

Student Work

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## Spirit/Body or Spirit-Body?

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# Spirit/Body or Spirit-Body?

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 [inallthings.org /spiritbody-or-spirit-body/](https://allthings.org/spiritbody-or-spirit-body/)

Annie Sears

## Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 78:17-20, 52-55](#)

[Exodus 33:7-23](#)

[Acts 7:30-34](#)

As I write this, it's 4:00am. I'm sitting in an emergency room with my best friend, who is sprawled out on an examination table, an IV pumping needed fluids into her bloodstream. As she allows the liquid meds to send her into slumber, I'm sitting in the bedside chair thinking about the connection between her spirit and her body. I'm thinking about how the exhaustion of one affects the other, and I'm thinking about how the two are unavoidably intertwined.

Modern day Christians sometimes distinguish between body and spirit, arguing that the spirit is eternal, but is temporarily confined to a finite body. In this view, the body is fallible. In pushing its own carnal desires for overindulgence – perhaps regarding gluttony, lust, and/or sloth – the body fails us morally. In ceasing to function after a given number of years, the body also fails us physically. This understanding simultaneously demotes the human body and elevates the human soul. And though many Christians push this view, I'm not sure it's inherently biblical.

When the soul is held in such high regard, it's tempting for Christians to identify themselves as human spirits rather than human bodies. In the words of CS Lewis, "You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body." And if I am a soul confined within a corporeal shell, then I should put most of my energy into maintaining and developing my soul, the inward and infinite part of who I am. By this logic, I should put most of my energy into honing my mental, emotional, rational, and spiritual facets because these are tied to my soul, which is inherently worth more than my finite and fallible body. Again, I'm not sure this philosophy is entirely biblical.

Distinguishing between the soul and the body works for the sake of discussion. In practice, however, the two are inseparable. Humans are multifaceted – biological and energetic and rational and emotional and sexual and relational and spiritual all at the same time. Each of these aspects of humanity is manifested within the context of a physical human being, never as ethereal entities. Contrary to the widely held, underlying presumption that we are spirit/bodies rather than spirit-bodies, our personhood isn't wrapped up in either our body or our soul. Rather, our personhood lies in their concurrent existence and consequent experience.

I'd argue that this conclusion does indeed prove biblical, which shouldn't surprise Christians. After all, our bodies are God-designed, God-breathed, and God-sustained. He clearly thought that our physicality was important when He created us in His image, and He clearly thought it was important to take on a physical body of His own as Jesus Christ. Though Christian culture puts emphasis on the internal aspect of faith – holding high the personal devotion, the coffee-time-Jesus-chat, and the sedentary-sitting-and-sermon-listening – there's something to be said for engaging our physical body in the act of worship.

The ancient Israelites understood this. While wandering towards Canaan, Israelites that wanted to speak intimately with God would venture far outside their tribe's camp and enter the Tent of Meeting. When Moses would go to speak with God, the rest of the Israelite people would rise from their personal tents and watch Moses enter as a Pillar of Smoke formed at the Tent's entrance. Until Moses was done communing with God, the people would continue to stand outside their own tents, worshipping the One who was speaking to Moses physically, "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

The Israelite people then responded physically. They watched. They stood. They waited. They took physical action

to express, to spur, to symbolize, and to mimic their spiritual state of worship. Moses did the same, taking both a physical and a spiritual journey into intimacy with God, who appeared to him physically.

That's why we physically venture to a church building weekly. That's why we shake hands when greeting our congregation. That's why we stand when we recite together. That's why we raise our hands and close our eyes when we sing. That's why our church choirs process into the service, sometimes carrying a physical Bible or a physical cross. That's why we take communion, really eating the bread and drinking the wine. That's why we go through a real, really wet baptismal ceremony. That's why some congregations clap thunderously or dance boisterously as an act of praise. The way we carry ourselves physically in our God-given, God-breathed bodies is just as important to our worship as our non-physical posture because our bodies are just as essential to our humanity as our souls are. We worship with all of who we are – heart, mind, soul, and strength.

And when we truly live into the worship that engages our full personhood, the Lord promises, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14).

My friend and I need that promise now, as we sit in the ER waiting to be discharged. We'll need it again when we get back to our hotel and bow our heads in prayer, thankful for the God that cares about our bodies and our souls and their overlap. And we'll need it again come Sunday morning, when we raise our hands and our voices, thankful for the one who came to be with us physically and is still present with us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, always offering rest in His relational presence with us.