

The Leadership Ellipse

Study Guide

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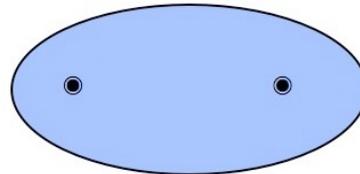
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This document contains key points and discussion questions for **The Leadership Ellipse** by Robert A. Fryling.

An ellipse is defined by two distinctly different focal points of equal importance. Both are needed if there is to be an ellipse.



In the Leadership Ellipse, one focal point is our inner spiritual life. The other is our outer world.

<i>Inner Life</i>	<i>Outer Life</i>
Soul	Actions
Allegiance to God	Organizational life
What we think, longings, affections	What we do, how we do it

To be an effective spiritual leader, our inner and outer lives must be aligned with one another and they must be aligned with the call of God in our lives.

Part One: Shaping Our Inner World

1-A Weaned Soul: The Practice of Sabbath

- Personal contentment occurs when we are weaned from our own preoccupations. God has provided the sabbath as a means of helping us do this ([Exo 31:13](#)).
- The issue is not to be legalistic about observing sabbath. Instead, you are to be attentive to what is truly restful to you and provides an environment for a quiet heart. A sabbath period is a time to cease from work to find rest for your soul and body.
- A sabbath should remind you that God is God and you are not.

Discussion

- What helps you have a quiet heart?

- Journaling
- Nature walk
- Reflective reading
- Prayer
- Sitting in silence
- Other _____

- What would it take for you to practice a weekly sabbath?

2-A Growing Strength: The Practice of Pruning

Honest self-awareness prompted by the Holy Spirit is one of the greatest leadership resources that we have.

Circumcision as a Spiritual Metaphor

Circumcision became a spiritual metaphor for faithfulness. It relates to our private relationship with God.

- Circumcised heart so you can love God ([Deu 30:6](#) and [Rom 2:29](#)).
- Uncircumcised lips are unable to speak well for God ([Exo 6:12](#)).
- Uncircumcised ears inhibit hearing from God ([Jer 6:10](#)).

Pruning as a Spiritual Metaphor

Pruning relates to our public relationship with God. There are three common leadership struggles related to pride.

1. Urge to always be right, self-righteousness
2. Being consumed and addicted to doing things
3. Seeking praise and recognition

We can do a daily **examen** to invite God to prune us. Ask yourself:

- During the day, when did I have the greatest sense of God's presence?
- When did I feel frustrated or separated from God's presence?

Discussion

- What attitudes undermine your relationship with God and others?
- Under what circumstances have you experienced God circumcising your heart, lips, or ears?
- Of the three leadership struggles related to pride, which needs most pruning in your life?

3-A Renewed Mind: The Practice of Humble Thought

Non-conformed Mind

Paul was like a theological crime science investigator. He determined that the primary reason we act wrongly is that we think wrongly. Often, our biggest issue is that we think wrongly about God.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:2).

We use our minds to choose:

- What we read
- Whose advice we accept
- Whose lifestyles we model
- Whether to know God's teachings
- Whether to obey God's teachings that we do know
- Where we let our minds wander

Spiritual Mind

How do we set our minds on the Spirit instead of the flesh?

- Speak the truth to others.
- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

Prayerful Mind

It is unhelpful to ignore negative feelings. Instead, pray for the person or circumstance that troubles you and pray for yourself. You can trust God to hear your negative thoughts. He already knows them.

Prepared Mind

- Don't be intellectually lazy. Be prepared for serious thinking (**1Pet 1:13**). Intellectual laziness affects your spiritual life.
- Take time to read books that nurture your soul and prepare your mind for action. Outstanding leadership requires outstanding readership.
- Take every thought captive to obey Christ (**2Cor 10:5**).

Humble Mind

The best indicator of a renewed mind is whether it is a humble mind (**1Pet 3:18**).

- Set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before God (**Dan 10:12**). Think of understanding as standing under God.
- A humble mind is not ignorant. It seeks knowledge so that it may serve others (**Php 2:6-7**).

Discussion

- What factors do you consider when you choose something to read?
- What was the last book you read that nurtured your soul or prepared your mind?
- How often do you lift up irritating people to God and ask Him to help you see them as He does?
- Discuss the things in your life that are true, noble, and just (**Php 4:8**).

4-A Dancing Heart: The Practice of Involvement

Contemplation and Action

There is a strong connection between being with God and the ability to do things and be a gift for others.

