

A Theology Of Christian Leadership:
A Continual Journey Of From Character Transformation To Spirit-Led Action.

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Introduction

Contrary to what popular Instagram accounts may reveal, Christian leadership has little to do with how many followers one has on social media, how many books one has written or how many celebrities attend one's church; it has everything to do with the character of one's heart. When Joseph was only a teenager, he had a prophetic dream where his brothers bowed to him. Despite receiving hatred from his brothers upon sharing this dream, he proceeded to tell them the next dream about the moon and the stars bowing to him, a dream which did not produce any more goodwill.¹ As Isaac's favourite son, Joseph was accustomed to receiving special treatment and he had developed a spirit of pride and arrogance. In the decades to come, Joseph's dreams would come true—one day he would hold positions of stature, power, and authority—but as a teenager, he lacked the character of a leader who could be used by God. The story of Joseph and his dreams reveals the importance of character formation in the process of becoming a leadership who can be used by God. The theology of leadership outlined in this paper involves three levels of transformation, which can be summed up in three words: transforming, /discovering/ living and acting. Authentic Christian leadership must begin with character transformation, a period where one comes to a personal revelation about three pillars of Christ-like character: one's need for humility before God, stewardship of God's resources and intimacy with God. As these qualities are integrated into a believer, he or she comes to embody a Christian "code of living" and is strengthened through Christian community. Out of this character formation and habitual living in code, the desire to love and serve a particular people in a particular way grows. From this sense of calling and purposeful love, God will cause individuals to act in different spheres of

¹ Genesis 37:5-9 NIV

influence in their lives (see Appendix 1). Character transformation leads to a Christ-formed way of life, which leads to clarity about one's calling and action in action in the world.

This theology of leadership stands in contrast to what happens in traditional churches where often the only people recognized as leaders are those with formal titles (worship leader, pastor, ministry leader, etc.). These "leaders" are often chosen based on their ability to perform a certain function, how long they have attended the church or their relationships with existing title-holders. These "leaders" are then given authority to execute tasks or make decisions for the congregation. However, to be a church title-holder does not necessarily make one a Christian leader, and to be a Christian leader will not necessarily make one a church leader.

The primary definition of Christian leadership used in this paper is the capacity to hear God's voice intimately and courage to follow through on all God's directives. Authentic Christian leaders are people who draw all their strength, ability and purpose from God and allow themselves to be used as God's conduits for shalom, regardless of whether or not they hold a formal title in the church. Authentic Christian leaders are what Henri Nouwen calls "people who are so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow him wherever he guides them, always trusting that, with him, they will find life and find it abundantly."² This theology of leadership widens the horizon of God's call to leadership to all believers, recognizing that to follow Christ is to be an influence in any facet of life and society.

² Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership with Study Guide for Groups and Individuals*, iBooks ed. (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2002), 65, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1065989>.

Theology Of Leadership:

Stage 1: Shaped In Character

Being a Christian leader is not about fulfilling duties but about allowing God to reorient one's identity and character to align with His design for humanity. Although there are countless books written on the topic of what constitutes Christ-life character, these three traits are foundational to Christian leadership: humility, stewardship and intimacy.

Humility

A true Christian leader is one who lives in total and utter humility before God. She recognizes that all her abilities, personality traits and even her physical characteristics are gifts from God. In Henri Nouwen's book, *In The Name Of Jesus*, he explains that true Christian leadership is "leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest."³ A heart of humility is essential if believers are to grow into Jesus's view of spiritual maturity: "the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go."⁴ The character trait is evident in one of the greatest leaders in the Old Testament, Moses. Instead of becoming prideful about his position as the Israelites' chosen leader, Moses remained humble before God. While leading the Israelites through the wilderness, Moses frequently set up a 'tent of meeting' where he could consult God and seek guidance. In Exodus 33:12-13, he tells God, "You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find

³ Nouwen, 53.

⁴ Nouwen, 58.

favor with you.”⁵ Moses’s prayer revealed his heart: he lives in continual submission to God’s will. Humility is a quality that grows naturally as a result of seeing ourselves in the right relationship with God. Moses’s prayer also illustrates how humility is foundational to meaningful theological reflection, the process that allows believers to have their hearts and behaviour shaped by God’s truth,⁶ an essential component of Stage 2. True Christian leadership requires that no matter how high our official position is, our hearts are always in a position of humility of God. Only In humility are we willing to listen to God’s correction and God’s leading.

