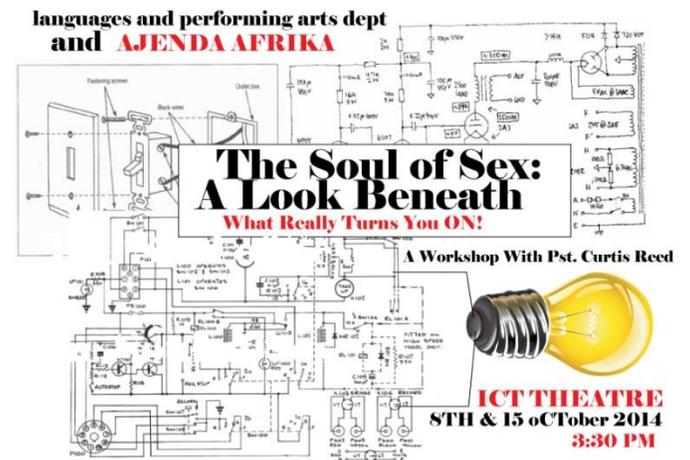


The Soul of Sex
by Pastor Curtis Reed

On October 8th 2014 at Daystar University, Athi River campus, Brother Curtis led us in the discussion of the thoughts he had earlier shared on September 23rd during the chapel hosted by the university's Compassion and Care Center (DCCC). Following is a loose transcript of what he said. The text is not completely verbatim, but is, I believe, faithful to the spirit and gist of what Curtis shared. – Wandia Njoya



For those of you who were at the chapel when we talked about sexual addiction, healing and forgiveness, I may repeat things from that time, but most of our discussion today will be fresh information, unless you've been to other Soul of Sex workshops.

I want to thank Ajenda Afrika and the Language and Performing Arts Department for inviting me to do this. It is so important that we talk about sex. I want you to get used to saying those words – SEX. I realize that that word and that topic is kind of taboo, and I think it's because when it comes to sacred things and mysteries, we generally tend not to talk about them.

But the problem is that everyone else is talking about sex. Everyone is highlighting sex and presenting it to us. You can't even walk down the street without having to deal with sexual images. So when everyone is talking about it, and then we – especially the church – are not talking about it, it means we are being set up to fail or lose in terms of expressing our sexuality in righteous ways.

So I'm breaking with protocol, and I'm speaking about SEX. I know we're mature adults here, so I may say some things that are forthright. I won't be vulgar, because I don't get down like that [laughter]. But I will be forthright. I'm tired of the devil killing our young people. We've got to go there. Be forewarned.

Much of the stuff I want to share with you comes from painful life experience and things that I wish someone had taught me when I was your age. I had a sexuality that was somewhere over here, and then I had a Christianity that was somewhere over here. I got saved in my fifth year of high school. I had dropped out of high school and eventually went back, and spent a lot of time drinking and smoking and stuff.

Once I did become a Christian, I knew I was supposed to live a holy life, but I didn't know where to place my sexuality within the context of the gospel. No one had helped me with that. What people would tell me, mostly, is "don't have sex as a Christian, until you get married."

You know what that means. Usually if someone tells us not to do something, all of a sudden that's exactly what we want to do. We may not have even been thinking about doing it, but as soon as someone says "don't do it," we've got the wheels spinning and the ball rolling in terms of our desire to do it. The Church told me not to do it, but that was not enough.

Once I was in college, I got involved in compulsive masturbation and pornography. The two are normally related, especially for men. This continued for many, many years. I need to say that technically, I was a virgin. And that's why we can't talk about sex only in terms of physiology and the sex act itself. You can be a virgin and still be a freak at the end of the day. So we're not just talking about whether or not we're having sex; we're talking about ways of thinking and being. That's where we want to go. So if you were hoping to learn some technique [laughter], it's not going to happen.

Biblical Perspective

I want to try and put sex in a Biblical framework and we're going to look at the Scripture. The good thing about the verses we are going to read is that they all say the same thing, but the context is different.

