

Seeing people holistically

What Does This Mean?

People are not just minds or bodies. The Bible sometimes refers to people as “body and soul” or as “body, soul, and spirit,” with soul and spirit including the will, emotions, thoughts, and our relationship to God ([1 Thessalonians 5:23](#), [Psalm 31:9](#)). The Bible is not precise in its terms; “soul” can stand for the whole human being and take on the meaning of “person,” or it stand for an aspect of our make-up ([Genesis 2:7](#)).

People are not like hand puppets, with the soul inside the body. The two are intricately connected and affect each other—they describe different facets of what we are as whole people. Worship involves the whole person, as do most activities. The Scriptures say, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind” ([Luke 10:27](#)).

“Flesh” is not the same as “body” in the Bible. It can refer to “flesh and blood,” as we use the expression ([Ephesians 6:12](#)), but it also is used to describe any aspect of human nature that veers away from God, so it can apply to mind and emotions as well as bodily behaviors that turn away from God ([2 Peter 2:10](#)). The Bible does not see the soul as good and the body as bad; both can be redeemed, both can be spiritual. The Bible talks of the mind being renewed by God and of our bodies being offered in worship ([Romans 12:1-2](#)).

There is no use trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it. I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity taught that sex, or the body, or pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, and that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy. C. S. Lewis

There is a spiritual dimension of life that helps us to connect with God, but it is intricately interwoven with our bodies and minds.

What Does This Mean in School?

Education can easily drift into seeing students only in terms of their minds rather than as whole beings. Resisting this need not mean that teachers see themselves as social workers or parents. It means that we can only do justice to who students are by seeing them holistically.

- A problem with learning may not be just intellectual; be aware of other possible causes, such as bodily, emotional, and spiritual.
- Design a lesson so that students become aware that they are complex beings. For example, draw attention in gym class to how exercise of the body can help us emotionally and intellectually.
- Raise questions that address various aspects of who students are.
- The spiritual aspect of humanity can be included in many subjects, such as history, English, drama, geography, and science. Scientists are also complex beings, so explore how their emotions, faith, and thinking might affect their findings.

Think of a time when you became aware of your students as complex beings and not just minds to be taught. Could you have developed that so that students became aware of it?



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