

Truth, Beauty, Love

Part II of The Soul of Sex workshops
Daystar University, October 15, 2014

By Wandia Njoya

Last week, we learned from the discussion led by Brother Curtis that God designed sex to enhance our lives, not to carry the weight of our lives. Although God created sex as a powerful force that reflects the passion we carry in all dimensions of our lives, sex is not a substitute for all the aspects of our lives.

Unfortunately, though, the world attaches sex to almost everything, especially politics, power, consumer goods and entertainment. We're told that if we're rich and powerful, we need more than one sexual partner (which we sometimes baptize as "polygamy" to give it some respectability). We're enticed to buy cars, alcohol, perfumes, soaps and other consumer goods with adverts with semi-nude models or promises that we will be attractive if we use the product. As we saw with Sauti Sol's video "Nishike," many entertainers use sensuality to get a breakthrough in their careers.

With so many demands being made from sex, it is no wonder that sex and sexuality have crumbled under the weight of expectations God did not design it to meet, and that so many people are living their sexuality as a dysfunction or an addiction.

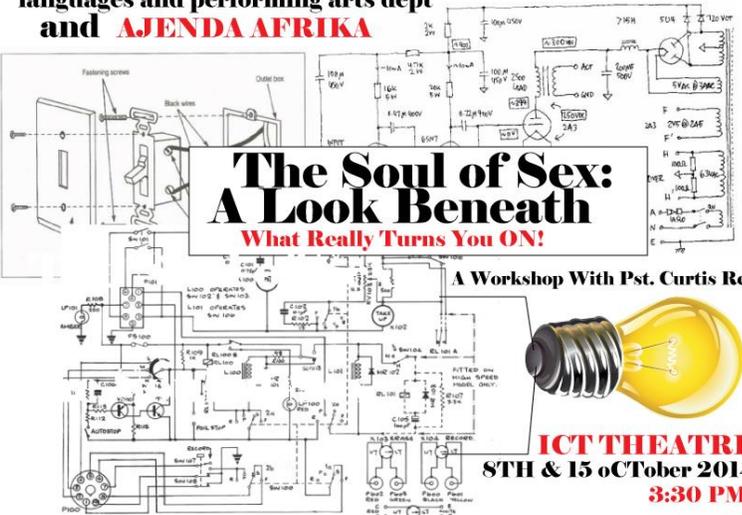
And why does the world do this to us?

Because if you can control how people express love, what attracts people to each other, you control them completely. Being able to manipulate love and sexuality means your power is not just in the public institutions, but in the intimacy of people's lives. As someone recently said, you control people if you control their tastes. We recall that at the height of the political sycophancy of the 80s and 90s, Joseph Kamotho suggested that Kenyans should hang the president's picture in their bedrooms.

We see the political power of sexual control from the story of Samson in Judges 16. In fact the story is so absurd, that one is not sure whether to laugh at Samson or get annoyed.

God had let Samson know that Samson's divine purpose was to be a judge and protect Israel from the Philistines. However, the man had a weakness for sex, and this weakness temporarily allowed the Philistines to compromise God's divine plan. In verse 1, we see that Samson slept with a prostitute, and then in verse 4, he falls in love with Delilah. The relationship was a disaster. Three times, Delilah asked Samson for the secret to his strength, and each time, Samson lied, and Delilah sold that lie to Samson's enemies. And after each unsuccessful attempt to arrest him, Samson still didn't understand that the

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woman was dangerous and that he needed to run! Instead, he remained with her and listened to her accusing him of not loving her because he did not tell the truth about his strength.

He finally conceded and the repercussions were brutal.

His eyes were gouged out, he was chained and he was made into the machine for grinding flour. But worst of all, his capture did precisely the opposite of what he was a judge for; it gave the Philistines confidence that their god was stronger than Jehovah. Samson had brought not only himself, but God into disrepute.

