The heart is the *nexus of all our thinking and will*, the center of our being where decisions are made, and intentions are formed. According to Jeremiah, a deceitful heart leads to flawed reasoning and self-serving decisions.

But wait, there’s more: Scripture also considers the heart to be *the moral and spiritual core* of a person. The heart is where our true character and motivation lies. In his “Sermon on the Plain,” Jesus seems to argue that both good and evil can flow from this spiritual center, “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). Unlike Jesus, who suggests that good might come from the heart, Jeremiah believes that the heart is *inherently* flawed and prone to sin, making the heart a source of moral and spiritual corruption.

The delusional nature of the heart manifests itself in a variety of forms, like *self-deception.* Our emotions and thought processes can deceive us by making us believe that our desires and actions are justified when clearly, to any unbiased observer and to God, they are not. We all too easily rationalize our bad behavior, convince ourselves that we are doing good when we are not, and overlook our own very obvious faults.

We also see the devious nature of the heart in our *susceptibility to sin.* As Paul notes, doing what is wrong is just easier than doing what is right. Our heart seems naturally inclined toward selfishness and sin; it is easily tempted. There is a sort of moral clumsiness in the human heart. We may think we are morally balanced, like a ballerina performing a dozen graceful pirouettes in a row, but in fact, we are about as morally graceful as a giraffe on ice skates. This inherent clumsiness means that our moral judgments can be easily compromised as we stray from the straight and narrow.

Rounding out a study on the nature of the heart, Jeremiah complains that the heart is so devious that *it defies explanation*: “Who can understand it?” Like Paul, Jeremiah is stumped by the complexity and the wavering of the human heart. It rings true, doesn’t it? We are often surprised by and simply do not understand why we do the stupid things we do.

Our hearts deceive us into thinking that we need more of something to be happy: material possessions, business success, others’ approval, or some instant gratification. Such deception leads us to pursue these desires relentlessly, often at the expense of our spiritual health and our relationship with God and neighbor. We are always *craving more*. Just as one chip leads to the desire for another. So, too, our hearts crave more of what is wrong for us. If it is true that we are what we eat, it is true spiritually as well.

Snack food may satisfy us temporarily, but like a sugar rush, bad food does not provide lasting nourishment. Snack food offers *false satisfaction*. Similarly, the things we often think are important in life like money, power, and status, have little spiritual value, offering temporary satisfaction but leaving our souls empty and longing for more.

Cravings that lead to false satisfaction happen when we *lose control*. You can sit for 30 minutes with a bowl of Doritos on your lap and a bowl of guacamole on the tray table and not eat one. But once you eat that first chip, it is all over. You can’t eat just one. It is not possible. Within minutes, you are eating chips faster than a squirrel in a peanut factory. “Just one more” mirrors how easily our hearts can lead us astray. Without self-awareness and reliance on God, we find ourselves trapped in cycles of sin and unfulfilling pursuits.

In despair, Paul asks: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). Paul’s answer is: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). Similarly, Jeremiah, after noting how devious the heart is, wonders, “Who can understand it?” Jeremiah hears God say, “I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (v. 10). God knows *exactly* what is going on with us, which is good news. Knowing that our emotions and thoughts will tend to be self-serving and devious, there are *checks and balances* to safeguard our moral center and our spiritual core.

**Self-examination.** Examine your inner life. The need for periodic introspection is like a regular wellness check, but we tend to ignore it. Socrates said that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Aristotle wrote that “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Polonius says to his son, Laertes: “To thine own self be true and thou canst by no means be false to any man.” The great transcendental thinker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” Augustine of Hippo advised, “Know yourself, that you may know God.” Reformer John Calvin suggested that “Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God.” And Benjamin Franklin, the politician, raconteur, and author of *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, said: “There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one’s self.”

The psalmist David, fearful that his heart might not be an honest source, famously wrote in Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). If we regularly examine our heart and motives, we do ourselves, our God, and our neighbors a great service.

