

Foreword by LIGON DUNCAN

STEADFAST

The Leadership Journey and Model of
DAVID S. DOCKERY

ANDY PETTIGREW

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DAVID S. DOCKERY

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To Laura, Lili, Elliot, and Wesley

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Foreword

Few Christian leaders of our generation have combined theological depth, institutional vision, and personal grace with the faithfulness and fruitfulness of Dr. David S. Dockery. For more than four decades, he has served the church, the academy, and the denomination with a steady hand and a steadfast heart. Those who know him best, whether students, colleagues, pastors, or friends, recognize in him a rare blend of conviction and charity, courage and humility, intellect and integrity.

David Dockery's influence reaches far beyond the campuses and classrooms he has led. His life's work has helped shape a generation of Christian scholars and pastors who understand that leadership in Christ's service is not about personal advancement, but about faithfulness to the truth, the good of Christ's church, and the glory of God. His example demonstrates that the Great Commandment and the Great Commission are not only the foundation of Christian discipleship but also the framework for Christian leadership.

In the institutions and organizations he has served, among them Criswell College, Southern Seminary, Union University, Trinity International University, Christianity Today, the Evangelical Theological Society, the International Alliance for Christian Education,

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and now the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Dockery has modeled a form of leadership that is theological at its core, and relational in its practice. He has shown that conviction and collaboration need not be in tension, that academic excellence and spiritual vitality are meant to go together, and that unity grounded in truth is both possible and beautiful.

This book tells that story. Andy Pettigrew's careful research and firsthand perspective have produced more than a biography; this is a study in Christian leadership shaped by Scripture and tested through decades of service. Readers will encounter here a model of integrity and perseverance, and a portrait of a man whose life has been anchored in the gospel and whose ministry has been guided by the Word of God.

For those who aspire to lead in Christian higher education, the local church, or any sphere of ministry, *Steadfast* offers both inspiration and instruction. For those of us who have had the privilege of walking beside David Dockery as friends and colleagues, it is also a reminder of how much we owe to his wisdom, humility, and example. You will also learn surprising things you didn't know about David's life and career. For instance, he managed the University of Alabama basketball team under the legendary C. M. Newton, and has a 1974 SEC championship ring!

On a personal note, David and I both worked with the late Doug Baker in various capacities over the years. Doug deeply admired David, and wanted to see this project come to fruition. (I can remember him telling me about it years ago.) In God's inscrutable providence, Doug was called home before he could see it come to fruition. So, in a sense, Andy Pettigrew's work is both a testimony to Dr. Dockery, and a testament to a friend.

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Dr. Dockery has often said that Christian leadership means loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and serving others with grace and truth. His life has embodied that calling. My hope is that every reader of this book will be encouraged to lead, teach, and serve with the same steadfast faith that has marked his remarkable journey.

Ligon Duncan

Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary

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He had secured a table for three at one of his favorite restaurants in the heart of downtown New Orleans—a spot that conveyed both charm and culinary excellence. By the time I arrived, the appetizers were already en route, and Doug Baker, impeccably dressed in a tailored designer suit with a red-striped tie and flawlessly combed hair, sat poised and ready to tackle the pressing conversation of the evening. But before any serious discussion could begin, Doug launched into an enthusiastic rundown of the restaurant’s must-try dishes. He spoke with such speed and passion that, for a moment, I was convinced every item on the menu was a masterpiece. Once we made our selections, he summoned our server, ensuring that the menu-selection portion of our agenda was firmly in place.

That night my thoughts were still lingering on a discussion from earlier in the day with David Dockery regarding the intricate world of Southern Baptist politics. After all, we were in New Orleans for the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though Doug had since become a member of the Presbyterian Church of America, his deep roots in Southern Baptist life and his keen interest in the SBC made for a spirited conversation. Yet, what intrigued him even more was hearing Dockery’s perspective on the convention—because,

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ultimately, it was the subject of David Dockery who had brought us together that evening.

The third person at our table that evening was Matt Hawkins, a friend eager to help this book get off the ground. Doug treated both Matt and me with his signature warmth, asking about our lives, families, and ministries. But his real excitement lay in discussing his vision for a leadership biography on David S. Dockery, one of his long-standing mentors. Our decision to coauthor the book stemmed from my doctoral research on Dockery's leadership and our shared conviction to preserve his legacy. Fortunately, B&H saw the value in the project—though it's hard to imagine anyone turning down Doug once he sets his mind to something.

As we savored an unforgettable meal, Doug and I spoke passionately about our purpose for the book. This wasn't about simply venerating a man; it was about highlighting the principles that defined his leadership. The profound need for Christian leaders in today's world struck both of us. While leadership literature remains abundant, authentic examples of convictional leaders whose faith and integrity withstand the trials of time are increasingly rare. That conviction fueled our commitment to telling Dockery's story, not as a relic of the past but as a guidepost for the future.