It is probably because God's name was tarnished that God decided to allow Samson the final victory by giving Samson the strength to break the pillars and bring down the temple of the Philistines, thereby slaying more Philistines at Samson's death than in Samson's life (v. 30). But that is not what Samson is remembered for, or why his story is retold. Delilah is the heroine of his story.

The story of Samson is the story of a fragmented, disengaged man. Samson failed to see the connection between his sexuality, his faith, and his duty as God's judge in Israel. He thought he could continue to kill lions with his bare hands while sleeping with any woman who caught his fancy, even with women who were so obviously outside the purpose of God. And his choice had consequences not just for himself, but also for God, and for his family that had to come pick his body for burial.

Another man who brought dire consequences on his nation because of his sexcapades was King Solomon. In 1 Kings 3 we see God pleased with Solomon's choice to ask for wisdom, rather than for wealth and power. And when the Lord blessed him with all three, Solomon complicated his life by marrying hundreds of women and keeping a few hundreds more. And who bore the cost? The people of the surrounding communities who were sent into forced labor (1 Kings 9), and the Israelites who paid heavy taxes to build Solomon's house and maintain his expensive lifestyle (1 Kings 12). God was also aggrieved, because Solomon started worshipping the gods brought by the women he married, and after Solomon's death, the kingdom split (1 Kings 11).

The two men show us the serious consequences borne by men, their families and communities when men choose to detach their sexuality from the rest of their lives.

We women often bear the brunt of this lack of integrity in men's lives. When I was in my twenties, it was not uncommon to think one is having a stimulating, "whole" relationship with a man, only for him to later announce that he was marrying another woman – usually one he fetched from the village – who looked more like "wife material" than we "city" women. It wasn't that they weren't enjoying our company; they did, because they could talk about their dreams, their careers and their struggles. However, they saw that interaction as different from marriage. Their model of marriage was a stereotype of having a glorified house worker, and they believed that importing a woman from the village was the way to go. Needless to say, once the kids started kicking in, the same men would be coming back hoping for affairs with the same women whom they thought could not be "wife material."

And some of the women who were rejected the first time would settle for the humiliating position of being a *mpango wa kando* or a second wife.

veEn today, many men men separate intellectual friendships from spiritual ones and from family ones, so there's a woman for the bar, a woman to take to the parents and bear the children, and another for the office. And each of the three (or more) relationships involves sex. And each of these women compromises on their happiness and smiles to keep appearances. Maya Angelou's poem brilliantly captures how painful it is to be in a relationship with a man who has separate, fragmented love relationships rather than one whole one:

They Went Home

They went home and told their wives,
that never once in all their lives,
had they known a girl like me,
But... They went home.

They said my house was licking clean,
no word I spoke was ever mean,
I had an air of mystery,
But... They went home.

My praises were on all men's lips,
they liked my smile, my wit, my hips,
they'd spend one night, or two or three.
But...

A nation cannot grow to its true calling when its men are fragmented and the women are suffering. And I bet that if you check the lives of most of our Mpigs, they are just as fragmented. That's why we hate them so much. Just as their emotional and sexual lives are disconnected – they hit on the daughters of their colleagues and the wives of their poor constituents while their own wives are at home – Mpigs also don't see that the taxes we citizens pay, the high salaries they demand, their unnecessary “benchmarking” trips, and their sabotage of public services like transport, health, and education are very connected to the unemployment, poverty and poor health of Kenyans. As a poor substitute to their jobs as lawmakers and civil servants, Mpigs give us charity, sink an occasional borehole, pay our bills at Nairobi hospital and contribute at harambees as we substitute our gratitude for votes every five years. And we Kenyans remain poor and without dignity.

These things we call politicians are an embarrassment to our humanity, and to our society's manhood.