The first passage we'll read is from the second chapter of Genesis, verses twenty-three to twenty-five. We'll then go to 1 Corinthians chapter six, the fifteenth to the seventeenth verse. I will then point you to one other passage of scripture in Ephesians chapter five – the famous love chapter that people like to read when they're getting married. We'll read verses twenty-five to thirty-two.

[Eve has just been made] from the rib of Adam, and he's seen her for the first time and he's saying "Wow! Man, she is awesome. And she is the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh." And then the scripture says that "for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." This is the first time that the term "wife" is used in the Bible. This is obviously referring to marriage. So God is establishing the institution of marriage, and this is going to be repeated in the other passages.

[In 1st Corinthians] the Apostle Paul is talking to the Church in Corinth. The [members] have some issues, but he's encouraging them and talking to them about their own bodies, saying that their bodies are temples, and so they need to be careful about whom they join their bodies with. Their bodies are sacred, they're temples. God Himself – "Christ in you" – lives within their bodies. And then he mentions the term "prostitute," and then he quotes Genesis chapter 2: "the two shall become one flesh." But is he talking about marriage?

He's not talking about marriage because generally speaking, we don't marry prostitutes. That's a business transaction. For Paul it doesn't matter, because he says the two shall become one flesh. But he's not talking about marriage, but simply about sex.

In the last passage, Ephesians chapter five, things tend to change. The Apostle Paul starts off talking about husbands and wives. He was giving this church instructions with regards with how husbands ought to relate to wives, how wives ought to relate to husbands. But things start to get dramatic in verse 32, when he says that "this is deep...this is a mystery. I'm not really talking about man and woman or husbands and wives. What I'm really referring to Christ and the Church." So in this context, that phrase "the two shall become one flesh" is referring to Christ and the Church.

So we have "the two shall become one flesh" representing three different things in the scripture: marriage, sex, and Christ and the Church.

And so, sex is a metaphor of this relationship between Christ and the church. Sex is a model for this relationship between Christ and the church, however, I must caution that the relationship between Christ

and the church is not a model for sex. In fact, further in 1 Corinthians chapter six, we read that food is for the stomach and stomach is for the food, but God is going to do away with them both. In other words, there's no sex in heaven, because sex is a shadow of the relationship between Christ and the Church. When Christ is completely married to His Church, when we meet Him, why would we need sex? If sex is pointing us to something, and the something it's pointing us to we already have, then why do we need the shadow?

Erotic living

To go back to my testimony – I had to struggle while desperately fighting the urges and temptations of masturbation. I prayed, I fasted, and I read, meditated and memorized scripture. I followed all the prescriptions. And at the same time, I was a minister, so I was having Bible studies in my dorm room, trying to lead people to Christ, encouraging people in the ways of God and examining the ways of Christ. In terms of lifestyle and activities, I was doing the things that I knew to do, yet it seemed like nothing was working for me.

As I mentioned in chapel, I later came to find out that 90% of men and 80% of women in the US masturbate. I had been thinking I was all by myself, that I was hopeless and struggling and that it was just me. And again, I don't know the statistics for Kenya, but my suspicion is that the statistics are similar, simply because of all the conversations I've had with young people.

And it seems to me that Christians suffer in a different way than non-Christians do. We have this commitment to celibacy before marriage, so when we do anything sexual, there's usually some guilt and condemnation attached to it, which may or may not be the case for non-Christians who, generally speaking, don't have a commitment to abstinence.

In fact, I would argue that most Christians have a shame-based view of sexuality. Sex is something that is not to be talked about, or even thought about. It's something to be avoided. But if we have a shame-based view of sexuality, even when we get married, we still have a shame-based view of sexuality. It's not like you get married and all of a sudden your thoughts about sex change. I've counselled married couples, godly couples, who when they have sex, they have to imagine God turning his head. Even when they're doing it the right way! We should imagine God celebrating when we have sex within marriage.

For those of us who are struggling, I want to give some helpful hints to expressing sexuality in righteous ways.

