

## EXCERPT



### ***The Soul of Desire***

*Discovering the Neuroscience of Longing, Beauty, and Community*

October 5, 2021 | \$27, 238 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0210-0

## What Do You Want?

As I write this we are entering the thirteenth month of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has both revealed and contributed to the traumatic isolation that has become the defining social malignancy of our time. But our isolation is not new. It is as old as humanity; the pandemic has only highlighted and reinforced it. And evil has taken advantage of it, using trauma and shame to disintegrate us as individuals and communities.

Most of our well-intended attempts to counter the storms of our inner and outer lives involve identifying our problems and devising solutions for them. But in our hurry to diagnose and treat our diseases of the soul, we're often outrun by the very fear that is driving us to identify and resolve them. And this is often as true for people of faith as anyone else. What are we to do? What, indeed, is my patient—along with all of those who are paying a price for their life choices—to do?

This book offers a response to those questions by inviting you to pay attention to the world in a different way—one in which we have little practice. It invites you to live into the biblical narrative of new creation by focusing first *not* on the surface, on what is obvious, and *not* first on the souls' identifiable diseases—as important as that is to do. Instead, it invites you to look below all of this, at the desire—the longing, the depth of eternity that God has placed in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

To consider and answer Jesus' question in John 1:38, "What do you want?" is a life-altering practice, for it opens our minds to the reality that Jesus is keenly interested in *what we want*—our desire. In fact, that question lies at the ground of our being, for it lies at the center of the triune God in whose image we have been made. Jesus' question eventually draws our attention to our deep longing to be known for the purpose of creating beauty in the world, in those very places—our politics, our ethnic identities, our painful marriages, our sexual encounters, our histories of interpersonal and social abuse—where it might seem impossible to imagine it could emerge. Our isolation not only compounds our affliction, but does so by distracting us from true desire and our longing for beauty.

You might be suspicious that desire has much good to offer us, considering how often our desire can go awry—how often we move from desiring to devouring the very beauty for which we so hunger and thirst. Given how our culture has trampled on or exploited the notion of beauty over the years, you could hardly be blamed for thinking that a book that brings together neuroscience and beauty is barking up the wrong tree. What on earth can they have to do with each other? Sure, the brain is incomprehensibly elegant in its structure and function—beautiful by any measure. But isn't beauty itself an add-on in God's creation economy? A luxury? Something we can consider only if and when we have time in the course of all our effort to fix the problems of our anxiety-ridden lives?

What does putting ourselves in the path of oncoming beauty have to do with the healing of our minds, the changing of our brains—and the transformation of our world's most troubled systems? And how does that depend on our living in the context of a vulnerable community?

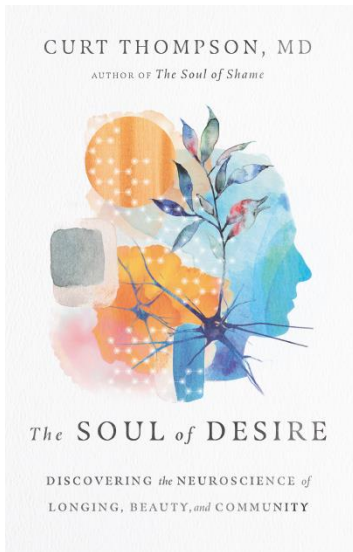


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I hope to persuade you that beauty is not only *not* a luxury; it is a necessity. A necessity not only for flourishing for our very survival. It is not something we only want to create and experience—it is something we long to become, beauty that will arise out of our “slight, momentary affliction that is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Beauty for which we were destined before the foundation of the world. Beauty that begins and ends with God and our relationship with him and each other. As Simone Weil said, “In all that awakens within us the pure and authentic sentiment of beauty, there is, truly, the presence of God. There is a kind of incarnation of God in the world, of which beauty is the sign.”

I invite you to join me and to discover and acknowledge that you are a person of deep desire. You desire to be known in the deepest recesses of your story, so that you will be liberated to become an outpost of new creation—of beauty and goodness—even as you create that same beauty and goodness yourself, as you practice for the kingdom of God that is here and is surely coming.

—Adapted from the introduction



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Desire and beauty go hand in hand. But both our craving to be known and our ability to create beauty have been marred by shame and trauma, collapsing our imagination for what God has for us. Weaving together neuroscience and spiritual formation, psychiatrist Curt Thompson presents a powerful picture of what it means to be human.

## **New from the Author of *The Soul of Shame***

“Curt Thompson’s previous work on shame has been life-transforming for numerous readers. Here he continues his interdisciplinary exploration of one of the elemental human experiences that founds our sense of self—the desire to see and to share beauty. Disarmingly self-disclosing, deeply in touch with Scripture and classic Christian sources, and engagingly conversant with the advances and insights of current neuroscientific research, this book beckons us to a deeper, healing knowledge of ourselves and, ultimately, of God.”

—Wesley Hill, associate professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary

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**Curt Thompson** (MD, Wright State University) is a board-certified psychiatrist and the founder of Being Known, an organization that develops resources for hope and healing at the intersection of neuroscience and Christian spiritual formation. He is also the author of *The Soul of Shame* and *Anatomy of the Soul*.

Thompson is board certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and his main focus of clinical and research interest has been the integration of psychiatry, its associated disciplines, and Christian spiritual formation. He is actively engaged in learning and teaching as he supervises clinical employees and facilitates ongoing education groups for patients and colleagues. He also speaks frequently on the topic at workshops, conferences, and retreats.

Serving as an elder at Washington Community Fellowship in Washington, DC, his duties have included preaching, teaching, and participation in the fellowship’s healing prayer ministry. He and his wife, Phyllis, a licensed clinical social worker, are the parents of two children and reside in Arlington, Virginia.

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