Being “Sexy”

The second lesson from Curtis's discussion that is important for our discussion today is the definition of sexy. We saw that unlike the world which defines sexy as the opposite of holiness, what we call "sexy" is actually a wholeness, a refreshing personality that is completely engaged and focused in the different dimensions of one's life. In Biblical terms, Curtis said, it's called "living in the Spirit." That means that Biblical attraction to people of the opposite sex must be based on passionate living, not just on one dimension of life like one's looks, one's bank account and one's status. And ultimately, we find that people who are in relationships surrounded by prestige and wealth end up looking outside their marriages for that other thing...the one that turns you on.

And one such person was Potiphar's wife.

In Genesis 39, we see that Potiphar's wife was a woman married to a powerful man, over whom she had enough influence that she could get an innocent man thrown into prison. But all that wealth and power did not satisfy her. By contrast, Joseph seemed to have his act together. He was holy, or sexy, because whatever he did, he put his passion into it. Joseph had suffered great betrayal at the hands of his brothers who sold him into slavery. But rather than wallow in bitterness, he worked hard and diligently in the land of his exile. The Bible says that Joseph was successful and found favor among the Egyptians, and the Lord blessed not only him, but the households where Joseph worked. Is it surprising, then, that Potiphar's wife was immensely attracted to Joseph?

What Potiphar's wife did not understand though, was that what attracted her to Joseph was not just his physical looks; it was the presence of the Lord, and the passion with which Joseph lived and worked. And that's why she underestimated Joseph's power to resist her proposal.

Meanwhile, Joseph was able to resist her not because he had developed strategies for resisting women coming on to him; it was because he thought of the larger picture. Who was he? He was a member of the community called to God's promise through Abraham. Why was he where he was? He may not have been sure, but he knew God had something to do with it. To whom was he responsible? He was dedicated to God and trusted by his master. He knew – despite his difficult circumstances – that his life's purpose was bigger than having a fling with a woman. Or bigger than a bowl of soup, like in the case of his uncle Esau.

It is the power of that conviction about God's purpose – not Joseph's superhuman control of his sexuality – that saved him from succumbing to temptation. Joseph's life confirms what we learned last week – that the best way with to manage our sexuality is to deal with the totality of our lives, such as our faith, our professions, our responsibility and our ethics.

The situation of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is familiar. Here in the university, we ladies tend to get attracted to teachers and members of staff. We see handsome young and mature men who sound intelligent, have wide experience and may have travelled abroad, who have two or even three degrees, while we're still struggling to get our first one. What's more, the men have power over lives of students. Sometimes they even have good cars. Lecturers might be the closest thing we'll get to a powerful and

prestigious man. And so we think that that's sexy, and we develop a crush on the said man. And if he does not notice us, we try all manner of ways to trap him like Potiphar's wife did.

When it comes to pastors, we fall even harder because the man probably has everything the lecturer has, but better still, he is a man of God. We therefore think that if we have affairs with the pastors, it can't be wrong. God knows. And when it's a counsellor, we get the romantic notion that "this guy knows my faults and problems, and accepts me as I am."

But, at the end of the day, we have completely misunderstood why we are attracted to the man. We think it's because he's cute, but what really is pulling us with such as force is his apparent passion for his profession, or for helping us. To get out of the trap of being beholden to such men, we must do what Joseph did; not shout "shindwe" at our attraction, but think of the larger context: who am I, what is God's purpose for my life?

That's what Rahab the prostitute (yes) did. In Joshua chapter 2, Rahab recognized the Israelite spies who had come to her house had a greater, Godly purpose. So she hid them from the king of Jericho, and before helping them escape, she told them: "I know that the Lord has given you the land...For we heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt...the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now then, swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you will also deal kindly with my father's house" (8-13 RSV).

What did Rahab do here? First she remembered history (the journey of the Israelites from Egypt), then she remembered her responsibility (to her family). So rather than take the opportunity to make a quick buck through sex, she made a bargain for her family to be saved.