First of all, I need to define a word that has been terribly misused in our day; that word is Eros. I'm told that when people would die in ancient Greece, the first thing people would ask is "did he live erotically?" That is what eros means: to be fully engaged. To be full of zest. Or passion. So what they were asking was "Was he fully engaged in life? Was he passionate? Did he live with zeal and zest? Even if he was pursuing the wrong things, was he passionately wrong? And again, as we discussed in chapel, ultimately, this is what will transform us and transport us to ways of living that we were meant for. This is how we overcome whatever sexual temptations we are facing.

What is happening in our world is that things like eros have been terribly reduced to sex. When we think of eros, or erotic, we're basically thinking about sex, yet the words mean much more than that. So we've got to reclaim the meaning of those words. We have to take eroticism out of the dimension of sex only. Our entire lives – not just sex – have to be erotic.

What would happen if the only time you felt connected to God or you really worshipped God was on Sunday morning between 11 and 1? Would that be cool? It would be miserable, wouldn't it, if all the other hours of your existence, you were disconnected or disengaged from Him? And what would happen if the only time we experienced eros, the only time we came alive, or became turned on, aroused, engaged, fulfilled or connected with people, was in the bedroom? It would be misery. Yet for many people, that's exactly what's happening. The only time they feel good is when they're hooked up with someone. That's a miserable life.

So the challenge for us – and it's really a high calling – is to live erotically in every dimension of our lives. Do you know what that's called in the scripture? Living in the Spirit. Living by the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit.

Be careful with this, because we live in a world that is going to keep on feeding us sex, as though sex is the answer. How many magazines keep promising that you can experience the big "O" as though that's the goal in life? As though we'll all be happy and fulfilled if we experience the big "O." But it seems to me that people are experiencing the big "O" in record numbers. Are we happier?

One of the things the world is doing, and is pretty successful at it, is pimping sexuality so that sexuality models something else other than the relationship between Christ and the Church. It could be a beer, a car, or Nivea. I mean, what does a woman have to do with a car? Why is she laying naked on the hood of a car? Because she's modeling something. That's even what we call her: a model. The company is using her sexuality to point to something, so that you will buy it. That's pimping.

But I'll give the world credit for this: at least it understands that sexuality models something. Many of us in the church haven't figured that out yet. That is why I mentioned in chapel that if you're studying accounting because the market demands that there are more accountants in Kenya, but your heart's passion is for music, that's passionless living, and there are consequences for that.

Don't think that we can live our lives in any kind of way and there will be no repercussions. Don't be deceived that we can do things for the sake of capitalism – which is the true terrorist by the way. Capitalism turns men into slaves. We do so many things for paper, for shillings; we sell ourselves short, we put aside our purpose, our destiny and our calling for some paper. And when we fail to live passionate lives, this primal energy that is within us gets designated to only one area of our lives, and often times, that area is sex because sex is so powerful.

That's how addictions form – because there is something we're mandated to do by God with our lives that we're not doing, and the passion He has given us to do those things is not being used in all the dimensions of our lives. And so all those things get stuck in one dimension of our lives, and that one dimension begins to crumble under the weight we're placing on it because it was not designed to carry that weight. Our sexuality wasn't designed to fulfill us. It's supposed to enhance our lives, not to carry the weight of our lives. When sexuality begins to carry the ultimate meaning and purpose of our lives, then we've got

problems. But the problem is not sex. The symptom might be some sexual behaviors or sexual activity, but sex isn't the core issue. The core issue is: why are we not engaging with reckless abandon in the things that God has put in our heart? For each person, that core issue might be different. Mine was rejection.

The last thing I wanted to do was to tell somebody my problem, but I got desperate enough. So I went to a Christian counsellor, and he encouraged me to write a journal. To be honest with you, I thought that that was stupid. I thought "Man, I need spiritual deliverance. You need to be laying your hands on me and casting out these lust demons." But I don't think I had a lust demon at all. I was just a healthy man, with a healthy sex drive that I did not know how to manage. And the counsellor was perceptive enough to know that.

