Wollf, Randy. *Dimensions of Christian Leadership,* MB Herald (In Touch insert), October, 2011.

**Dimensions of Christian Leadership**

I love building capacity in seasoned and emerging Christian leaders so that they can serve God more effectively. As I do so, I have found it helpful to focus my energies on seven key dimensions of leadership: biblical truth, a growing relationship with God, character, calling, community, team, and skill (see the Christian Leadership Pyramid below). Questions I ask are how am I personally growing in these seven areas and how can I help others to grow in these dimensions, as well.

**The Christian Leadership Pyramid**

**Biblical Truth**

Biblical truth must guide every aspect of our leadership. It is imperative that we increasingly live and lead in keeping with a thoroughly biblical worldview. This comes as we grow in our ability to meditate on God’s Word continuously,[[1]](#footnote-1) to handle it accurately[[2]](#footnote-2) and to be a courageous practitioner of the Word.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**A Growing Relationship with God**

The desired foundation of Christian leadership is a growing relationship with God. The Christian leader must continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him.[[4]](#footnote-4) As we abide in Christ, he will bear fruit through us.[[5]](#footnote-5) I find that the practice of spiritual disciplines, when done in a meaningful way, rallies me to God and His plans for my life. One of the most useful tools I have found for establishing and growing these disciplines is the Rule of Life. A Rule of Life is an intentional plan to deepen one’s relationship with God and to position oneself to love and serve others more effectively. Similar to what Peter Scazzero says in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality,[[6]](#footnote-6)* I am learning that one’s Rule of Life should encompass all of life. This would include practicing traditional spiritual disciplines such as prayer and listening to God through His Word, but also cultivating healthy relationships, fostering emotional health, and taking care of my body (among others).

**Character**

Character is the second layer of the leadership pyramid. As we increasingly submit ourselves to Christ’s Lordship and experience an ongoing filling of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to imitate God and follow Jesus’ example of love.[[7]](#footnote-7) Scripture describes many admirable character qualities such as the fruit of the Spirit,[[8]](#footnote-8) being wise,[[9]](#footnote-9) holy,[[10]](#footnote-10) just,[[11]](#footnote-11) humble,[[12]](#footnote-12) and courageous.[[13]](#footnote-13) Growth in these kinds of qualities greatly enhances our ability to reflect Christ and lead in God-honouring ways. I believe we will acquire these traits in increasing measure as we surrender ourselves to God, deal with sin in our lives, associate with godly people, leverage Scripture to bring about necessary change, allow trials to shape our character, and expose ourselves to opportunities that foster growth in desired areas.

**Calling**

Understanding and living out one’s God-given calling is another key ingredient for effective Christian leadership. Scripture says that we have been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand.[[14]](#footnote-14) This suggests that God has a unique plan for each of our lives. What is this plan or calling? I use a process with my students at MBBS Canada that helps them understand their God-given calling, which includes life purpose, core values, and vision.[[15]](#footnote-15) The process invites participants to prayerfully explore Scripture, their defining moments (which often contain God-ordained themes that point people in certain directions), their interests, desirable character traits, areas where they and others have seen God’s blessing on their endeavours, and their areas of gifting and strength. As people discover or re-envision God’s call on their lives, they are in a good position to determine where and how they should serve. In addition, they are often filled with purpose, passion and a willingness to make sacrifices to live out that calling. This kind of understanding and passion is essential for effective Christian leadership.

**Community**

Building strong community is critical for leading effective groups and organizations. We must grow in our ability to love one another deeply from pure hearts.[[16]](#footnote-16) It is in the context of healthy relationships that people can build trust with each other (of course, there are other elements to building trust such as the perceived competence and credibility of others, but relational “chemistry” is certainly an important piece). A loving Christian community is also a powerful witness to the world. Jesus said that our love for each other will broadcast the fact that we are Christians.[[17]](#footnote-17) Leaders can foster relational development by setting a strong example of loving others and by providing opportunities for people to build relational bridges with each other.

**Team**

The leadership development literature gives considerable attention to team-building. Jesus taught the masses and ministered to individuals, but his primary training was with his team of disciples. He poured his life into them. Effective Christian leaders know that a team can often accomplish more than what team members could achieve individually. Even though people who do not particularly like each other can learn to work together, fostering relational closeness within a team is the best strategy for going beyond team-building to building a loving and caring community. As a part of the team-building process, it is often helpful to learn about each other’s strengths and weaknesses (e.g. through a Myers Briggs assessment or by doing the StrengthsFinder inventory), and to practice functioning as a team (e.g. doing activities and challenges that encourage team members to leverage their strengths on behalf of the team).

**Knowledge and Skills**

Effective leaders are lifelong learners. We need to continually hone our skills related to important leadership practices like managing conflict, making wise decisions, developing leaders, building and communicating vision, and fostering a learning orientation within our organizations. In addition, the rapid pace of societal change means that leaders must acquire new competencies to increase their effectiveness. Knowledge and skills represent another important dimension of Christian leadership.

**Conclusion**

Using a pyramid to represent the dimensions of Christian leadership has its shortcomings; however, one of the strengths of the pyramid analogy is that it clearly portrays the importance of the foundational layers. We can have extensive knowledge and exceptional leadership skills. We may be able to build strong teams and foster meaningful communities. Yet, without a growing relationship with God, will we be able to reflect Him in a vibrant and sustainable way? Will we truly hear God’s call and have what it takes to live it out on a daily basis? I believe that Christian leaders who desire to serve in God-honouring and effective ways strengthen each of the seven dimensions of leadership in themselves and others while prioritizing the foundational elements. Why? So that we might be more effective in loving God, loving others and making growing disciples of Jesus both in Canada and around the world. In my view, that is Christian leadership at its best.

1. Psalm 1:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Timothy 2:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. James 1:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colossians 2:6-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Scazzero. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Franklin, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 195-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ephesians 5:1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Galatians 5:22-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Proverbs 2:1-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 1 Peter 1:15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Micah 6:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Philippians 2:5-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Joshua 1:6-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ephesians 2:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I originally learned this process from Dave Jackson who directs the ReFocusing initiative within the Canadian Conference of MB Churches. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 1 Peter 1:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John 13:35 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)