Stewardship

The second quality of Christ-like character that must be cultivated in an authentic Christian leader is stewardship. Christian stewardship is the fundamental recognition that everything belongs to God, and that humans are to manage and use the resources as the Owner directs. Christopher J. H. Wright highlights that God gave humans a purposeful role: the care and keeping of His creation, out of which flows responsibility in our ecological, economic and social relations.⁷ In his book, *The Ministry of The Missional Church*, Van Gelder further explains how God created the heavens and the earth with a particular order, so that humans experience a desire and need to be in right relationship with the Creator, with each other and with the world.⁸ Thankfully, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that believers can have that continual guidance and grow in their role as stewards of God’s creation.⁹ Joseph’s life demonstrates how growing in one’s capacity for faithful stewardship prepares and opens the door for faithful leadership. As

⁵ Exodus 33:12-13

⁶ Joyce Edith Bellous and Daniel R Sheffield, *Conversations That Change Us: Learning the Arts of Theological Reflection*, 2017, 70.

⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 65.

⁸ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 27.

⁹ Van Gelder, 45.

Joseph humbled himself before others and before the Lord in prison, the Lord worked in his heart and gave him this capacity to steward, to the point where Joseph became overseer of the prison.¹⁰ Later, God empowered him to steward the storing of grains during seven years of feast to prepare for the seven years of famine. Stewardship is not only the act of directing resources responsibly, it is a position of the heart and it is shaped by humility and a deep love of God.

Intimacy with God

The third essential quality in Christ-like character formation is the intimacy with the Lord, which involves laying oneself bare before God in a life of unceasing prayer. Personal intimacy developed in solitude with the Lord, was evident in Jesus's prayer life. Throughout his ministry, he consistently withdrew from crowds to pray and receive clarity or strength.¹¹ This time of personal prayer is also when believers can practice theological reflection, the practice of having conversations with God and with others where God can shape their lives. In *Conversations with God*, Bellous and Sheffield emphasize how pausing to consider assumptions, identify fears, list losses and benefits, consult scripture and pray helps believers to gain new theological understanding and grow in spiritual maturity.¹² Whether done privately, or in conversation with others, this habit of seeking intimacy with the Lord and making space for theological reflection through earnest searching of scriptures and prayer, is foundational to authentic Christian leadership.

Growing in Christ-like character is not a one-time affair, but a lifelong willingness to let God change one's heart, a cyclical process to which the leader must always return (represented by the circle in Appendix 1). In the world, it is possible to lead without changing one's

¹⁰ Genesis 39:21-23

¹¹ Luke 6:12-13, Mark 3:13, Mark 6:31-32, Matthew 15:29

¹² Bellous and Sheffield, *Conversations That Change Us*, 19.

character, but to be a Christian leader to be constantly shaping into the image of the sacrificial servant leader, Jesus.

Stage 2: Adopting The Code

As a believer grows in Christ-like character, she will naturally come to live in what Mark Sayer would call a “code of living.” In his book, *Disappearing Church*, Sayer argues that Christians should not try to “pitch” their faith to the world, stressing the benefits of Christianity as though it were a transaction in a marketplace.¹³ Christianity has survived and thrived through the ages because of “creative minorities”, people who lived according to a gospel-centered way of life, a “code” that drew people in through their devotion and sincerity.¹⁴ Sayer contends that in order to stand out and to lead culture, Christians today must be willing to uphold this Christian code and I argue that living in this code is what makes a Christian leader. In *The Missional Leader*, Roxburgh emphasizes that building Christian missional leaders “is not primarily a matter of technique and program. It is the formation of a people in the habits and practices of Christian life.”¹⁵

Authentic Christian leaders are those who have integrated the gospel into their lives in such a way that every facet of their daily lives continually becomes more Christ-like. The Christian code of living is not a set of hard-and-rules, but a holistic way of life guided by love, care, goodness, truth and the fruit of the spirit. Rather than appealing to public opinion, Jesus modeled this principle by deliberately building his kingdom on “a small, living, breathing, devoted, Spirit-filled bunch of actual human beings.”¹⁶ Christian leadership is not just about who

¹³ Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 120.