I respected him enough to follow his instructions even though I didn't understand why. It took some months, but the pattern that emerged in my writing was that I was most tempted when I was feeling rejected. So that was my trigger. Someone would say something to me and I would agree with it. Someone would say "you know what? You didn't do that well." And I'd say "you're right," and I'd feel bad about it. I had to address my mum's and dad's divorce in childhood. I thought it was my fault that they got divorced. As you know, as children we internalize things, often times in irrational ways, and if those things are not challenged, we stay with them. We could be fifty, sixty, seventy years old, still having warped ideas about our person and our worth stemming from stuff from childhood that was never really addressed. So when I began addressing those issues, things changed for me in terms of my sexual behavior. In other words, I stopped addressing masturbation directly because I realized it wasn't the issue.

And having talked to many people since then, I've discovered that many who struggle with some kind of sexual addiction, deviancy or dysfunction, struggle with issues of rejection. The spirit of rejection is very powerful, and we all experience rejection. The question is how to we deal with the spirit of rejection without suffering from rejection. Jesus was despised and rejected of men, yet He never needed to be delivered from rejection because He knew who He was. He had His identity intact.

So we see how all these things – sexuality, identity, erotic living, holiness – are interrelated.

"Holiness" is an old English word that literally means 'whole.' What I'm talking about today has everything to do with "whol-iness," our ability to engage in every dimension of our lives with the passion God has given us. It's really not about how much make-up you wear. It's not about how much facial hair you have, brothers, or whether you have dreadlocks or not....when you know someone who is holy, what you notice about them is that they engage. Their whole person is engaged in the different activities and dimensions of their lives: in their social gatherings, their worship of God, their work, their school. It looks like they're looking through you, or penetrating you. They're so into you. It's like their hanging onto your every word. They're focused. They're in your presence, and there's something really refreshing about them. That's how holy people – people who are fully engaged – live.

In fact, we don't call that holy. We call that sexy.

So you might say "I don't know what it is about that guy; he's not even all that cute. He is sexy." What you're really saying is that there's something about this person, there's something he has, he has an identity, and he has a passion, and it's attractive." Sexy people are attractive. Holy people are attractive.

But we have so discombobulated that word, that we think a holy person is somebody aloof. That's just the opposite of what holy means.

It's really unfortunate that we used David as an example of disengagement or passionless living because he was an extremely passionate man. He was the only man in scripture about whom God said is "after my heart." David made many mistakes, but they were passionate mistakes. He repented often, and it was passionate repentance. The dude was passionate. He was a holy man. God was pleased to have Jesus come through his lineage. That's what we've got to have: passion. There's no substitute for that.

One of the things I ask God is to enable me to leave a legacy to my children, and that legacy is not necessarily land or money. The legacy is them having a passionate daddy, them knowing a man who lived his life passionately. I know that most children don't have that. I didn't have that. I want my children to know that they can engage in anything that God has put in their heart, and incline their hands, hearts and minds to that because Daddy left a model for them with which to do so. Emasculated men can't do that. Passive men can't do that.

Overcoming addiction

One of the first things I had to learn to do was to forgive – forgive myself. That might sound a little strange, because of how a lot of Christians think. I was thinking "What I did was so horrible...God, why do you put up with me? I'm just a mess; I don't know what to do."

But I started changing the script, and so I'd say "God, I messed up for the thousandth time but I forgive myself. I'm asking you to forgive me, and I'm going to accept that forgiveness."

Why is self-forgiveness is important? Because the pattern works like this. Our trigger emerges (whether it's rejection or something else). And we feel really bad about ourselves. And we masturbate to get relief from how bad we feel about ourselves. But that lasts only for a little while, and when that's over, we feel even worse about ourselves because we know that what we've done is wrong. So now we have guilt and condemnation, and we feel horrible about ourselves. And what do we do next? We want to get rid of that feeling, so we masturbate again.