Make It Happen Culture

Functional Atheism = thinking we can do and control things with our own strength rather than depending on God

A Dancing Heart

How do we develop good internal disciplines that liberate us to dance in our leadership?

- Listen to God with our hearts as we pray and read through Scripture .
- Recognize Jesus in our daily walk [[Luke 24:32](#)].

*Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in Your presence and please You more and more.
Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I will take up my cross and follow You.
Holy Spirit, I pray that this day You will fill me with Yourself and cause Your fruit to ripen in my life.
(excerpts from John Stott's daily prayer)*

Practicing Involvement with Others

When you freely help others with their jobs, there is a partnership of involvement that is satisfying and builds community.

Discussion

- What are some outreach activities you can do that are outside your area of responsibility?
- To get things done, how much do you depend on God rather than your own strength?
- In which spiritual disciplines do you regularly engage?

- Prayer
- Scripture reading
- Solitude
- Worship
- Confession
- Celebration
- Bible study
- Other _____

Part Two: Shaping Our Outer World

5-In a Frenzied World: The Perspective of Prayer

There are two main reasons for hurry sickness:

1. External complexities. We are immersed in an exploding, fast culture that is exhausting.
2. Internal compulsions. We become consumed with building our personal and organizational towers. Our flesh wants to be the Creator rather than the created.

How do we wade through the rushing currents of external complexity and internal compulsion?

We can use the Lord's Prayer to guide us. By thoughtfully considering each portion of the prayer, we can get our minds back in alignment with God.

Luke 11:2-4 So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one." (NKJV)

- **Our Father** indicates acknowledgement and craving for an intimate relationship with God.
- **In heaven** expresses our awareness that He is God and we are not.
- **Hallowed be Your name** says that we revere His name in our speech and our lives and want to continue doing so.
- **Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven** asks that He help us stay in alignment with His kingdom and His will.
- **Give us day by day our daily bread** is an admission that we depend on Him for

physical and spiritual sustenance. Note: We need to gather fresh manna each day [[Exo 16:14-20](#)].

- **And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us** is an admission that we want to have soft hearts and that we are grateful for His forgiveness.
- **And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one** admits that our own efforts are not adequate to resist evil. We need the power of God's deliverance.

Discussion

- As a group, pray over each portion of the Lord's Prayer and how it relates to your current circumstances.
- Discuss some practical ways to make life less frenzied for those you lead.

6-In a Lonely World: The Promise of Belonging

Because of His suffering, Jesus understands our loneliness in a deep way.

Common sources of loneliness include:

- **Overwork:** We often look for satisfaction in wrong places such as work accomplishment [[1Pet 5:7](#) and [Mat 11:28](#)].
- **Boredom:** Many of us are uncomfortable with silence and quiet. We experience weariness from routine.

Most leaders experience loneliness. The question becomes, "How can you cope with it in ways that do not harm you or others?"

Jesus' Prayer John 17

John 17

Notice the focus on belonging.

- Belonging to God (**John 17:9** and **John 17:20-23**): Belonging is a longing to be who He created us to be. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him.
- Belong to each other: Jesus wants us to experience unity (**John 17:21**, **Eph 4:3**, **Gal 3:28**).
- Belonging in the world (**John 17:15-18** and **John 17:23**): He sends us into the world for a purpose. Our objective is not to be "of" the world.

Discuss

- What actions do you take to find rest in God?
- Discuss times when you have experienced Christian unity.
- When you wake up each morning, do you think about saving the world or about savoring the world? What changes do you want to make?

7-In a Fragmented World: The Pursuit of Shalom

We all have a heart-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. -Pascal

Cultural Differences

Culture = the patterned way in which people do things together

Culture is complex and powerful because it operates at the subconscious level.

- Inherited cultures: physical appearance, intellectual capacity, temperament, gender, race

- Absorbed cultures: nationality, language, religious experiences, communal ethnicity, food preferences, music preferences, work habits, ways of handling conflict
- Learned cultures: organizational culture

Healthy cultural diversity does not come naturally. We must make an effort to have frank conversations and shared experiences.

Path of Shalom

Jesus is our shalom (peace) and should rule in our hearts. This makes it possible to sincerely seek shalom in our churches, communities, businesses, and countries.

- We can learn to listen and seek to understand those who are different.
- We can learn to avoid bias and stereotypes.
- We can honor each person as a being who God made in His image (**Rom 12:10**).

Discussion

- In what way are differences in people a challenge in your group or organization?
- In what way are differences in people an advantage to your group or organization?
- Discuss ways to harmonize the differences in people rather than seeking to eliminate the differences.
- As a group, pray for shalom in the relationships that trouble you the most.