In other words, ladies, we must remember our purpose. We're here studying not to get papers, but to have an impact on society. When we consult a counsellor for help, the larger, Godly goal is to get healed from trauma; not to find a man who loves us. Do not settle for the temporary influence of Potiphar's wife by making bargains with lecturers to make concessions for a better grade. It may work for a while, but you will be forgotten as quickly as Potiphar's wife whom we know nothing about except that she tried to cheat on her husband. Just as she temporarily succeeded in getting an innocent man thrown in prison, you too may get the grade, and the paper, from that manipulation. But believe me, everyone who knows what you did will never remember you for anything else. That reputation will follow you the rest of your life. And even if nobody remembers, you will. And you will never be confident in your abilities, and will always seek more opportunities to manipulate others through sex to get what you want. Meanwhile, the man you tried to trap will flourish like Joseph did.

However, even if you have already made that mistake, all is not lost. Jesus offers us the opportunity to make a clean break from that cycle. Like the woman caught in adultery whom he saved from being stoned to death, like the Samaritan woman at the well who had seven husbands, Jesus can help you can start a new life and live the purpose God created you for. He can give you living water so that you will never thirst for that kind of temporary, superficial attention again.

But sometimes – if not most of the time – we ladies find ourselves at the receiving end of attention which deviates from God’s purpose for our purpose. We get harassed and traumatized by brothers who have deviated from God’s purpose and want to take us along the same path with them. Again, remember Rahab and do not give in. Most importantly, take a step of courage and report such incidents to friendly sisters and brothers in the faculty who will guide you in getting healing and justice. Remember to keep the evidence like texts and emails that you receive. If you are not sure whether a brother is being irresponsible and hitting on you, find one of us and share.

But please do not keep silent and hope that the pain will go away, because it most likely won’t. It will hang over you like a cloud and prevent you from seeing the sunshine of God’s purpose for your life. More than that, just like Rahab saved her family through her actions, reporting what happened may save another sister from deeper wounds than yours.

Living wholly, holy lives

So now we know that the world is doing its best to distort our sexuality so that it can better control us. How do we live our sexuality victoriously?

We must live as wholly, holy, sexy African men and women called to God’s purpose. We must remove the barriers that are fragmenting our lives individually by separating our sexuality from the totality of our lives, and fragmenting us socially by making men and women hostile to each other. We must understand that the world we live in is a battlefield that is hostile to African men and women living their full purpose. We must be true men and women.

How do we do this?

We do this by connecting all the aspects our lives so that we live as whole, holy human beings. We must connect our history, our culture, our faith and our gender to the reality of the world we live in. We must think of our masculinity and femininity politically, historically and economically, and stop restricting gender to sex, our sexual organs and the ceremonies around them, and trivial matters like who does the domestic chores.

One way to do so is to deliberately seek out role African models who lived wholly, holy, engaged lives.

One such person was Patrice Lumumba of Congo.

In Raoul Peck’s film *Lumumba*, we see a fully engaged man who saw the connection between the Congo he was fighting for and his role as a husband and a father. One of the most powerful scenes for me is the one in Brussels, as King Bedouin “gives” independence to Congo and asks the Congolese to be worthy of the trust that the king had placed in them. Lumumba is visibly upset, and as Kasavubu reads his speech in which he indulges the patronizing devaluation of independence, Lumumba briefly leaves the hall and is cautioned by his friends that his own speech was too risky. Lumumba replies (my loose translation

and paraphrase): “You’ve heard Kasavubu and we must reply, otherwise what history will our children remember?” And to the podium he went, and gave one of the greatest speeches of our time, in which he addressed the men and women of Congo, (not the King) and told them to remember independence as a great day about which they would teach their children.

Our last memory of Lumumba is not his assassination and dismemberment; it is his triumphant letter to his wife, which stands as a contrast to many of our shallow politicians who would sooner read some fancy press statement to the media than talk intelligently to their families or to the people they claim to fight for. In this letter, Lumumba goes back to the importance of history and tells his wife Pauline: “History will one day have its say; it will not be the history taught in the United Nations, Washington, Paris, or Brussels...it will be ours... Africa will write its own history...”