When you decide to forgive ourselves, or treat ourselves well, we break that cycle. Before, I would run away from God because I felt bad about what I'd done, and I wasn't convinced that He could forgive me or that I could even receive the forgiveness He offered me. But I started changing. I'd say "Look God, this is who I am. These are my weaknesses, my mistakes. You say that I'm your son, so I'm coming to you. I'm not running away from you. You're going to have to sort me out. This is your problem."

About a year ago, my daughter was two years old, and we were teaching her how to use the *choo* [bathroom]. One day, for whatever reason, she *susu*-ed [peed] on herself. I was so frustrated, and I asked her, "why did you do that?" She looked at me with so much confidence and boldness and said "sijui [I don't know]."

She was absolutely right. She didn't know. I'm the daddy. What she was really saying is "You're the daddy. You figure it out. I'm two years old, I don't know why I did it." And that's how we are as children of God.

There are so many things we do and we don't know what we're doing or why. Daddy will sort it out. But run to Him. Don't run away from Him.

Remember the scripture in Proverbs chapter 3: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path." The part I love is "acknowledge Him in all your ways." Christians think it means "acknowledge Him in all your good ways." But He says "acknowledge Me in all your ways." That means "acknowledge me in your bad ways." Acknowledge Him on your worst day, when you do something you swore you would never do. Run to Him. He's your daddy. He understands. He knows. He knows not only what you did, but also why you did it. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And He brings so much patience, understanding and wisdom because He faced all those things himself. We don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses. He went through it all but without sin. Jesus was a man. He had all the temptations we have, and yet He overcame them. And so can we through His power. His power, not our power.

There are different strategies [for overcoming addiction], but they are secondary. Different strategies work for different people. Journaling really helped me. Jesus says He's the vine, and we are the branches [John 15: 1-5]. That partly means that we need to admit that we can't do this. We have to come to a place where we get out of denial, and we say "you know what? I'm addicted. I can't stop this." If we don't reach that point, I don't know how we can start the journey of healing or freedom. Jesus is saying "I'm the vine, you're the branches...apart from Me, you can do nothing." "It's not by power, it's not by might; it's by My spirit," says the Lord.

Sometimes I have to say this to myself because sometimes I end up thinking "I'm the vine, I have to work it out. I have to make this happen by my own effort." So I have to repeat to myself over again "I am not the vine." You're not the vine; you're the branch. Christians forget that. We start thinking we're the vine, that we have to work it out. But we don't have to work it out. The same scripture says we can't work it out without Him: "Without me, you can do nothing."

You are also going to have to find the root of your issue. Through which door did the strongman enter into your life? You need to find that door so that you can shut it. Journaling helped me find mine. Yours might be different. You have to find that issue so that you address it, as opposed to addressing masturbation. If you address masturbation directly, generally speaking, you're going to lose. And even if you win by some superhuman effort, what generally happens is that you'll get addicted to something else. People who overcome an addiction through self-effort generally transfer their addiction to something else. You may have been able, by some superhuman effort, to overcome smoking cigarettes, but now you've gained 50kg because you've transferred that energy into eating. That's why I say that we must win by the Spirit. If we fight another way, we're going to have to fight again. So find the root issue.

If you need some help, if you get stuck along the way, and you're not able to quite figure out what's motivating this behavior, get some help. It will take some courage, but get some help, like from DCCC [Daystar Compassion and Care Center].

At the end of the day, we're all in the same boat.

But we need to be selective about the people to whom we tell our struggles, because there are people who will take advantage of our weaknesses. So find someone you respect, whom you have confidence in, whom you know cares about you and that they won't be spreading your business in the street, and who may have insights into the weakness in your life. That's what worked for me. I was at a dead end, and a wise man of God who operated in the spirit of a wonderful counsellor really helped me by pointing me in the right direction. He did not give me prescriptions, and that's why I'm trying to avoid prescriptions. He respected me, my life and my relationship with Christ enough to simply point me in the right direction.