After I shared about my research and the discovery of key principles from more than fifty interviews and surveys as well as extensive reading of Dockery's works, Doug began to share the questions he hoped to answer in the book. Doug wondered if Dockery's leadership brought a formal end to the conservative resurgence. Did Dockery influence the evangelical world as much as the Baptist world? Was Dockery as shaped by institutions as he was instrumental in shaping them? How did he adapt Christian leadership to each unique setting he served? And most

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importantly, how could we ensure that Dockery's legacy endures for generations? Doug posed these questions with both enthusiasm and a deep desire to explore them in this book.

Our conversation, full of energy and insight, lasted through dessert. As the evening wound down, Doug, in classic form, shared a detailed list of things to see and do while in New Orleans before we eventually went our separate ways. Though I would have one more conversation with him, that night was the last time I saw Doug Baker. On June 21, 2023, I received a call from David Dockery with heart-breaking news: Doug had passed away. His death shocked us, but if Doug were still alive, he would remind us that nothing surprises God, and His plans are always good.

Doug's obituary captured the essence of his life: "Douglas E. Baker's 55 years is evidence that God is able. His life is the story of one shaped by great men and ideas. Wit, curiosity, and intellect combined to form a person of action and creativity. Doug was a doer, and few he encountered were unaffected." In a sense, this book on Dockery carries out Doug's legacy as well—a project that fueled his passion in his final days. To bring it to completion comes from a shared dream to offer a new generation a vision of Christian leadership—one that Doug Baker deeply believed in and that David Dockery exemplifies.

Whether this book fully answers Doug's questions is for the reader to decide. My hope, however, is that his vision for authentic Christian leadership, as embodied by Dockery, will leap from these pages and ignite a passion for unwavering faith in all who encounter it. I am deeply grateful for Doug's passion and energy, which helped bring this project to life. May Doug be remembered as someone who longed to expose the world to Christ by sharing the story of the mentor that helped Doug look more and more like Jesus.

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My journey with David Dockery began during my freshman year at Union University. Like many first-year students, I arrived eager to take on the world but with little understanding of it. Dockery had only served one full semester as Union's president before I stepped onto campus, yet his presence was undeniable. Though small in stature, he carried himself with a commanding yet humble authority. I knew little about him at the time, but from the very beginning, I sensed I was part of something significant by studying at Union.

During my four years at Union, Dockery was still in the early years of his leadership, yet his vision permeated every hall and conversation. Enthusiasm for the school's future was a common refrain. Though I didn't know him well as a student, he knew me; and every interaction with him left me honored. After graduation, his leadership continued to shape me in ways I wouldn't fully grasp until years later.

As I moved into ministry roles, my path eventually led me to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for my master's degree. There, I studied Baptist history, and it was in those studies that I began to see Dockery's impact beyond Union. His name surfaced repeatedly, with students and professors speaking of him with deep respect, tied to stories of his role in the conservative resurgence and his influence in the broader evangelical world. His writings carried weight, and his leadership left a lasting imprint on the institutions he served. The more I learned, the more I wanted to understand his legacy.

In God's providence, Union later invited me to return in a staff role. This time I had the privilege of serving under Dockery's leadership rather than simply observing it as a student. My respect for him grew even more as I watched him faithfully carry out his vision for Union, especially in times of trial. I remained on staff for several years before my family and I answered the call to the mission field.

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One of Dockery's last acts in my life as a staff member was a moment I will never forget: he led a special prayer service for my family in preparation for our missionary service. That deeply personal gesture left a lasting impact. A week after we departed Union, a devastating tornado struck the university. I wrestled with whether we should delay our move and return to help. When I reached out to Dockery's son, Ben, for guidance, his response reflected his father's unwavering faith. He assured me that Dockery believed our calling to the mission field was too important to delay. God had already provided for Union's needs, and our place was where the spiritual need was greatest.

Although I wasn't close to Dockery until recent years, he has been a mentor to me in many ways. When the time came to pursue my doctoral studies, I knew exactly what I wanted to research. I wanted to examine a leader not defined by textbook charisma but by Christlike humility—someone who shapes organizations to fulfill God's mission, which led me to a study of David Dockery. I am grateful to Dr. Dockery for allowing me to study his leadership and share his story.

Throughout this book, you'll find personal reflections and insights from individuals who have worked alongside Dockery or experienced his leadership firsthand. Unless otherwise cited, these quotes come from interviews and surveys I conducted during my doctoral research. Besides countless personal interviews with Dockery, I had the privilege of speaking with many people eager to share their stories of serving with Dockery, and their words reveal a deep respect and admiration for his leadership. I'm incredibly grateful for those who contributed to this process.

What drove my dissertation and now this book is the central question: What defines David Dockery's leadership, and how does this affect modern Christian leadership? My doctoral thesis concluded that

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his leadership is the seamless integration of faith and vision, shaped by three core values: It is excellence driven, trust oriented, and mission focused. This book aims more intentionally to tell the story of Dockery's leadership journey and to consider how his leadership model might apply to Christian leaders today.

The book unfolds in two parts. Part 1 traces the story of Dockery's leadership—not as a full biography but as a focused narrative of his journey as a leader. Part 2 draws lessons from his life and work, offering a practical framework for those seeking to lead with biblical conviction and purpose. Together, these chapters aim to inspire current and future generations by presenting a model of Christian leadership worth following.