Part Three: Shaping Our Leadership

8-As More Than a Grasshopper: The Practice of Wholeheartedness

Three giants challenge our spiritual psyche and make us feel like grasshoppers in our own eyes and the eyes of others.

1. **Giant of Failure:** When we succumb to the reality of our failures, we feel like a grasshopper. We become prone to attitudes of self justification and tendency to blame others.
2. **Giant of Self-Pity:** Like leprosy, self-pity is a disease that isolates us from others. When we identify ourselves too much with our job role, we get a distorted view of ourselves. This causes us to feel empty when we aren't achieving the success we expect.
3. **Giant of Ego and Jealousy:** Comparing ourselves to others is dangerous. Ego and jealousy are two sides of the same coin. Ego is the aggressive, preening side. Jealousy is the hidden, fuming side.

To face down the giants, we can follow Caleb's example of wholeheartedly following the Lord ([Josh 14:7-8](#)). We can live realizing that we are not the center of creation. We are one spoke in the wheel of what God has created. When you trust God, you see yourself as more than a grasshopper.

Discussion

- Which of the giants has troubled you the most over your life time?
 - Giant of Failure
 - Giant of Self-Pity
 - Giant of Ego and Jealousy
- What can you do to be sure you are in a place to receive from God what He intends for you?

9-As an Organizational Ecologist: The Practice of Attentiveness

- One great challenge of leadership is to keep various organizational systems and a variety of gifted people in healthy balance.
- Relational tensions among leaders is toxic to an organization. How can we develop a healthy organizational ecology?

The Practice of Attentiveness

Stay Involved:

- Listen to people carefully.
- Learn from others.
- Be kind to others.

Stay Invested:

- Take time to notice those around you.
- Respond effectively to the emotions of others.
- Teach others what you learn.

Inspire Others:

- Communicate what we are doing, why we are doing it, and where we are going.
- Encourage those around you.

Discussion

As a group, identify the healthy and unhealthy ecosystems at Grace Church.

- How leaders relate to one another
- How staff and volunteers relate to one another
- How leaders relate to those they lead
- Other _____

Assessment Exercise

As a group, evaluate the overall attentiveness practices of leaders in your organization.

	<i>Rarely <----- >Usually</i>
Leaders take time to listen carefully to one another.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders take time to listen carefully to others.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders welcome multiple viewpoints on issues.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders are kind to those around them.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders are attune to the emotions of others and respond in helpful ways.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders invest in others by sharing what they learn with them.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders frequently and effectively share the vision and mission.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Leaders encourage those around them.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

As a private exercise, evaluate your personal attentiveness practices.

	<i>Rarely <----- >Usually</i>
I take time to listen carefully to other leaders.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I take time to listen carefully to others.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I welcome multiple viewpoints on issues.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I am kind to those around me.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I am attune to the emotions of others and respond in helpful ways.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I invest in others by sharing what I learn with them.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I frequently and effectively share the vision and mission.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
I encourage those around me.	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

10-As a Grateful Creature: The Practice of Clarity

Knowing and wanting to do good are not the same thing ([Rom 7:24](#)).

Leadership is defining reality and saying thank you. -Max DePree

Clarity and gratitude can help you bring together your outer work life and inner spiritual life.

Being a Creature

- Remember, God created you. Your life will be most satisfying and congruent when you live in that reality.
- Deflect the desires of others to put you on a pedestal. Only worship God ([Rev 22:9](#)).

Gratitude

We are most glorified when we are grateful to God and give Him glory for His creation.

There are no ordinary people. -C.S. Lewis

- To truly receive from others means you recognize the value of others.
- To practice the habit of gratitude, thank God each day for the people in your life.

Clarity

- When you clearly see why you are doing something, it is much easier to be excited about it.
- Your role is to be a good shepherd for those under your care ([1Pet 5:2-3](#)).

Seek Spiritual Direction

Leaders need people in their lives who will give them genuine feedback about their spiritual journey.

Rule of Life

A rule of life is a way of cultivating rhythms for spiritual transformation.

Discussion

- Which of the following would be helpful components of your rule of life?
 - Prayer
 - Bible reading
 - Community
 - Work
 - Rest
 - Heart (cultivating)
 - Soul (nurturing)
 - Mind (disciplining)
 - Physical health
 - Family relationships
 - Local church
 - Stewardship
- To what degree does your current schedule accommodate the components that you think should be in your rule of life? What are changes that could help bring things into balance?