

## Evaluation Paper 1 \_\_ Leaders Who Last by Dave Kraft \_\_ John Black

Dave Kraft's book is prefaced with the call to finish well, both for Christians in general and leaders in particular. Burdened by a considerable failure rate among leaders, Kraft wrote this book as a guide for those in leadership positions, as well as those pursuing leadership. Over thirty years of leadership experience has contributed to this book, giving it extremely practical value. In the beginning, Kraft provides a clear definition of leadership from which he works throughout the book. "A Christian leader is a humble, God-dependent, team-playing servant of God who is called by God to shepherd, develop, equip, and empower a specific group of believers to accomplish an agreed-upon vision from God" (25). Kraft's definition also sets the tone for this God-focused approach to leadership. Because the book's content is organized so simply, *Leaders Who Last* is easy to follow when reading and would even be great to use as a reference on the topic.

**The first major theme of the book is that of leadership foundations. According to Kraft, these are things that are provided and developed within people by Christ (27).**

**Power:** It can not be denied that Jesus Christ is a person's ultimate source of power to do anything good for the kingdom of God. This is perhaps the most important thing for a leader to remember, and therefore a great way for Kraft to start his discussion. He very wisely exhorts leaders to study and apply God's Word to their own lives before seeking to teach others. A leader will surely burn-out and fail if only relying on his "own finite power supply" (30). This truth, which should be a no-brainer, is often neglected. We need Jesus every moment of every day. It takes humility to recognize that and it takes spiritual discipline to live like it is true.

**Purpose:** When one is in the business of dealing with people, as is the case with ministry, it can certainly be difficult to determine where time and effort would best be spent. There are so many people in need and each need is very different. For this reason, Kraft suggests for leaders to create a purpose statement that defines a clear path with specific goals, something that could be consistently referred to. A leader's purpose should then inform his decisions, regarding who he spends his time with and what he spends his time doing (43). What is particularly valuable about this point is that it forces leaders to question why they're doing what they're doing and whether or not they should be doing something else. Unfortunately, many people have not even considered the fact that God may have a specific purpose for them.

**Passion:** It is usually noticeable when people dislike what they're doing; there's no excitement or motivation to succeed. Obviously, no one would seek out a leader of this kind because they're ineffective. But as Kraft points out, enthusiasm is contagious. Nothing gets followers more eagerly involved than a leader who is on fire for his mission. And Kraft does such a great job of challenging his readers on this point. Many people will blame their lack of passion on their personality, and it is true, people can't force themselves to be passionate about something. Still, that should not be an excuse to lead poorly. Instead, it is a reason not to lead an endeavor for which one has no passion. It is important for a leader to recognize the passions that God has placed within him.

**Priorities:** A leader's priorities protect his purpose and passion (60). Priorities ultimately say, "I think *this* is important and so I need to make sure I give it *this much* of my time." Prioritizing with purpose in mind will allow a leader to be productive and not just busy (58), focusing on the things to which he is actually called. Leaders are urged to channel their resources into a few key areas (59), rather than to try to be everywhere at all times or everything to everyone. Kraft's ultra-practical advice is simply to say "no" more often, and to lead in light of one's strengths. Prioritizing really helps leaders to see that they are in need of support and that leading does not mean working alone.

**Pacing:** Where as priorities protect purpose and passion, pacing prolongs them (69). This is a part of leadership that is often overlooked. The drive of most leaders, if not properly managed, can ultimately lead to their demise. Many leaders are overworked, stressed out, and neglectful of other areas of their lives. Kraft both warns and encourages leaders by providing a reminder that different people have different God-given capacities (69). It is therefore a leader's responsibility to determine his capacity and set limits to dissuade over-extending himself (70).

**The second major theme of *Leaders Who Last* pertains to the formation of leaders. The following are ways in leaders can either be affirmed in their role or deemed out of place.**

**Calling:** It is somewhat of a concern for many people that the idea of calling seems to have been lost. One has to wonder if there would be a lower failure rate among Christian leaders if there were more in that position who had truly responded to a sense of calling. Kraft is confident that calling is one thing that produces perseverance in leaders (82). Being able to recognize and revisit one's calling is reassuring as the reality sets in that you can not do other than what you have been called to (83). With this kind of certainty, there is no looking back.

**Gifts:** In the end, one has to admit that there are certain qualities or gifts that a leader must possess. For one thing, a leader must be able to communicate. Words are often the means of encouragement, exhortation, development, and inspiration – all things that people look to their leader for (89). Again, like in the case of passion, Kraft points out that these specific qualities are not necessarily descriptions of a specific personality. God has certainly set some leadership standards, but he adequately equips those whom he wills to lead and he graciously allows for diversity in method. Without a doubt, there are different ways to lead a successful, biblical ministry, but certain gifts are indeed essential to leadership.

