

[Pic of couple w/ quote] In 1997, filmmaker Woody Allen shocked the tabloid world by announcing he was divorcing his wife, Mia Farrow, for another woman. The other woman in question was Soon-Yi, a 21-year-old woman Mia Farrow had adopted before she married Woody Allen.

Yes, Woody Allen married his step-daughter. A few years later, famed biographer Walter Isaacson interviewed Allen for TIME magazine. When he asked what we're all thinking - "How could you marry your step-daughter?!", Allen responded by quoting the poet Emily Dickinson. "The heart wants what it wants. There's no logic to those things."

The heart wants what it wants. Normally it would sound quite romantic. But Allen's use of the quote asks us to pause for a moment and press here, to see if this statement holds weight.

Allen would have us believe he was captive to love, that his desire for his step-daughter was so strong it overwhelmed reason and cultural convention. But his marriage reveals what we know deep down - following your heart isn't always the wisest option. Our hearts, it turns out, are sort of dumb. They don't think about practicality. They don't consider long-term consequences. They just... act.

[Illustrate] Our hearts are more complicated than we like to admit. On one hand, the Follow Your Heart folks think our desires are wholly trustworthy. Do it if it feels good and you'll be okay. On the other hand (and this is where a lot of Christians end up), a lot of us think desire is dangerous and shouldn't be trusted in any way. Some go so far as to say, If it feels good, it's probably wrong.

We'll see today that our desires are essentially human, which means they're good gifts from God. But sin has poisoned our desires, and made discerning the good in them complicated. If we are willing to do the hard work of learning to hear the Spirit's voice in our lives, we can learn the wisdom required to sort through our desires and find a full, flourishing life.

This quest for a fully human life is the goal of this new series we begin today called [w]hole. Our guide on this quest is Jesus:

One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

This was a common question rabbis of Jesus' day debated. The root of the question is getting at what it means to be fully human - which of God's laws is the summation? Which most perfectly encapsulates what it means to be a people of God?

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all

your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." -- Mark 12:28-31

Jesus' answer frames our series: in one sense, it's a twin command - Love God and love others. But Jesus' command is also four-fold. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength. So for the next four weeks we're going to use these four aspects of our humanity as a lens to examine our own lives.

Sin doesn't emerge fully grown. You don't wake up one day wanting to marry your stepdaughter. You don't show up at work and need to embezzle money. You don't decide to cheat out of nowhere, or become a chronic liar or a road rager in an instant.

Sin begins as small seeds within us. And God offers us these lenses - heart, soul, mind and strength - as opportunities to examine ourselves carefully, to seek out the seeds of sin and pluck them out of our lives before they can take root and grow into something ugly and painful.

This week, we'll ask how we can love God with all of our hearts. We'll learn how to discern the seeds of Sin hiding in our hearts so we can pluck them out so we can be whole and holy.

So let's talk about our hearts.

We think of our hearts as the seat of our emotion, but that's not how the people of Jesus day thought of hearts (emotions lived in their bowels, not their hearts). When Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," he was quoting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6. It's a prayer Jewish people offer every day. As one of the most important verses in the whole Bible, you can imagine the amount of commentary on it. And here's something fascinating:

**[Illustrate Two Hearts]** In Deuteronomy 6, the word "heart" has an extra Hebrew letter bet attached to it. So it's not "Love the Lord your god with all your heart," but "with all your *hearts*." An odd Hebrew quirk that implies doubling.

According to Deuteronomy, humans have two hearts. The rabbis interpreted this to mean specifically our human desire for good and our human desire for evil. We should love God with both our desire for good and our desire for evil. Which sounds strange, doesn't it? How can we love God with our desire for evil? Isn't evil anti-God?

**[Scripture Slide]** (This is where we all take a deep breath. It's about to get very nerdy.) To get a sense of what the rabbis mean, we need to go back to the beginning, to a very dangerous tree. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Genesis 2. This is the second creation story, where God shapes humanity out of dirt. The creation stories of the Bible tell us who we are in relation to God, to each other, and to the world. As we read together, we'll pause to note how human nature is depicted, and we'll work toward understanding the Hebrew conception of "Good and Evil". Let's begin in verse 7:

The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. -- Genesis 2:7-9

God forms the man from the ground like a sculptor, and then breaths into the man's nostrils. The word "breath" can also be translated "spirit" in Hebrew. So the man is both dust and spirit.

God puts the man in a garden with two trees - the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (there it is!). A few verses later, God gives the man some orientation:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. -- Genesis 2:15-20

[Illustrate: Animals, humanity, God - maybe a split-screen with humanity in the middle?] A couple of things to note here: first, the nature of humanity is elaborated in contrast to the animals. God decides the man shouldn't be alone, so God creates animals to see if any will be a suitable partner. Of course they're not, and next God will make the woman. But notice *how* the animals are made: God shapes them out of the dust *just like the man*.

In Genesis 2, God is Spirit and animals are dust. Humanity is *both*. We are the dust of the earth and the Spirit of Heaven. We are unique among all creation. We are animal and divine.

Now, back to those two trees: the Tree of Life (which we later learn grants immortality) and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

We hear "knowledge of Good and Evil" and we think "knowing the difference between right and wrong". That doesn't make great sense, though, because if the man and woman didn't understand right and wrong, how could they be punished? That wouldn't be just.