¹⁴ Sayers, 127.

¹⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 1st ed (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 34.

¹⁶ Sayers, *Disappearing Church*, 125.

leads at the mass, public level, but about how real individuals interact with those that they come in contact with everyday: communities, families, groups and neighbourhoods.

In this stage, authentic Christian leadership is the byproduct of a totally transformed way of life. Consider the difference between one who tries to lose weight and one who adopts a healthy lifestyle. One will use any means necessary to achieve a particular image while the other focuses on the day-to-day habits and a holistic approach to life. Ten years later, the one with the healthy lifestyle will likely be the one inspiring, encouraging and leading others into a similar lifestyle. Putting people into positions of church leadership (worship leaders, youth leaders, etc.) without explicitly communicating that Christian way of life, is like trying to convince members of a fitness class success is becoming a fitness instructor. However, the skills of a fitness instructor, such as the ability to talk and exercise simultaneously, do not equate to a healthy lifestyle. Similarly, Jesus did not call us to become “christian leaders,” people who can prop up the church by performing certain functions, but to love God and love others with our whole being. What we do (Stage 3) , comes from who we are (Stage 1 and 2). The church, therefore, is a place where an individual believer can be continually rooted in the Christian code and supported by Christian community. Thus, the believer’s location for exercising Christian leadership is not limited to church position, but could be in any sphere that one interacts with.

Stage 3: Discovering One’s Missional Calling and Acting

As a believer grows in Christ-like character and integrates the Christian code in her life, the spirit will begin to highlight ways for her to love and serve others. At this point, she begins to hear and know her missional calling. To be a Christian leader is also to be a missional leader, one who can “discern God’s direction and activities in them and for the communities in which they

find themselves.”¹⁷ Although Roxburgh’s and Romanuk’s book, *The Missional Leader*, predominantly frames missional leaders as shapers of a congregation, I believe that God calls all believers to be missional leaders. It is not just the church title-holders who should do theological reflection on where God is leading them, all believers can and should. As believers cultivate the practice of indwelling Scripture and reflecting on how the Spirit of God is moving among them, they will discover their unique missional calling. This could lead to new initiatives within the church, or outside of the church congregation.

This impulse from the Holy Spirit to love and serve others should be the leaders primary motivation for engaging with their community, and is not limited to churches or to the poor and needy, but to every sphere of a person’s influence, including family, church, society, commerce, relationships, and the environment. In contrast to conventional ideas of Christian leadership, where to lead is to evangelize or preach and only a few are called to these tasks, every believer, having integrated the foundations of Christlike character and code, is called to act in whatever arena the Holy Spirit highlights for them.

At this stage, the church acts as a sounding board, a space for spiritual discernment and a place of mobilization. Together, they help each other imagine, envision, pray and image Spirit-led decisions on their courses of action, empowering each believer to be confident in God’s leading.¹⁸ As the believer acts in the world in Spirit-Led ways, she is now *leading*; she is shaping and forming her world in Christ-centered ways and bringing the redemptive reign of God.¹⁹

Acting in the world requires constantly seeking God’s leading. Van Gelder puts it this way, “Congregations seeking to live within the redemptive reign of God are always searching for

¹⁷ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 15.

¹⁸ Bellous and Sheffield, *Conversations That Change Us*, 19.

¹⁹ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 218.

ways to improve what they are doing in stewarding the resources that are available to them. ... They are interested in always asking the questions, “Is this the best way to be faithful and effective in what we are seeking to do?”²⁰ For example, a mother may feel compelled to participate in motherhood groups and love and serve new moms this way. She has been activated as a Christian leader! In this theology, leadership has little to do with holding or achieving a formal leadership position, but acting out what God calls one to do. This principle of acting in whatever sphere God highlights is evident in Jesus’s life. He never confined his ministry to religious buildings or sites. He walked the streets, entered markets, ate at tables with friends. Jesus constantly engaged with new environments in different ways as He was by the Father. Jesus led by following wherever God guided him. Thus, a Christian leader is one who listens for where God is leading him or her, be it inside or outside of the church, and acts accordingly. It is at this stage that some of the more practical skills of leadership, like listening, delegating, and vision casting, may come into play, as believers interact with their world, but they are by product of the spiritual foundations integrated in stages 1 and 2.

