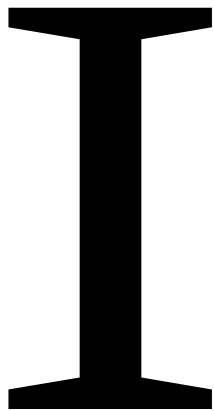




HOW MIGHT THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION COMMUNITY RESPOND?



BY ALAN FADLING



n twenty years of training Christian leaders in leadership development rooted in spiritual formation, we at The Leadership Institute have learned that the negative perception of Christians is an unfortunate result of professed but unpracticed faith. Even Christians affirming spiritual formation *ideas* may be little changed unless they engage in spiritual formation *practices*.

For example, the regular practice of solitude and silence coupled with prayer has become a place of deep transformation, producing *hypocrisy's* opposite—integrity. Hypocrisy is a dissonance between profession and practice. In regular solitude, God uncovers our pretending, our appearance managing, and our malformed images of Him. More genuine communion with God develops a growing likeness to Him in us.

The practice of *lectio divina* as an engaging of mind, heart, and will with the text of Scripture changes the spirits of individual Christians and their communities. Instead of engaging Scripture only to establish accurate Christian thinking and beliefs, *lectio* engages the whole person, provoking a willing response to holy invitations God extends to us. Scripture becomes the living and active word God intends it to be.

Practices of fasting, hospitality, and service help us

learn to empathize and respond in love to another. Practicing the way of Christ is what makes Christians attractive to skeptical onlookers.

As we develop transforming spiritual formation groups and processes, we need to provide opportunities actually to engage in spiritual formation practices *in the midst* of our time together. In training the disciples, Jesus actually practiced disciplines such as prayer, solitude, supportive community, praying psalms, and waiting on God. He provided intentional opportunities to lead his followers in a way of life. His teaching helped explain to them what they were experiencing, but he invited them to

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a way of living more than to a system of thought. This is how the practices of spiritual formation can beautify the bride of Christ and make her more attractive to others.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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