

*“Leading on Empty”*

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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Many leaders cannot recognize their limits or acknowledge their need for others as the demands of work or ministry scale up dramatically; not admitting their limits to themselves or others. When you go through dark seasons, you will be restricted by, or released to, what has already been established within your soul. The road to success and the road to a nervous breakdown were one and the same. It is a gift to be able to launch an inspiring vision. But unless you manage it along the way, it can turn on you, and soon the voracious appetite of the vision consumes you. Now I found myself managing more than leading and dropping as many plates as I was spinning. What began as a joy that filled me now became a load that drained me. I was fifty-two years old, but I was already thinking about pulling my plane into the hangar.

We began talking about the diminishing shelf life of pastors and leaders: how those whose vocation is all about giving out are wearing out. "Serotonin is a chemical like an endorphin. It's a natural, feel-good hormone. It replenishes during times of rest and then fuels you while you're working. If, however, you continue to drive yourself without replenishing, your store of serotonin will be depleted. As a substitute, your body will be forced to replace the serotonin with adrenaline. The only way to finish strong will be to first replenish your system. If you don't, prepare for a crash." One of the true marks of a veteran is not how he catches a wave, but whether he knows when and how to get off the wave. You need to be willing to give up the thrill of speed and advance for safety and longevity. Sooner or later every long-distance runner encounters the wall. Regardless of how well trained the athlete, he will meet it one day, and he will meet it head on.

Wisdom and understanding are not built in a day; however they are built daily. You might feel important and necessary for the moment, but that fleeting sense of self-importance has a price you will not be able to afford. This oscillation between desert and ministry is a nonnegotiable pattern for today's busy pastor. At the top of my list were personal health issues. I needed to recognize the trigger points in my personality that brought me to where I was: An inability to say no. Overachieving, and then the guilty feeling that I was not attaining what I felt was expected of me. "Quietude, which some men cannot abide because it reveals their inward poverty, is as a palace of cedar to the wise, for along its hallowed courts the King in His beauty deigns to walk." Solitude is a chosen separation for refining your soul. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the first.

When I returned from my little self-imposed exile, I knew I would somehow have to rearrange a host of drivers in my thinking and activities, learning what filled and what drained my tank. I had to learn how to recognize the symptoms and be more preventive than medicinal. Sometimes we get so busy rowing the boat, we don't take the time to stop and see where we're going ... or what we are becoming. If you return, then I will restore you-before me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. (Jeremiah 15:19) Learning the difference between a concern and a responsibility may save your ministry, your family, and your sanity.

Brian Dyson, the former COO of Coca-Cola, delivered the commencement address at Georgia Tech in 1996. In it he gave a simile that explained the distinctions of what is most important in life: Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them-work, family, health, friends, and spirit-and you are keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls-family, health, friends, and spirit-are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.

We won't be held accountable for how much we have done, but for how much we have done of what He has asked us to do. What makes up your most important 5 percent? Identify them and write them down. With everything else demanding your attention and time, the 5 percent can get tangled up in a battle of choices. But there can be no competition for this. I have had to work on rhythms of life so I don't get depleted. I make sure I am getting enough sleep at night.

I try to eat the right kinds of foods. I have learned that I need replenishing friends who are safe. I make sure that I have those kinds of friends. The busier I became, the less time I had for activities that replenished me. You can get along for a while with "more drain than fill," but it will eventually catch up with you. It's like a car that someone drives for years without an oil change. I began to find still waters and places where I could lie down in green pastures. But these places of repose were dependent upon principles of cadence and sustainability: cadence because my life would now require an intentional and measured rhythm to replace the knee-jerk urgencies that had dictated my life. Experience plus reflection will grant us insight, and insight helps us to grow and change. Faith is living in advance what we will only understand in reverse. May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world and in your neighborhood, so that you will courageously try what you don't think you can do, but in Jesus Christ you'll have the strength necessary to do. Faith is living in advance what we will only understand in reverse.

What has God called you to do? What will He hold you accountable for at the end of your life? You may never become all that you dream of, but you'll never achieve anything that you don't dream of. In other words, I don't want to kill myself by overproducing or doing anything without the quality that God and His people deserve. A leader's greatest asset is not necessarily time. It is energy. A person with energy can accomplish more in four hours than another would in four days. I had to invest my bursts of energy more intentionally, and in doing so, I would be able to extend my ministry shelf life.

*"The clock is my dictator, I shall not rest. It makes me lie down only when exhausted. It leads me into deep depression. It hounds my soul. It leads me in circles of frenzy for activities' sake. Even though I run frantically from task to task, I will never get it all done, for my "ideal" is with me. Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me. They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule. They anoint my head with migraines; my in-basket overflows. Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever."*

"So the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1:5 NKJV). This pattern is repeated as God continues to create on each successive day. Think of your day starting in the evening, not in the morning. It begins with sleep, not activity. My goal is not to study the Bible for an hour each morning. Rather, it is to let the Bible study me! Craig paced me through my tendencies and personality quirks, affirming what drained me and what filled me. We talked about legacy and fruitfulness, focus and passion. Friends are rare these days, but it is not because they have diminished in importance. It is because we have increased in speed. Friendships are not made in the blur of life. The secret to success has always been a bias for action. Without it nothing changes. I will work on my patience and not impose my speed on others who cannot run as fast. But at the same time, I cannot let their speed become mine.

Four ways to live your life:

1. A Life of Reaction
2. A Life of Conformity
3. A Life of Independence
4. A Life of Intentionality

- "Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts whirling around a center of fear."

--CORRIETEN BOOM

- "To do great work a man must be very idle as well as very industrious."

--SAMUEL BUTLER

- "It's the space between the notes that makes the music."

--NOAH BENSHEA

- "To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men."

A. W. TOZER

- "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength."

CHARLES H. SPURGEON