

Larry Tomczak: 5 Reasons I've Attended 12 Gay Pride Events

Last Saturday I attended my 12th "Gay Pride" event—this one in Nashville, Tennessee. I've also gone to ones in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. A friend of mine went to the festivities in San Francisco a couple years ago, returning with video footage and his impressions. They are basically the same as mine with some exceptions.

"Larry, why do you go to these so-called 'celebrations'? Don't you have a full schedule and better things to do?"

Here's the deal: I go to these gay pride events because I believe it is God's will for me. It's not necessarily for everybody, as individuals must be very careful due to some public nudity, drugs and behavior many would deem offensive. There are also levels of maturity in the Christian experience that must be taken into consideration. After some initial comments, let me share with you five reasons why I believe God has me go with the blessing of fellow leaders and the prayer covering of intercessors.

May the acronym . help readers grasp the simplicity yet necessity of what I convey.

- P – Praying for Participants
- R – Relating to the Rejected
- I – Investing for Eternity
- D – Demonstrating God's Love
- E – Evangelizing the Lost

Background and History

In June of 1969 rioting erupted in New York at the Mafia-owned Stonewall gay bar when, after a routine "card check" by the local police, some patrons resented the officers' intrusion

and became violent. Later, homosexual activists wanted to commemorate the event with some type of public demonstration. They wanted to celebrate their lifestyle and help liberate people from negative perceptions regarding their movement.

In November of that year, the first “pride demonstration” took place in New York City and then a group of activists proposed an annual demonstration be held not only there but throughout the United States. Bisexual Brenda Howard, known as the “Mother of Pride,” suggested a pride day and a week-long series of events. Frank Kameny, a homosexual pioneer, later suggested they adopt a slogan, “Gay is Good! “

Today in cities across America, there are various marches, festivities, parties, concerts, drag queen displays and booths to provide greater visibility to this lifestyle, remove social stigmas, plus disseminate information and recruit others to the homosexual life.

In the year 2000, Bill Clinton gave official presidential affirmation to the event. Barack Obama followed by expanding the title and the duration of the campaign by affirming what he calls, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month” in June via an official White House ceremony.

What began as a single march progressed to a day then to a weekend and now a month-long emphasis promoted (in scores of elementary, middle and high schools in America), by politicians, educators and the President of the United States. Themes will vary but to gain understanding, survey some that have been highlighted in the San Francisco event held for over 40 years.

- “In Pride We Trust “
- “Stand Up, Stand Out, Stand Proud”
- “Queerific”

- "The More Visible We Are, the Stronger We Become"
- "Year of the Queer"
- "The Future is Ours! "

My friend who attended the San Francisco event related public nudity amidst thousands of children participating because these events are billed as "family-friendly." Men and women stood buck naked on the streets (some topless and some bottomless) as blushing and giggling spectators took pictures and videos with the exhibitionists. Because the social nudity has gotten so out of hand there, an ordinance was recently passed to try and curb the "frivolity" except when a group obtains a parade permit.

For accuracy's sake, many of the gay pride events are more low-key and do not feature as much of the offensive displays present in Miami, San Francisco, New York, Atlanta and some other localities. Also, an afternoon parade down Main Street is usually tamer and much different than evening festivities once the booze gets flowing and darkness settles in.

1. Praying for Participants

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt. 9:37-38). I believe that as people have prayed for those involved in the LGBT lifestyle, I am one among many with a God-given burden and assignment to reach them.

This passage of scripture is preceded by these words, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 36).

When you wade through the crowd and look at the forlorn faces and into the empty eyes of those present, self-righteousness dissolves as you feel what God feels over the crowd. Despite

the glitter, the costumes and the cans of beer, these are broken people. Projecting a “hap-hap-happy” image and feeling secure in the crowd, many mask deep and long-standing pain from abuse and rejection. They are searching for relationship and the reality of the living God.

Prophetic teacher, Bob Jones, stated a few years prior to his death recently that he foresaw a great move of God converting 100,000 gay and lesbian people. Just as in the '60s when God intervened to rescue burned-out druggies and hippies starting in California and then sweeping nationwide through the Jesus Movement, Bob believed there was coming a similar divine intervention that would arrest the attention of the masses.

Prayer is always at the foundation of revival. When I walk among the hurting homosexuals in our culture, I am moved to prayer. I invite you to do likewise.

Pray that God will send out laborers into this harvest; that the Holy Spirit would “convict them of righteousness, sin and judgment” (John 16:8); stand in the gap for these individuals, exercising God-given authority over demons of deception and lust; intercede that God would lift the scales from their eyes and draw them to Himself; ask the Father the way Jesus told us that they would be “delivered from evil”; and beseech God that He would arrange divine appointments, sending faithful Christians into their lives doing the work of an evangelist. Finally, ask God for forgiveness if you have yielded to the sin of unbelief and been disobedient to evangelize the lost—particularly gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals.

2. Relating to the Rejected

Milling around the grounds, many of the people (90 percent are under 40) resemble sad, zombie-like figures. Blank stares and plastic smiles can't mask the emptiness within. As French mathematician Blaise Pascal said 400 years ago, “There is a

God-shaped vacuum within the heart of every human being that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by the Creator Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ.”