What an engaged man Lumumba was! He was keen that what he was fighting for was bigger than his own chance of acquiring power, or even for Congo at the time. He was fighting for the future generations embodied in his children, and for the entire African continent.

This is what a real man is! A man is fully engaged. A man sees the connection between what he does for family and what he does for the nation. A man thinks continentally and sees himself on the platform of history. By contrast, the males who are the role models in our country think “me, here and now.”

So sisters, the most important thing you must look for in a man is not whether he can provide and protect – although that would be very welcome and is his responsibility as a spouse and as a parent. Your primary preoccupation should be: is this man doing what God called him to do? Is he being responsible to society? Is he living erotically, or is he simply playing roles defined by the adverts and our warped materialist values? Does he see himself in terms of heroes past and generations to come? I think that is what is captured in this stanza of African America poet Nikki Giovanni’s “The Women Gather”:

we judge a man by his dreams
not alone his deeds
we judge a man by his intent
not alone his shortcomings
we judge a man because it is not unusual
to know him through those who love him

To think like Nikki Giovanni and other great African women, you must be like Rahab: you must know your history and your community, and use it to hold the man accountable. If he does what is right by God and society, he will do right by you as a woman.

To the brothers, the message is the same. Your calling is to live as a true man to not just yourselves, but also to the people who love you and the society you live in.

But that kind of manhood is costly, as we see from the lives of Lumumba, Sankara and even Mandela. Even the Apostle Paul referred to this high cost when he wrote “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25, RSV). To be a true man is a great calling.

Beauty and Love

But it isn't just our identity as African women and men that we need to be deliberate about; we also need to be deliberate about our standards of what we find beautiful or not.

One of the greatest frustrations we face as Kenyan women is the failure of men to take charge in defining what they find attractive. Men often explicitly state that they supposedly don't like women wearing make up on their faces, weaves on their heads, and necklines too low or hems too high to leave anything to the imagination. We have even heard stories of some men stripping women naked in public. However, from where we women stand, all we know is that men go for the women dressed in the very way men say they don't like.

And as our discussion on Wednesday revealed, many men haven't really determined what they themselves consider beautiful, and so they settle for waiting for the woman to either wear something they like or for looking when the woman is wearing something that attracts their attention. The men in the audience were hesitant to state what they like because they felt that that would be tantamount to dictating what women should wear. However, that definition of taste is not for the woman, but for the man himself, because if he doesn't decide what he likes, Kim Kadarshian – or the media or eurocentrism – will define his taste for him. And those tastes are intimately linked to identity and power, as we learn from Leopold Senghor's famous poem "Black woman":

Naked woman, black woman
Dressed in your color that is life, in your form that is beauty!

I grew up in your shadow; the softness of your hands shielded my eyes, and now, at the height
of Summer and Noon,
From the crest of a charred hilltop I discover you, Promised Land
And your beauty strikes my heart like an eagle's lightning flash.

Naked woman, dark woman
Ripe fruit with firm flesh, dark raptures of black wine,
Mouth that makes mine music
Savanna of clear horizons, savanna quivering at the fervent caress of the East Wind,
Sculptured drum, stretched drumskin that moans under the hands of the conqueror
Your deep contralto voice is the spiritual song of the Beloved.

Naked woman, dark woman
Oil that no breeze can ripple, oil that soothes the thighs of athletes and of the princes of Mali
Gazelle with celestial limbs, the pearls are stars upon the night of your skin.
Delight of the mind's riddles, the reflections of red gold from your shimmering skin
In the shadow of your hair, the neighboring suns of your eyes illuminate my despair

Naked woman, black woman
I sing your passing beauty and fix it in Eternity
before jealous Fate reduces you to ashes to nourish the roots of life.