**Spiritual Practices.** Establish some spiritual practices to strengthen your inner life. Take some quiet time daily to study Scripture, pray, meditate, sing, or read a devotional. Just as an athlete sets up a regular schedule at the gym to get in some reps, we must immerse ourselves in regular prayer and the study of Scripture. When we do, we will find it easier to identify those moments when our heart is not being honest with us. After all, God’s word “is a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our]path” (Psalm 119:105) designed to help us discern truth from deception.

**Accountability.**Surround yourself with a community of faithful brothers and sisters who offer support and encouragement. Worship habitually with them, share your struggles and your joys, and seek guidance from those who are walking faithfully with God.

**Contentment.** Find contentment not only in your relationship with Christ, but with the material things you have. Paul says: “I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13). Some people will always have more than we have. Find your level and be satisfied.

Dorito Theory reminds us of the deceitfulness of the heart and of our need for God’s guidance. Just as we struggle to stop at one chip without self-control, we struggle to find direction and satisfaction without spiritual practice. Jeremiah warns us to turn our hearts toward God, finding contentment with what we *have* while seeking to improve upon who we *are*. As the Lenten season begins, let’s be accountable and disciplined, not fearing self-examination. One would hope that God looks at us and rather than saying we need to lay off the chips, the Divine Physician gives us a good bill of health and sends us out with healthy hearts to be agents of change and blessing in the world.

Prayer: Loving God, I realize more and more, the rich blessings that are received by those who trust in Your Word and place their eternal hope in You. Help me to live by faith and not by sight, so that You become increasingly the focus of my heart and the joy of my life. Develop in me that child-like trust in You, that I may faithfully serve as a disciple of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

**Sources:**

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**Dorito Theory and the Deceptive Heart**

Sunday, February 16, 2025 [Jeremiah 17:5-10](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+17%3a5-10&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN Romans 7:14-25

Last week was Super Bowl Sunday. A reported 126 million viewers watched the Philadelphia Eagles demolish the Kansas City Chiefs on the gridiron. For fans, food is a major component of Super Bowl Sunday. You cannot watch a game without munchies: pizza, popcorn, wings, nachos, pigs-in-a-blanket, spinach artichoke dip, meatballs, deviled eggs, sliders, and chips. There are *always* chips. The problem with munchies is that it can be hard to stop eating them once you start. You eat them not because you are hungry but because *the last chip you had was not satisfying.* You reach for “chip after chip when consuming a bag of Doritos,” writes one pundit, “because you are only enjoying the moment in which you taste the unhealthy snack, and not actually because your body is being nourished or satisfied by the act of eating them.”

This notion is at the heart of a new understanding of our unhealthy eating habits. The hypothesis is called “Dorito Theory,” so-named after Doritos, our nation’s most successful snack with a market-leading share of $1.5 billion in annual sales. Dorito Theory attempts to explain why we fall into toxic patterns in life, whether it is unhealthy food, bad relationships, poor spending habits, or sluggish spiritual practices. Dorito Theory suggests that engaging with things that do not satisfy us is addictive. Dorito Theory proposes that eating chip after chip can lead to unhealthy life patterns because it shows a lack of self-control and boundaries. Dorito Theory recommends striking a balance between activities that are satisfying and activities that are not.

Dorito Theory is a modern version of Paul’s dilemma in Romans 7:14-25, which goes something like this: “For I find that when I want to do good, a bowl of chips and guacamole lies close at hand. For I delight in the idea of healthy eating, but I know that my taste buds are at war with my healthy ideals. I am a captive to my chip cravings. How can I escape the clutches of my hungers? They will be the death of me!” (I am paraphrasing, of course!)

**The Deceptive Heart.** The prophet Jeremiah says it like this (not paraphrasing): “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The idea of a heart that is deceptive by nature is a controversial assertion, but Jeremiah does not mean the physical organ, the hardest working muscle in the body that pumps 2,000 gallons of blood per day and beats more than 2.5 billion times in a 70-year lifetime. In the Bible, the heart is the *seat of our emotions and desires*, where love, joy, sorrow, and anger reside.