In summary, to be one who follows and reflects Christ is the greatest form of Christian leadership. Growing in this capacity is submitting to the ongoing, cyclical process towards Christian spiritual maturity and towards outward Spirit-led action. Every believer is called to be shaped by the Holy Spirit and be led by Christ. Whether someone is a stay-at-home mom, an X-ray technician, a cashier, a jet setting VP, a retiree, being led by God and having the character to follow through is the greatest form of Christian leadership. Christian leaders are those who are submissive to God, willing to be formed and willing to act in whatever way the Spirit leads.

²⁰ Van Gelder, 218.

Strategy for Implementation

This implementation plan is developed in conjunction with the long term vision of building spiritual centres outlined in my Ministry Project Proposal. (See Appendix 2) The proposal details the development of spiritual centers as places for spiritual discovery and honest exploration of Christianity. One marker of success in the Ministry Project is the formation of committed disciples of Jesus who are spiritually and practically able to plant and lead new spiritual centers. This is a multi-year, even multi-decade initiative that requires years of spiritual discernment and Spirit-led action. In the long-term, I imagine that this theology of leadership would be fully embedded into the culture of the staff and into the programs offered to guests. It is also possible that this theology will change significantly as I make various attempts and follow the Spirit leading over the coming decades.

In order to ground this strategy for implementation into real life, it mirrors the starting point for my Ministry Project and expands on how the Project would progress from Phase 1, gatherings in my Georgetown home, to Phase 2, pilot programs in select locations (see Appendix 2, Strategy for Implementation). The goal is to move attendees from being “spiritual explorers” to committed disciples of Jesus. Questions I have considered include:

- How do I make the Christ-like character important and appealing to spiritually-curious people?
- How can I invite people to commit to the Christian code of living?
- How can I help them discern where the Spirit is leading them and act accordingly?

Undergirding this theology of Christian leadership is an ethos of invitation. Just as God does not coerce us, but instead invites us into relationship, people are invited into each step of the process.

Phase 1: An Invitation to Character Transformation

Every human life is continually being shaped by the people and messages placed around them. Advertisements continually remind us that we are consumers, and churches continually remind us of the existence of God. Consciously and subconsciously, we ignore some messages and pay attention to others. The revelation that certain qualities, such as love and kindness, are more admirable and honourable than others is a gift of God's common grace, available to all. However, humans can choose to turn up or turn down this inner knowing. This explains why collectively, society may believe that love is important and yet individually, people act out of pride or revenge.

The role I believe I have been given in life is to be a communicator, an amplifier. Specifically, I can uphold and communicate Christ-like qualities. I intend to communicate and uphold the Christian values of humility, stewardship and intimacy with God through my life, my interactions with others, and through written and oral media. How can one know the gifts of choosing humility over pride, generosity over greed, stewardship over ownership or intimacy over resistance, until one experiences it or hears about it? Therefore, I will always be devoted to talking about, writing about and practicing Christlike qualities. As the Spirit leads me, I will write and create materials around humility, stewardship and intimacy and invite people to see these character qualities in light of Christ.

I will also continue to seek Holy Spirit transformation personally, so that I can exemplify these qualities through my in-person gatherings discussed below.

Phase 2: Experiencing And Committing To The Code

Next, I commit to living out the gospel-centered code, recognizing that it is not my job to “pitch” but to “live.” I intend to invite people to experience the Christian code by hosting gatherings in my house where non-Christians can interact with and come to know the Christian way of life. This “light” introduction to Christian code will happen through dinner parties, art parties, film screenings and other ideas the Lord gives me. My intention is to create a space where the spiritually curious can be introduced to the Christian way of life. Through the intersection of my written reflections on Christ-like character, my personal behaviour and the testimonies of my Christian community, I pray that people will be drawn into this different standard.