One also can't help but notice the abundance of corporate-sponsored booths with free candy, giveaway prizes and smiling representatives stationed everywhere. This is not coincidental but intentional marketing strategy to connect with this cultural grouping.

“There is no impact without contact!” This principle should remind us of Jesus calling us “salt.” We need to come out of the saltshaker to affect those in our spheres. As He was a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19) and told us that He “came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), so too are we called to follow in His steps.

I don't try to relate to them in some mechanical way or by blaring through a bullhorn into their faces. I'm led by the Spirit and strike up casual conversations by citing the logo on their cap, a message on their shirt or simply sitting down next to somebody sitting alone sipping on a beer. Like Jesus with the woman at the well, I then extend acceptance and take an interest in their life, awaiting the right time to mention something about Jesus and how He changed my life.

People with a “spirit of rejection” struggle relating to others in social situations. This is why alcohol, drugs and crowds help them soothe the inner ache in their hearts. Amidst the festivities, they find false security and an identity.

Remember Jesus was “despised and rejected by men” (Is. 53:3) so He really feels what these imprisoned, thirsty, strangers-in-society experience in their daily lives. He also commissions us to reach them by reminding us, “I was in prison and you came to visit me ... I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink ... I was a stranger and you invited me in” (Matt 25:35-36).

3. Investing for Eternity

In my study I have a picture of Steve Hill, the fiery evangelist from the Brownsville revival where I served for five years. Prior to his passing he reminded all of us: "Live each day with eternity in mind!"

The only two things in life that are eternal are the souls of men and the Word of God. Wise disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ know we will all give an account one day for how we invested our time, treasures and talents. Daniel 12:3 reminds us, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

Putting aside my "busy" schedule to go and invest in the lives of those headed for hell is a most worthy endeavor. Gospel "seeds" are planted by engaging in a natural, relational way and then leaving them to ponder an appealing, personal testimony tract—mine or from a former gay or lesbian.

"Tracts don't work! Plus that's old-school evangelism!"

Cheesy, condemning gospel literature rarely works, but what I hand individuals are attractive leaflets from former homosexual Stephen Bennett, "I WAS GAY" () or my personal testimony tract, "A MOMENT AGO, WE MET. WAS IT A COINCIDENCE?"

On Saturday after connecting relationally with people, I personally handed out about 50 of the above tracts. There was not one refusal!

4. Demonstrating God's Love

There are two maxims that bear repeating, "People will never care how much we know until they first know how much we care," and "What you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you say."

People struggling with rejection find it difficult to receive

love from others. That's why it must be practical and not just theoretical! "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

I have served at "Pride" events with teams of dedicated and caring Christians by setting up "Dream Interpretation" booths. When passers-by inquire about what we are doing, it affords a wonderful opportunity to engage people in a winsome way regarding their dreams and what they might mean. Mature and spiritually sensitive, gifted believers are able to minister the love of God as well as bring encouragement into the lives of many depressed and downtrodden LGBT folks.

Many opportunities for sharing Christ come disguised as unwelcome interruptions. On a daily basis and at these type of festivals, if we will seek God He will show us creative ways to practically reach out and serve. It might be through free water bottle giveaways or dream interpretation. The important thing is that we come out of our comfort zones and inward focus to recognize "the fields are white unto harvest" (John 4:35).

5. Evangelizing the Lost

Some gays say are **militant**—rough and ready to be combative with anyone perceived as opposing their radical agenda. My experience is these are a small minority.

Most gays are really **moderate**—having found acceptance in a lifestyle they have discovered or with which they are experimenting, they see themselves on a journey, still trying to find ultimate peace and purpose in life.

Other gays acknowledge they are **moving on**—admitting the emptiness of a way of life they tried and thought would satisfy, they are now trying to abandon it and are reaching out for community and caring relationships to support them on their journey back to wholeness. I have interacted with two people in the past few days who are in this zone.

A while ago I had a divine appointment with John who transitioned from the second group to the third, but tragically it was too late. True compassion for me meant regular visits to a hospice as he went from gay to straight, putting up a valiant struggle with the ravages of AIDS. Just being there, listening, encouraging and reassuring him along with his precious, young daughter, meant the world to John. Later I was able to take care of his memorial service in a way that I trust inspired all of his former LGBT friends who attended to reflect on his life and theirs.

Remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Whom you would change, you must first love."

Following the method of our Master, we really do need to recapture the adventure of lifestyle evangelism, including charitable outreach to those in the gay community.

For those who still discredit literature evangelism, I thought it was interesting that everywhere I went at the recent Nashville Pride event, there were either booths or individuals distributing literature to influence those in attendance. They sure believe that passing out tracts and fliers can have an impact!

One such piece of literature was a beautiful color brochure entitled "Discover the Unexpected Fabulous Side of Cleveland!" [Hey, that's my hometown!] The 30-page brochure introduced, with an official welcoming letter from the mayor of Cleveland, the International Gay Games to be held on August 9–16, 2014.

The Hon. Frank G. Jackson beckons everyone to come saying that this event is going to "attract more than 30,000 worldwide visitors to our friendly and inviting city."

In the distance I hear Someone else issuing an invitation for His ambassadors to also come. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

Anybody game?