

Published on *Spectrum Magazine* (<http://spectrummagazine.org>)

[Home](#) > Spiritual Formation: A Rose by Any Other Name

Spiritual Formation: A Rose by Any Other Name

2 August 2012 | [Ron Reece](#) [1]

| [Comments](#) [2]



Spiritual formation is at the heart of Adventism and will always be at the heart of Adventism—just as Romeo will always be at the heart of Juliet.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23 NAS)

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” In this classic line spoken by Juliet in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, she is on her balcony, not knowing that Romeo is lurking in the bushes below. Juliet is bemoaning the fact that although she loves Romeo (Spiritual Formation), she has been taught that people with the name Montague (Spiritual Formation) are bad. She is beginning to see that this is a stupid point of view. Romeo (Spiritual Formation) is still the same guy, whatever his name is, just like a rose is still a rose if you call it something else.[1]

Seventh-day Adventists practice spiritual formation every day; we just use different names to describe it. When we turn off the TV and silence our iphones to listen to the still small voice of God, like Elijah, we practice spiritual formation. When we carve out time to pray, three times per day like Daniel, we practice spiritual formation. When we sing psalms in church fellowship, like David, we practice spiritual formation. When we pray like Jesus that we maybe one with the Father as Jesus was one with the Father, we practice spiritual formation.[2] When we

“contemplate the life of Christ,” whether for one hour or ten minutes each day, like Ellen White, we practice spiritual formation.

For Ellen White, contemplation moved beyond mere meditating on words and Biblical events toward entering a divine space where she, like the Apostle Paul, could acquire the mind of Christ.[3] Ellen White describes this mystical union with Christ in the *Desire of Ages*:

“So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Thus through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved.”[4]

Such focused contemplation on the life of Christ in the Gospels or seeking personal meaning from scripture through prayer in other Christian persuasions is sometimes called *lectio divina*. The differences are mostly semantic, in reality they express the same Adventist prayerful intent and disciplined desire to let scripture, Christ, prayer and the Holy Spirit transform our lives by God’s grace.

Spiritual Formation in its fullest dimension is very Adventist. While many evangelical churches concentrate on saving souls; Seventh-day Adventists believe that humans are not just souls; but whole body/soul/mind persons who come fully to God for relationship and worship.

The spiritual disciplines advocated by Ellen White and Adventism in general include solitude, silence, fasting, healthful living, prayer, service to others, worship, and Sabbath observance. Fasting is more than just periods of avoiding food, but avoiding TV, gossip, worry, social networks, excessive work or other things that have a stranglehold on our lives. These spiritual disciplines not only engage the mind but engage the whole body. We learned these spiritual disciplines from the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, Christ’s disciples, Paul and the early church fathers.

Dallas Willard in *The Spirit of the Disciplines* echoes Adventism’s emphasis on the involvement of our whole bodies in spiritual formation:

“Spirituality in human beings is not an extra or ‘superior’ mode of existence. It’s not a hidden stream of separate reality, a separate life running parallel to our bodily existence. It does not consist of special ‘inward’ acts even though it has an inner aspect. It is, rather, a relationship of our embodied selves to God that has the natural and irrepressible effect of making us alive to the Kingdom of God—here and now in the material world.”[5]

Some of my favorite books for spiritual formation are Ellen White’s *Steps to Christ*. There White outlines chapter by chapter the spiritual disciplines of repentance, forgiveness, prayer, worship and Bible study that lead to a walk closer with Christ. If you want to mediate or more deeply contemplate the life of Christ, then Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages* needs to be by your side. If you want to know how the early church fathers - so important in formulating many of the Christian doctrines that Adventists hold today - sought the presence of God in their lives, then read *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*, edited by Richard Foster, or try LeRoy From’s *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*. If you want a summary of the

varied spiritual disciplines practiced by different Christian traditions then read Tony Jones, *Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. I particularly enjoyed Jones' chapter on Sabbath observance. Henri Nouwen's *Road to Day Break* speaks of his spiritual transformation while caring for mentally and physically disabled individuals in a group home in France.

Developing a tool box of spiritual disciplines - solitude, silence, fasting, healthful living, prayer, service for others, worship, and Sabbath observance – takes time, effort and intention; but the reward is a closer walk with God; that is what spiritual formation is all about. Other Christian traditions have additional spiritual disciplines that may stretch your envelope, but don't be afraid of spiritual formation.^[6] Adventist administrators will come and go, but spiritual formation, in Christ, is at the heart of Adventism and will always be at the heart of Adventism—just as Romeo will always be at the heart of Juliet.

I look forward to the New Directions in Adventist Spirituality Conference in Portland, Oregon, August 31 – September 2 2012, which, looking at the lecture titles, will be time honored old spiritual directions made relevant for nurturing spiritual formation today.

Ron Reece is an Adventist physician practicing in Northern California

[1]Adapted from Answer.com

[2]John 17:21

[3]I Corinthians 2:16

[4]Desire of Ages, p. 673.

[5]Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciples: Understand How God Changes Lives*, Harper Collins, NY, 1988. p. 31.

[6]Read Bill Cork's "Who Afraid of Spiritual Formation?" in Spectrum