The gatherings are people where people get to “try on” and “try out” this way of living. The gatherings will be designed in such a way that will prompt people to imagine, “How does it feel to receive generosity? How can I be generous?” For example, as I invite people who have been the recipients of my muffins, to come to my house bake with me, I will get to introduce them to the ethos of stewardship and how it connects to my faith. In other words, I will be subtly discipling them, inviting them into Christ’s way of life. Although the gospel may not be preached at every gathering, it is certainly lived out, and I trust that God will guide each person’s spiritual journey. Whenever possible, I will also invite guests to church with me, in the hopes that they will get to experience the Christian code (not the service, but the spirit of God changing hearts) and have an opportunity to commit.

As the Spiritual Centre’s programs grow, the idea is that guests will receive a more immersive experience in the code, witnessing the redemptive work of God’s reign. Through the

centre's programs and campaigns, people will receive tangible invitations to commit. To enroll in one of the Centre's programs is to "try-on" the code, and potentially commit.

At these early stages, however, I will be leaning on Christ in me, Christ in others and Christ in my church community to "draw" people into this code. I recognize that the chance to "commit" is spiritually significant, so as the Spirit leads me, I will extend a formal "contract" to attendees. This could be baptism or anointing or a concrete invitation to help me lead gatherings. For the first 2-3 years, as I host gatherings at my house, I believe that God will draw people in, creating in them a desire to move beyond being spiritual explorers and into a life of following Jesus.

Phase 3: Mobilizing Spirit-Led Action In The World

In order to mobilize people to take spirit led action in the world, I must first encourage people to discern how they think God is leading them and in what ways they could act. In the early stages of the project, while the attendees are spiritually processing, the process of discernment will be communicated organically, in conversations or in my writing. Over time, I imagine that the Holy Spirit will give me more insight on how I can help people to see God's leading. I have much more research to do in this area.

In the long term, the process of discovering God's missional calling and acting on it will be embedded into the culture and programs of spiritual centres.

By its very existence, the Centres invite people to uphold Christ-like character, and provide a place for people to try on or integrate the Code in a supportive environment. Through its incubator and accelerator programs, the Centres will guide people through the three phases of leadership and support them in their Spirit-led actions in the world.

Criteria For Evaluation

The success of my Ministry Project Proposal hinges on the creation of Christian leaders. Thus, the criteria for evaluation of the entire project is also relevant to this section (see Appendix 2). Here I isolate and expand on the criteria for evaluating Christian leadership formation.

Success of the Digital Media

As the library of content about humility, stewardship, intimacy and other Christian values grows, are people being brought to the content, online and in-person? Is the content edifying people? Is God working through it? Is God guiding the process? To evaluate this, I will send my completed pieces to select Christian friends and mentors for their feedback and use. Each quarter, I will look at the analytics for the content and prayerfully consider God's will. It could take years for online content to get traction, but it God can also work quickly.

Success of the Gatherings: Openness To Christianity

As I host gatherings in my home, I will continually assess if the gatherings are gently guiding people to Christ. Are people responding to my invitations to gatherings? For example, if I invite certain people, Christians and non-Christians, to join me for a social gathering and attendance is consistently low, I will take that as a sign that I am not taking Spirit-led action. Just as God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites and God actually caused the rain to flood the earth after telling Noah to build an ark, if I am not seeing any fruit, I need to go back to the drawing board.

As gatherings occur, I will do an evaluation after each one to assess how effective it was. Did the event provide space for people to learn about or grow in humility, stewardship and intimacy with God? Is there space for spiritual conversations? Are people feeling compelled to

return and invite friends? Are genuine connections being made? I imagine that as I reflect, the Lord will show me new ways that I can invite people, host gatherings or engage conversations and my job is to obey. I will continually track qualitative metrics, like feedback, and quantitative metrics, like attendance.

Openness to Christianity

Are people being moved, compelled by what is happening? As I host more and more gatherings, and as time passes, I will evaluate if and how the gatherings are bringing more people to Christianity:

- Are people inviting their friends?
- Are people becoming more intimate followers of Jesus, or are people becoming curious about faith?
- Are we having more conversations about faith and spirituality?
- Are people being moved to get involved with the gatherings or the code. Are people volunteering to contribute in some way, through supplies, food, or expertise in some way?
- Are people getting better at hearing God's voice for them? Can they discern where God is leading them? And if they are not yet christian, are they coming into contact with new Christ-centred ideas at the gatherings?
- In the transition to larger, more structured programs, is the project growing organically? Does it feel like I am forcing things or is God opening doors? Are we experiencing miracles, events only God can do?

