



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

S E R I E S

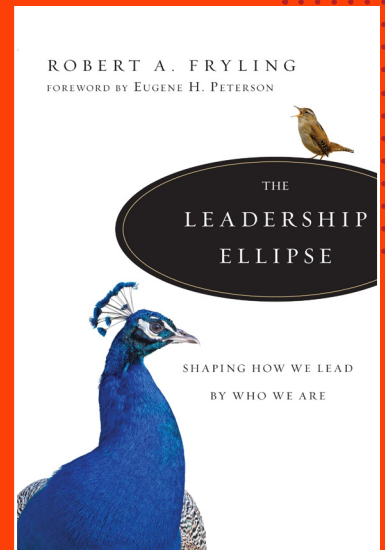
THE NUTSHELL OF THE LEADERSHIP ELLIPSE

Robert A. (Bob) Fryling
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Carmen Bernos de Gasztold's The Creatures' Choir offers poetic prayers that reflect deep human longings. My favorite is "The Peacock," proud of its beauty yet humbled by its "discordant cry" and "meager heart." It prays, "Lord, / let a day come, / a heavenly day, / when my inner and outer selves / will be reconciled in perfect harmony." This captures every Christian leader's desire to align an inward spiritual life with outward leadership demands.

We often divide these worlds. Many books teach business and organizational success; others explore inner spiritual disciplines. But they rarely intersect. I personally wrestled with whether to retreat from leadership or to reject a deeper interior life. I needed another way of thinking and living. I found it in the ellipse: one focal point is our inner life—affections, loyalty to God—and the other is our outer world—how we work and influence others. Both shape us. Jesus spent time in solitude but also served tirelessly.

I was not content. Though I led 600 staff and oversaw budgets for 30,000 students, I was physically, emotionally and spiritually drained. Psalm 131 describes a "weaned child" quietly at rest, point-



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ing to peaceful reliance on God rather than constant striving. Through Sabbath-keeping, we “cease our work” and find a deeper contentment. Growth itself does not guarantee spiritual strength: God often prunes us, cutting back our self-righteousness, compulsive striving, and longing for affirmation. A renewed mind focuses on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, resisting a purely “get real” or mindless approach. Meanwhile, a “dancing heart” embraces both solitude and action, listening to God while responding to real needs.

In a frenzied culture, Jesus’ Lord’s Prayer offers disciplines of restraint—aligning with “Our Father in heaven” and asking forgiveness as we forgive others. Loneliness, even with all the people around us, is answered by John 17’s promise of belonging: “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” We belong to God, belong to each other, and belong in the world, without conforming to it. When relationships fracture, we pursue shalom—how things should be—through humility, listening, and forgiveness, echoing Jeremiah 29:7’s call to “seek the welfare” of our communities.

Facing giants of failure, self-pity, and jealousy can make us feel scared. Yet Caleb trusted God wholeheartedly, refusing to be ruled by fear. We can also act as an organizational ecologist, cultivating a healthy environment among diverse people. By practicing attentiveness—listening, investing in others, and inspiring them—we foster an environment where conflict lessens and trust grows.

Finally, gratitude and clarity anchor our leadership. Max De Pree defined leadership as “defining reality and saying thank you.” Recognizing we are grateful creatures prevents pride and fosters humility. Gratitude thrives alongside clarity: naming problems and calling forth people’s best. A rule of life, shaped by prayer, rest, relationships, and work, helps us integrate our inner devotion with outward responsibility. Embracing our creaturehood before God—defining reality, giving thanks, practicing clarity—leads to spiritual coherence and richer leadership.

