dislike us, so that's what I try to do.

NICOLE

Faith is about facing the unknown, God going with you, putting yourself into those places where you're not comfortable and believing that God will take you to the place you need to be.

MICK

There's a lot in the world that separates us, and I think a good part of that separation is the separation from God and God's love. And I think if we just concentrated a little bit more on being like Jesus in our life, being like God in our life and opening ourselves up to the experience of the Divine, then I think we would start treating each other a little bit better.

FRAN

The book of Romans I've found very helpful – particularly, I think it's the fifth chapter where 'perseverance gives us strength, suffering builds us up, but we have hope and that hope is in our lord, Jesus Christ.'

KEVIN

We need to figure out how we can have meaningful dialogue with people who truly are not accepting, who truly don't can't open the door.

CHRIS

We have to be more involved, and people have to see us in our relationship with our partners. And knowing that we're loving people just like they are, and that God loves us and that we exhibit that, and we are confident in that. That I am not gonna die and go to hell because I love this individual who happens to be a woman.

JOHN

If you are having issues with my sexuality, that is your issue. That's an issue that you need to resolve. But I know that I'm right with God. I know that God is right with me. I took the Bible, and I said I'm gonna own this thing. I'm gonna see myself in this thing. So I see that. And if you can't see that, I know that you will know that I am Christian by my love, if nothing else, and I'm gonna love you regardless if you love me or not.

So SHEILA

I think that the church will open its eyes, and there will be places where we are accepted and places where we are not, but I think over time that tolerance will prevail, love, unconditional love.

STEVE

If we are made in God's own image and there are many different types of us, then there must be many different facets of God. And I don't think there's any way to see God unless we see the whole. And so if we are exclusive in any way—if we exclude liberal or conservative, or gay or straight, or black or white, or rich or poor---then I think we are missing out on a part of God because God is all of those things.

Dip to black

Music up

CREDITS

Music out

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WORDS TO THE SONG

BE TRUE ©Carrie Newcomer

*Love will ask you to stand
Take you where you don't think you can
Love calls and waits and waits for an answer
Yes, yes, be true*

*Love is best when it listens
Beware, there is no compromise
Love calls and calls and waits for an answer
Yes, yes, be true*

*For a promise made is a promise given
A love like this cannot be hidden
Show me now just where it's written
Yes, yes be true*

*Love will ask you to open your heart
And mind and not turn away
We are all just waiting, waiting to say
Yes, yes be true.*

*For a promise made is a promise given
A life like this cannot be hidden
Show me now just where it's written
Yes, yes be true*