[Worth *Illustrating*?] A couple of qualities of Hebrew help us get a handle on this Tree: first, "knowing" in Hebrew isn't just an intellectual exercise like it is in English. To "know" for us is to understand or comprehend a fact. But in Hebrew, "knowing" implies an intimate experience - it's why "to know" is a euphemism in Hebrew for having sex. I couldn't say in Hebrew, for instance, that I know how a car works. I understand the basic physics of an internal combustion engine, but I don't *know* a car the way a mechanic does.

The other is that Hebrew couples opposites as a poetic way to say "everything". So 'in the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth' means that God created *everything*. So too, pairing "good and evil" can be a poetic way of indicating all knowledge.

“Evil” in Hebrew has a much broader range than it does in English. We hear Evil and think “Hitler and serial killers”. But the Hebrew word used here can mean also “base” or “carnal”. Think of a person who uses crude language and tells dirty jokes. We wouldn’t call them “evil” exactly, but they’re low. Animalistic. Think about how we describe people like that: he eats like a pig. They’re a party animal. She’s a cougar. You and me baby, ain’t nothing but mammals...

This is the sense of “good and evil” here. Spiritual and animalistic. Which fits because in Genesis 2, that’s what humanity is.

Let’s look now at chapter 3:

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made.

Genesis tells us this serpent is the "shrewdest of all the animals". The snake represents a certain kind of knowledge - animal knowledge. Animal knowledge is instinct. Animals are slaves to their desires. Animal knowledge is programmed in from birth, and they act according to that knowledge.

Listen to the snake's conversation with the woman:

One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’ ”

“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. -- Genesis 3:1-6

[Bring back split screen] The snake promises the woman knowledge, that she'll become like God. But remember: the snake is an animal. It is wholly unlike God. The woman, however, is both animal and Spirit. But here, she succumbs to the snake's temptation. She sees that the tree is beautiful and the fruit looked good and she *wanted it*. So she took it.

She acted on her animal instincts. Rather than following God's way, the way of her Spirit, she followed the way of her flesh, the way of her animal self. She settled for less than she is. And so did her husband. The two of them gave into their flesh, rather than heeding the wisdom of the Spirit that enlivened them.

Desire is at the heart of the first sin - as animals, we have instinctual desires - for food, safety, sex, and more. But as spiritual beings, we also have divine desires. Since our first father and mother sinned, those desires have been a whirlwind within us. And when we're not careful, our desires lead to evil.

That doesn't mean our desires themselves are evil. The church father, St. Augustine of Hippo, pointed out that, because God created everything and called it "very good", evil cannot be something God created. Rather, Evil is what we call that which is disordered, which operates contrary to God's good design.

Our desires, since God created them, are good. But we can desire the wrong things. Food is good, but gluttony is bad. Sex is good, but sexual violence, adultery, casual hook-ups, and more are bad. Anger at injustice is good, but an uncontrollable temper is bad and dangerous.

God wanted the man and woman to live forever, not to act like animals.

Desires aren't the problem. Disordered desires are the problem. Desire given free reign reduces us to animals. We know we're more than animals. We know that living according to our desires, that "following our hearts" isn't enough. How do we learn to order our desires? How do we keep from living as animals?

Genesis 2 reminds us: we are filled by the Spirit of Life. Without God's Spirit giving us life, we are animals, at the mercy of our desires, slaves to our instincts. But when the Spirit of God fills us, we become what God created us to be - fully human, both spirit and flesh, both divine and human.

**[Spirit uncovers what's under our desires]** As we live in the Spirit, we become able to discern which of our desires are good and which are warped. We begin to be able to dig down into our evil desires to see the good in the core of them. Our desire for illicit love is really a desire for approval or confidence. Our anger covers a deep hurt or insecurity. Food comforts us.

As we discern the root of our desires, we see more clearly how God created those desires to be satisfied. We grow in wisdom, becoming more mature, able to live as God's children in God's world.

**[Fasting]** Each week during this series, we'll focus on a different Spiritual Practice that especially helps us engage this aspect of our humanity. Today, since we're talking about our desires, that practice is Fasting.

Fasting is saying No to our animal urges - food is the most common object of the fast. When we fast, we learn that our desires don't have to rule us. Fasts enable us to focus on the Spirit as we say no to our cravings. If you've never tried a fast before, our Spiritual Practices Guide has everything you need to know to try it this week.

Friends, we don't have to be afraid of our desires. And neither do we have to let them rule us as though we're nothing but animals. We can be a community of wisdom, one that is not afraid to investigate our desires, interrogate them and discern what is at their root.

God gave you those cravings. Enjoying physical pleasure is part of what a fully human life looks like - and when we breathe deeply of the Spirit, we can learn trust that even our physical desires lead us toward life.

Let us love God with all our hearts.

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] We come to the table knowing that we do not live on bread alone, but on God's very word.

1. When in the last week did your desires connect you closer to God?
2. When in the last week did you indulge desires that drew you away from God?
3. When in the next week will you be tempted to indulge a desire that draws you away from God?
4. How can you breathe deeply of the Spirit this week?