This poem is an icon of the Negritude movement that recognized that appreciating black esthetics, black beauty, is central to affirming our dignity as Africans. The poem uses African seasons (East Wind), the African landscape (Savannah and gazelles), African history (Princes of Mali) and music (drums). We too must know our history, our cultures, our environment to be able to express love authentically. And we don't have to invent the wheel; not everyone is a poet or needs to be one. We just need to be humble enough to deliberate seek poets and artists who paint African beauty with words, tunes and colors and use their works as tools to authentically express our love and what we consider beautiful.

If the men can use such tools as the standard by which they offer compliments to women, women will eventually pick up and work with what (but not necessarily do everything) the men indicate that they like. I refer you to an interesting debate about beauty, pain and culture on the Ajenda Afrika website. We may not have agreed on what is beautiful, but something powerful happened because we decided that what is beautiful must be our decision, we must know why we've made it, and doing it in conversation with community helps.

Just like in the case of beauty, we must see our choice of partners and our romantic relationships contextually, not just as a couple. Like Curtis said, the world tries to cheat us that the deepest, and probably the only intimacy available to people in love is physical sexual act. And so we must expand intimacy and romance beyond the limited boundaries of sex set by the world, to our best values, our best memories and our best dreams. We must see the environment as part and parcel of our relationships, and support those who fight for protecting it. We must be creative and bold in deciding what is "romantic" for us, as this poem "The True Road" by David Diop reminds us:

Brothers, you whose youth they would like to destroy
Do not expect to find the truth in their twisted words
In their demeaning spans and their bedroom betrayals
Do not expect to find beauty in their masks which twitch
And which soak their ugly wounds in perfume
Or find love in their uncovered thighs
Truth beauty love are
The worker smashing the deadly calm in the bars
The sensuous and serious woman walking by
The kiss that goes beyond the cold manipulation
The flowers of engaged couples and the child in loving arms
This is everything they have lost, brothers
And which we will uncover on the paths of the world

To live wholly, holy and erotically, we need to be more decisive in determining what is truth, beauty and love. And fortunately, God has given us the principles to guide us and so have many great poets and artists. And once again, when we're not sure, we can seek help from our own artists. But let us not allow the movies and stars like Beyonce and Kim Kadarshian, who model erotic lives just to earn a living, determine what is beautiful and what is romantic for us.

May God bless us as we seek to live erotically, contextually spiritually and victoriously, both within our relationships and as individuals. May we also always remember that the ultimate value of our lives is

living within God’s divine plan, and in simple human dignity, as we read in this poem by David “Black-Skillz” Oyuke. Amen.

Looking back

David Black-Skillz

Looking back to the days when sunsets were watched and rainbows were not the only things that brought colour to the earth.

When the love of one’s life could say “look into my eyes and find home” and not be laughed at for sounding corny or comical.

When love was not just a word, but truth and peace, hope and freedom, joy and home all wrapped in a beautiful garment called words.

When hope was not frozen in the minds of those already lacking the word but was a baby’s first sense, as they looked on, of what lay beyond.

When smiles reflected the ambitions of the heart and the ambitions of the heart were noble and honourable.

When togetherness was not just in taking responsibility, but showing responsibility.

When dreams brought faith, rather than faith being seen as a dream.

When truth was not hidden and passion was not blinded.

When our mindsets were set to mind the mindsets of loving minds and in turn, we would become apprentices in the craft of love.

When wisdom was God given and not self sought, when it was not just a framed word describing what we used to have.

When we knew that thought was not what mattered, but the content of the thought.

When it was not where we journeyed to find the purpose of self, but why we journey.

When it was never about how we looked back, but why we looked back.

We look back to recognise the truth behind the truth and the inspiration behind the inspiring.

We look back to see when you and i believed, believed that these were not just mere words, but results of our choice to believe.

And therefore i look back, i look back to that day,
that day when i began to believe. . .