**Character:** Kraft summed up the importance of character in one statement: "Who you are will take you much further than what you can do" (96). This can not be emphasized enough. Even in the accomplishment-driven culture of America, one can see the severe impact that dishonest and immoral leadership has on people. Just look at any of the scandals involving certain presidents. Kraft quoted Arthur Friedman who said, "...only men of character are trusted" (98). Leaders must find supporters who are strong and willing to engage in battle and fight to live in "a manner worthy of the calling."

**Growth:** Kraft is firm in stating that leaders must grow. Growth involves being committed to learning and capable of adapting as the world changes (105-107). He said in the beginning of the book that leaders must not fear change (23). By failing to adjust to cultural and generational transformation, a leader is pulling himself right out of the game; he is rendering himself useless and irrelevant. For that reason, a leader should be recognized as one "who is dissatisfied with the way things are" and who has a "God-given burden" for change (118).

**The book's final theme is connected to a leader's fruitfulness. A leader's following says a lot about his ability to lead.**

**Vision:** Clearly, for a leader to lead, he must have a sense of where he is going. Therefore, a leader's vision must be strong, developed, and compelling. He must be able to communicate it effectively for anyone to accompany him (122). People are highly unlikely to commit to a disorganized and haphazard effort in which there is no evident direction. There must be some attraction, and a leader should be able to passionately present the significance and worth of his vision.

**Influence:** A true leader is able to get others to join him (119). This, of course, has to do with vision, but it is also related to how much a leader can impact other people. Even after they buy into the vision, people need constant encouragement and training so that at some point they can own the leader's vision and become leaders themselves. This is how a movement grows. Kraft suggests that lasting impact emerges from close, genuine relationships (129). Every relationship we have seems to point to this fact, as we think about the ones in which we have the most influence. Also, related to influence is the idea of character. If men of character are trusted, then people need to know that you are a man of character, and that occurs in relationships.

**Legacy:** A leader's legacy is indicative of the extent to which he was able to communicate his vision and influence others to follow him. If a movement dies with its leader, then it says something about the significance of the movement and the capability of the leader. Only by raising up new leaders, who are then raising up leaders, will a movement live on. A leader must be mindful of this and seek to recognize and invest in others who will lead the next generation. If a leader's vision means anything to him, his legacy will be a priority as he passionately pursues his God-given purpose.

## **How am I going to become a leader who lasts?**

For me to provide an answer to this question, I have to assume that I should be a leader, which is somewhat of a sobering thought. In the past, and even still today, I have had to check my motives and verify my calling. Is God really calling me to a position of leadership? Of course, all men were created by God with a responsibility to lead at some level. Every husband is called to lead his wife and every father is called to lead his children. But is every man called to leadership in the church? Even more specifically, have I been called to leadership in the church? Although I have sensed such a calling on my life, I remain unaware of what, in particular, that is supposed to look like. As of now, my purpose can be described only generally, in terms of being a Christ-follower, a husband, a son, a brother, a student, and a friend. In terms of vocation, I lack clarity, and so this is something that eventually needs to be defined in order for me to become a lasting leader.

As I seek to clarify my purpose, I need to consider the things for which God has given me passion. Over the years, I have discovered things that I thoroughly enjoy, that I am interested in, and for which I am gifted. I have also come across things that I despise doing, that I have completely failed at, and things that I care very little about. Through the various experiences and opportunities that God has given me, I am where I am right now. I have to trust that his Spirit has been at work throughout my life, calling me and directing me, and it is by the same Spirit that I will be led to passionately serve in a specific role in God's kingdom. Therefore, I need to fervently seek the Lord and his will as I keep in mind the passions and gifts that he has given me. I also need to prioritize my life around these things and seek to develop and further clarify my gifts and calling. In this process, I need to make myself available to other wiser and more experienced leaders, all the while remaining open to criticism and suggestion.

In addition, I need to constantly guard myself against temptation and sin of any kind. God calls his leaders to be men of character, above reproach, and it is these kind of men that are able to gain the respect and trust of faithful followers. I consistently pray that God would reveal to me the sin that is creeping into my life unnoticed. Repentance must be a regular part of my life. I also need not forget that I am as susceptible to falling as any other. The world in which we live is ruled by the evil one and the dangerous effects of his work are real. I need to clothe myself in "the full armor of God" and surround myself with other men who will hold me to the standard that Christ has established. Taking these steps will go a long way in becoming a leader who lasts.

In all of this, what is most important is that I fanatically pursue a greater knowledge of and love for my Savior, Jesus Christ. I need to consistently deny myself and resist the devil and draw nearer to Jesus and acknowledge him as the source of my strength and joy and purpose and security. Focusing on him as the means of Godly living, as well as the ends to which we strive, will help keep me from going astray. It will become easier and easier to follow Jesus as he becomes more and more desirable to me. So I pray for an increased love for Christ. I need to make a practice of worshipping him in all that I do, and in everything seek to bring him glory. After all, "all things were created by him and for him."