



FROM THE FAMINE OF SEXUAL ADDICTION TO THE FEAST OF LIFE **By Andrew Comiskey**

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I approach the topic of sexual addiction; a.k.a. bondage to habitual sexual sin; in weakness. Any authority I have comes from Jesus. He is my strength. I have no strength to resist sexual sin apart from Him. Left alone, I would feed off the flesh of others until I choke to death.

Sex became the bread of life for many of us. From early on, we fed off false images and ideas that imitated life. We bought the lie that said, "Let your imagination be filled with whatever appeals to you the most." United with graphic symbols of idealized man or woman, our aloneness ceased temporarily.

Until the fall. After our descent into masturbation or union with another (more accurately defined as mutual masturbation), our idealized sources of love and life turn on us. False lovers quickly reveal our own darkness. In the reflection of their bloodshot, still hungry eyes, we glimpse our own aloneness, now accentuated by another failed attempt at union.

Still, no matter how aware we are of the futility of our quests, we can't stop. Why? First of all, we like the darkness. The fallen and conniving part of us (e.g., the flesh, old man) doesn't want to give up its control over how pleasure is secured. Mere knowing that something is sin doesn't free us from choosing sin. I'm perfectly aware of how I have deliberately chose the way of darkness in regard to sexual fantasy and masturbation. I chose it because I wanted it. I know full well the ultimate vanity of my pursuit. I opted for pleasure en route to consummating my own moral failure.

This sinful tendency becomes particularly oppressive the longer it goes on. The Father revealed this to me a while back after an intense period of sexual temptation. Although I didn't yield to sin, I was puzzled and cried out to Him, "Why the intensity, Father?" Over the course of an hour, the Father revealed a chain of memories that conveyed how deep and constant my pursuit of illicit sexual imagery was, beginning in late childhood and extending over the course of my teens. I spent much time alone seeking out erotic pictures and books and ultimately people. No one knew this in "real life" but in my private world a powerful brokenness deepened each time I entered into an illicit union with an image on paper or in person, or one summoned from my own debased memory bank.

Satan inhabits this private world and does all he can to strengthen the tie between immoral images and the deceived heart that does not resist them. He wants us to sacrifice more time and money and energy in devoting ourselves to idols in the form of idealized man or woman. A very real form of worship transpires here. We bow down to the lord of perversion--he who imitates life and love and creativity via sexual immorality--when we become one with an image or person outside the heterosexual covenant.

The deep-rooted nature of these practices and the spiritual oppression that accompanies them involves a fear and a flight from real connectedness with real people. I refer to non-erotic intimacy

here. Most persons with long-standing struggle with sexual sin do not know the meaning of relationships where esteem and empowering transpire without seduction, with both members fully clothed.

Early on, the addict began to equate sex with intimacy. Aware of his aloneness and the perceived inability of others to meet his needs for empowering and esteem, (s)he discovers the power of sex. Legitimate needs get suppressed in the rush of orgasm and the lure of erotica yet to be had.

Illicit sex afford him a kind of control. He need not face the pain and risk involved in becoming known by others as a person who is as strong and gifted as he is wounded and needy. He finds cover in the flesh--idealized body images wholly separate from the heart. He can get it when he wants it and thereby exerts control over the more risky and tenuous returns of relating to others at a heart level.

A man to whom I was ministering conveyed well the tendency of the addict to hide his heart by fixating on the body. "I have never really known a woman. Since junior high school I have related to them in order to have sex with them. But I have never known one. It is scary for me to admit that. I don't know how to love." The Father is liberating this young man from the false esteem and power that sex gave him. And in its place, the Father is reclaiming his heart and uniting his heart with the favor only a Father can grant his son. Only through the Father's love can the power of false love be bound and true love loosed within us. Some signposts in this journey toward freedom are as follows.

Steps to Freedom from Sexual Addiction

First, we must be open to meeting Jesus on the ground of sexual brokenness. We must admit to Him how sick our sin has made us and that we are powerless to heal ourselves. I believe that restoration of those bound to habitual sexual sin necessitates that the sinner own his sin; secondly, the Lord must sufficiently access his heart so that the sinner becomes profoundly aware of the devastation wrought by his sin. Many of the men I have counseled could describe their sin as such but remained split off from any genuine remorse. The deep recesses of their hearts still contained the will and desire to sin; at some basic level, they remained open and even playful to union with evil.

The Father through Jesus pierces through our darkness in order to reveal to us our hearts. He commands the honest admission that at times we choose darkness rather than light, rags rather than royal garments, lies rather than the truth. The confession of our own double-mindedness in the face of Jesus affords the light greater access to the whole heart. And in turn, as the light breaks in, the true nature of sin is revealed and we are freed to cry out from our depths for the cleansing and deliverance we desperately need.

We need mediators here, Godly men and women to stand with us and help facilitate the revelation of our own sin and the greater revelation of the Crucified One who waits to bear our sin upon Himself. The love of others coaxes us out of the hidden, walled-off fortress where we have pleased ourselves with lies. Becoming known by the people of God through the confession of sin mediates Jesus. In allowing ourselves, rags and all, to be known by them, we yield more freely to Him.

We must make a full confession of our idolatrous history to Jesus, preferably in the presence of a trusted mediator. As I mentioned earlier, the roots of our idolatry extend back a long ways and require an extended time at the foot of the Cross. Here our hearts become present to us. We begin to grieve over our sin as its depth becomes apparent. Jesus, ever present in holy love, compels us to lay down each occasion for darkness at the foot of the cross. At once we know mourning and release as the confession progresses.