Can anything separate you from the love of God? Claim the love of God. Reach out for God with both hands. It's the one thing we can absolutely be greedy about. And don't allow anything, not even your own sin, to separate you from that love. People struggling with rejection find it difficult to claim the love of God because they don't think they're worth it. But we have to learn to claim the love of God for ourselves. No matter how bad things get, no matter what we've done, let us always remember that that does not affect our worth in Him. I don't care what it is, or how many times you've done it. It does not affect your internal, intrinsic worth as a human being. You may have done something wrong, but that does not make you wrong. You may have made a mess, but that doesn't make you a mess. You're still of great worth to the Lord. He still loves you with an everlasting love. And there's still nothing that can separate you from that love.

Claim His love. Every day with the coming of the new sun, claim his love. Then you'll have the strength to start changing some of your behavior. If you start off by trying to change your behavior, it's going to be counter-productive. And ultimately, that is not what Christianity is about. Christianity is about being transformed from within.

Dawa ya moto ni moto

Studies on addiction show that there are some pathways that are built over time in your brain. When we become addicted, these neurological pathways are built up over time, so that, for example, when I feel rejection, that feeling goes through the pathway and triggers a response, and that response is usually masturbation. But as we start receiving the love of God over our lives, we begin to engage in activities that take us away from that path that we've built up over time, and we start building up new, healthy pathways. And again, that's going to be different for each person.

For me, writing poetry helped. Hip hop had got so bad that many of us who liked hip hop left it and started writing poetry without rhyme, without beats. I was still in Chicago. I would write poetry and I would perform this poetry anywhere that would let me: homeless shelters, non-Christian venues, everywhere. In other words, I started developing new pathways in order to express my passions.

We need to remember that everything is inter-related. There is no way we can manage our sexuality righteously without having our identity intact. It has to do with holiness. We cannot afford to avoid any dimension of our lives.

This is what avoidance is: a void dance. It means that we're dancing around empty spaces of our lives, and that is always self-destructive. We cannot afford to avoid anything; we cannot avoid our history, our culture, our sexuality, our gender, our society, our political situation. We have to go into it. The reason I

have these insights into sexuality is because I went into my sexuality. For all those years, my sexuality had been oppressing me, and I was running away from it. But it was killing me. Eventually I reached a point where I said, "I'm not running away from you anymore. What do you want? Why do you insist on messing up with my life?" I faced it.

Many Christians think that because the scripture says "flee youthful lust," they should flee sexuality. They shouldn't. Address your sexuality. Address your culture. If you don't, that void will express itself in different ways. I would go as far as to say this: every moral failure in your life, in my life, is as a result of our emptiness. Why do people lie? Because they don't believe their story is enough. In other words, they touch their emptiness. But instead of dealing with the emptiness, they end up lying. Why do we cheat on an exam? Isn't it because we don't think that what we have is enough? Why do we gossip and backbite? Isn't it because we've touched something we don't like about ourselves, and we don't want to address that, so we'd rather talk about how somebody else looks, how ugly that tie is? What do you do with your boredom? Do you avoid that too? Do you watch TV, which is another addiction, just a more socially acceptable one?

Go into your boredom. Stop avoiding it. The world is very good at helping us do this. We've got gadgets to keep us from dealing with restlessness. I would even say that restlessness is probably one of the major issues young people are facing today, even more than sexuality. This is one of the things I do when I'm bored: I pray "God, I believe you have given me boredom as a divine tool, that there's something you're trying to teach me. What is it? I'm open. Is there something you want to say to me?"

I want to close with this: just like we said in chapel, *dawa ya moto ni moto*. The cure or the medicine for the passion within us is more passion. It's not cold showers. You can win some battles with some strategies such as not looking at a woman, not looking at images in a movie, getting an accountability partner... we know these strategies, yet somehow, we're still in the situation. So we need something more. We need to invest our lives in something infinitely beyond our lives. And if you're willing to do that, I'll pray that God will bring a fire to your life and consume your entire being. If you want to be a drink offering before the Lord, if you want Him to pour your life out as libations upon the earth, I'll pray that that happens.

Amen.