

Former Homosexual Evangelizing Homosexuals

by Lee Weeks

For ten years, Eric Garner participated in one homosexual relationship after another, desperately seeking to fill a yearning in his heart for love and acceptance.

During times of great loneliness and despair, he turned to alcohol and marijuana as short-term remedies to his problems. By 1990, the 27-year-old Greenville, S.C., native had fallen into the depths of a two-and-a-half-year relationship with a man who was HIV-positive.

"I knew that the last young man that I was involved (with) in a relationship was HIV-positive before I ever moved in with him, before I ever even considered having a relationship with him. That's how desperate I became. My need for love had become so desperate that I was willing to even justify that."

More than seven years later, having graduated from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with an associate of divinity degree, Garner's burning desire is to tell others how God delivered him from the grip of a ten-year homosexual lifestyle.

"Praise God!" exclaimed Garner during an interview. "I'm saved. I'm delivered. I'm healed and I'm going to tell everybody because the book of Matthew tells me to."

Since his conversion, however, reaction to his testimony from the Christian community has been mixed, said Garner.

"A lot of people look at my testimony as something truly incredible, but they only do that because they are pointing the finger and saying, 'I was never as lost as he was,'" said Garner.

"In my opinion, a lot of Baptists believe there is a degree of lostness, and they look at the homosexual community as people that are more lost than they were. You can't get Scripture to justify that."

Garner cited Matthew 10:26-27 as his commission: "Fear them not, therefore, for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed and hid that shall not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, that speak you in light. And what you hear in the ear, that preach you upon the housetops."

"I go out and testify because the Book of Matthew tells me to," he said candidly. "I have nothing to hide. I know

the work that God has done in my life, that He has begun. I know the commitment and submission it takes from me."

Garner said he succumbed to the sin of homosexuality after serving two years in the U.S. Navy. Prior to enlisting in the Navy, Garner said, he broke off an engagement with his high school

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girlfriend to test his attraction to the same sex while serving aboard a ship.

"That was very twisted thinking on my behalf," admitted Garner. "All I did was open a floodgate for Satan in my life. I was involved in looking at pornography at a very young age and that opened up another door. That opens up demonic activity in your life."

Garner was discharged from the military after admitting to Navy officers that he was a homosexual. "I was proclaiming that I was a gay man without any reservations whatsoever. Everyone that knew me at the time knew that I was gay. I made no ifs-and-or-buts about it."

Garner said God began dealing with him during a two-and-a-half-year relationship with his HIV-infected partner, who professed to be a Christian. He said God began convicting his heart as he sat and listened to Sunday School lessons and sang hymns at Holmes Avenue Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C.

On January 7, 1990, Garner walked down the church aisle, shook the pastor's hand, and asked Jesus into his heart. After the service, however, he returned home with his male companion.

As he began reading his Bible and praying, Garner said, the Holy Spirit directed him to Leviticus 20:13: "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them."

"When I read that Scripture verse, it scared the life out of me. I went to the young man I was living with and said, 'What do you think this means?'"

Garner said his partner admitted the Bible condemned homosexuality but dismissed the Scripture as simply old Jewish law.

"Well, I got back on my knees and I began to read more and more and more. The more I prayed and read, the more I wanted to pray and read."

Garner said about three months after his conversion, the guilt from his sin was so overwhelming that he left his partner's house, leaving behind all of his possessions.

With nowhere else to turn, Garner decided to go see his roommate's brother and his wife, who are Christians.

"I said, 'Do you have any idea how I've been living with your brother?' And they said, 'Well, Eric, yes, we do and we've been praying for both of you.'"

Garner said the woman, who was six months pregnant, began to share with him how God had delivered her from a five-year homosexual relationship before meeting her husband.

"God Almighty has sent you to my house tonight," the woman told him.

A few days later, Garner moved in with the Christian couple, severing all ties with his former lifestyle while finishing cosmetology school.

"I didn't have any friends that weren't gay. I didn't have people that knew me in any other way except being gay."

Garner admitted the drastic changes didn't come easily. Scared and confused, he bowed his head one night shortly after his conversion and prayed: "God I don't know how not to be gay, but I do know how to be a Christian. I know how to read the Bible. I know how to understand it. I know how to believe what it says. And I know how to do what it says. I'm going to start focusing on being a Christian, rather than not being gay."

A little more than a year later, following several negative HIV tests, Garner found himself making plans to marry a woman from the same church where he received Christ as his Savior.

In June, he and his wife, Kelly, celebrated their five-year wedding anniversary.

"I thought there would never be a day that I could look at a man and not think of something sexual, and I can honestly say I'm at that point now because God has changed me and God has changed my desires. God has taught me how to change my thought patterns, and so I'm able to look at men now and see that they are a creation of God and they're a brother in Christ."

Garner, a licensed minister and ordained deacon, said he believes the Lord has called him to a bi-vocational ministry of equipping churches and Christians alike to reach out to the gay community with Christ's redeeming love. ✠