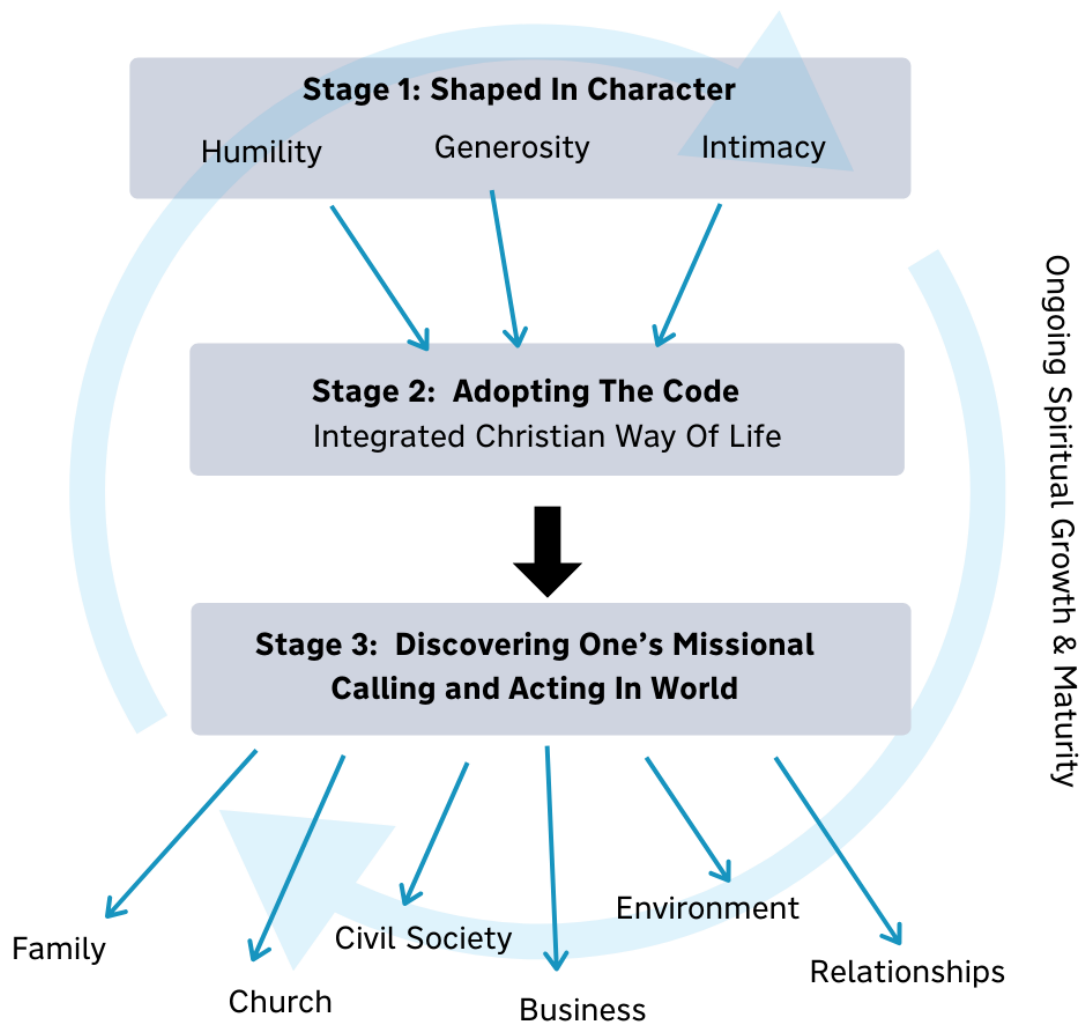
For each of these questions, I will develop a quantitative rating system and also reflect qualitatively. For example, on a scale of 1 to 10, how spiritual were the conversations? Although subjective, the numerical values will help me to reflect on changes over time. Particularly with the Christians that I invite to the gatherings, I will have personal conversations with them after the events to seek if the Lord has spoken to them about being more involved, or if God has words of guidance for how to shape these gatherings. I will ask for constructive feedback in order to see blind spots.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Diagram of Theology of Leadership



Appendix 2: See separate attachment