The more we dare to be known by Jesus the more free we become. His Presence draws out like a magnet the death incurred by immorality. Darkness invaded our depths; through confession, light penetrates deeper still and breaks the stronghold of sin. Jesus assumes the broken, sullied remnants of our bondage upon Himself. He draws near in order to draw out the sin; He avails His body to us to bear our brokenness so that we can be free. I am reminded of how Elijah foreshadowed Jesus when he stretched himself out upon the dead boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "O lord, my God, let this boy's life return to him!" (1 Kings 17:21). The boy lived. In the same way, Jesus stretches himself out over us and intimately assumes the death incurred by our sin. We live in turn.

Those mediating our confession proclaim forgiveness. In the same way that we wait quietly for the Lord to reveal what sin needs to be confessed, so we wait quietly before Him in order to receive profoundly the truth of absolution. It is very helpful here to sprinkle water over the one receiving forgiveness. Water symbolizes cleansing in the scripture (e.g. Heb 10:22) and its use in the confessional makes real the cleansing that has occurred on unseen levels.

Following forgiveness and cleansing, we receive Jesus' resurrection power. His life moves freely into our depths and takes a stronghold. Jesus boundaries our hearts with His powerful Presence; in union with Him, we plant the cross as the symbol and seal of our heart's true desire. Jesus indwells us and covers us at our point of greatest vulnerability. He becomes our strength and protection where we are most weak. A fortress of light becomes established where darkness formerly reigned.

Out of this fortress we renounce evil. We realize that principalities and powers contributed to the unreal world of our sexual sin. Sensitized anew to sin's destruction, we stand firm with the cross before us and proclaim Jesus' victory over any unclean spirit seeking reentry into our hearts. We become increasingly adept at discerning evil. Correspondingly, we become more insistent that our hearts house one God and one alone. We stand guard with Jesus on the ground of our hearts and battle with holy power the oppressive spirits that want to draw us back to our former unrealities.

Cleansed and protected, we are freed to feel the real cry of our hearts. It may be the uneasiness and inadequacy we face in confronting life's challenges; it may be the fear of rejection we face in securing non-erotic love from others. The Father reveals our pain as well as the good and true yearning we have to not be alone. He frees us to meet Him in our aloneness. Naked and uncertain, and yet opting for the false cover of lust, our true feelings emerge in His Presence.

The Father is teaching me to not suppress the pain that results from living in a fallen world. Others' insensitivity and my own silent hurt and detachment from them—in short, the bittersweet reminders that no one can meet my needs perfectly. My needs are now occasions for deeper intimacy with Himself. I welcome those times of quiet with Him. Gazing on the cross, mediating on a psalm, or partaking of communion are key ways in which the Father mediates grace to me in my pain and affords the release that frees my heart to love more authentically.

The gentle power of communion has been especially meaningful to me here. Jesus feeds me through the bread and wine. He indwells me with His broken body and shed blood. God reveals himself on the ground of my inner brokenness and thus is able to resurrect my real self (John 6:53 - 58). I am grateful to the Father for sending His Son so that I can feed off the Bread of Life. The false flesh of others tastes rotten in contrast to the intimacy He affords us. Nothing symbolizes that provision better than communion.

Equally meaningful is the affirming love of others. No former addict finds freedom in devotion to Christ alone. Having been freed from the enslavement of false flesh, he discovers and listens to the real cry of the heart. These are cries for real flesh--real men and women with whom one's aloneness

can be eased. The legitimate, God-given need for affection, understanding, and support emerges out of its former encasement of lust.

The initial challenge for the former addict will be to not sexualize those legitimate needs. Having accepted the call to meet with others based on their common commitment to Christ and personal freedom, he will be tempted to interpret another's care as erotically motivated. Touch elicits sexual arousal, time spent becomes foreplay, emotional disclosure foreshadows the physical. Good gifts given by reasonably whole people are skewed by the addict's eroticized lens. He may retreat in shame, berating himself for these perverse reminders of his unloveliness. But the inspired cry for communion prevails. Given willingness and a good support system, the former addict will press through his own residual brokenness and shame and discover anew the blessing on non-erotic love. The confessing community affords him relationships based on honesty; that honesty compels each member to name what is dark and illusory and submit it to the light. He finds that not even the tendency toward false eroticization can separate him from Christ and His community. Trust replaces fear and hiddenness. The experience of belonging, of being knit into a group of authentic, caring believers stabilizes the rhythm of the heart's true cry. It also furthers his emergence as a real person who is committed to real people, not romantic or erotic illusions.

My own experience reveals the truth that overcoming sexual addiction involves becoming knit into whole relationships. It's easier to fight unreality when you're steeped in the reality of true love. With my wife, Annette, I experience the great freedom to be naked and unashamed. The sexual pleasure we discover together flows out of our mutual trust and our commitment to communicate on less ecstatic levels. With my good male friends, especially Jonathan Hunter, I secure the needed masculine bolstering I need in order to continue to walk upright in righteousness we help each other to stand and not bend toward faster, cheaper counterfeits of love. We confess quickly and concretely our struggles and failures to one another. We remain clear in Jesus with the help of one another.

With Christ and with my loved ones, I live purely. I am not free of temptation toward false images that fire up false affections. I am free to stand in my real self, the one united with Christ, and to love people aright. He is my strength in weakness. He is the beauty of my real self and the real selves of others that I can now freely perceive. He is the power of my perseverance unto loving His creation aright. Jesus frees me daily from lesser loves so that I can embrace all that is good and real and true.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble,

whatever is right, whatever is pure,

whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. (Phil 4:8)