The world needs more leaders like David Dockery. In the pages ahead, my hope is to present a model of exemplary leadership that points people to God rather than man. My life has been forever changed by Dockery's influence. May this story inspire others to embrace faith-driven leadership that advances God's vision and purpose in the world.

Dockery's Leadership Framework

Throughout his career, Dockery has left a lasting impact on Christian scholarship, authoring and editing more than forty books and contributing to more than eighty others. Surprisingly, despite his extensive work, he wrote little specifically addressing leadership. His only dedicated book on the subject, *Christian Leadership Essentials: A Handbook for Managing Christian Organizations*, compiles insights from various university leaders.¹ This volume addresses critical leadership topics in Christian organizations, including organizational mission,

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strategic planning, board relations, crisis management, mentorship, cultural engagement, and external relations.

In this leadership volume, Dockery brought together experienced voices from Christian higher education, ensuring each chapter reflected practical wisdom from leaders actively shaping the field. He contributed the opening and closing chapters, offering a broad perspective on Christian leadership. While he didn't define leadership explicitly, he described its essential functions, stating, "Leaders learn from the past, live in the present, and plan for the future." His body of work exemplifies this philosophy.

Dockery rooted his leadership vision in two foundational biblical principles: the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–39) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). He emphasized leadership grounded in truth, vision, community, and the responsibility to invest in others. His approach to leadership sought to glorify God and reflect Christ's example in every interaction. The story of Dockery's leadership aligns with these biblical themes, particularly as they shape his faith and vision. Before diving into Dockery's specific applications, it's essential to understand these foundational principles.

The Great Commandment: A Foundation for Leadership

When a lawyer asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus summarized the heart of God's law: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . And . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–40). This powerful statement, known as the Great Commandment, calls for complete devotion to God and a life marked by love for others.

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Dockery emphasized this holistic commitment, writing, “Jesus’ words refer to a wholehearted devotion to God with every aspect of our being.”² Similarly, Nathan Finn connects this command to Christian living, stating, “Theology is thinking rightly about God and his world for the sake of living rightly before God in his world.”³ This perspective highlights how the Great Commandment shapes both personal faith and leadership.

Jesus’s words in Matthew echo God’s instruction to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5. By referencing “the LORD your God,” Jesus reinforced the call to unwavering devotion to Yahweh. True theological devotion, then, flows from God’s love and calls believers to respond with their whole being.

Jesus’s command to love with heart, soul, and mind speaks to total commitment. Some biblical texts, like Mark’s Gospel, include “strength” in this list, reinforcing the all-encompassing nature of devotion. Regardless of wording, the message remains clear: God requires wholehearted love.

For Dockery, this command formed the foundation of Christian leadership. His book *Faith and Learning* highlights its significance, stating: “Jesus’ words [in the Great Commandment] refer to a wholehearted devotion to God with every aspect of our being, from whatever angle we choose to consider it—emotionally, volitionally, or cognitively. This kind of love will then result in obedience to all He has commanded. These words of Jesus serve as the framework for our initial considerations regarding our calling as Christian educators.”⁴

Dockery’s leadership, particularly in education, reflected this principle. Throughout his work, he emphasized that true Christian leadership flows from a deep love for God and a commitment to serving others.

The Great Commission: Leadership with a Global Vision

After His resurrection, Jesus declared His divine authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). This statement set the stage for the Great Commission, where Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19).

Throughout Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated His authority. The crowds marveled at His teaching in Matthew 7:28–29 because He spoke with authority unlike the religious leaders of His time. This authority culminates in Matthew 28:18, where Jesus publicly declares His reign as King.

The Great Commission is not just a call to evangelism; it’s a call to advance Christ’s kingdom by making disciples who worship God. Disciple making is deeply tied to the Great Commandment because leading someone to Christ means helping them love and serve God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

Dockery saw leadership as a form of gospel partnership. While his leadership focused on Christian education, his vision extended far beyond academia. He championed a global perspective, urging leaders to engage in the future of Christianity worldwide. His leadership philosophy rested on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, blending love for God with a mission to bring that love to the nations.

Dockery’s work demonstrates that leadership is not merely about strategy or management; it’s about shaping lives through biblical truth. His emphasis on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission provides a framework for leaders who seek to honor God, invest in others, and advance His kingdom. Dockery’s story will explore how these

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themes influenced his leadership, particularly in his faith and vision, offering a deeper understanding of his enduring impact arguing from his leadership that there must be an international focus to the work.

Dockery's leadership unfolds within the landscape of Christian education, spanning diverse settings and institutions. Yet, one constant in every place was adversity. His story cannot be told without acknowledging the trials that marked his path—injustice, doctrinal drift, natural disasters, and financial upheaval. At every turn, his leadership faced a test, making resilience under pressure a central theme of his journey.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” What happens when a leader takes this charge to heart and lives it out? This book explores the leadership journey of David Dockery through that very lens—not to elevate a man but to reflect the character of the One he serves. In doing so, it aims to inspire readers to follow Christ with the same steadfast purpose.

What keeps a leader steadfast—across changing times, shifting institutions, and heavy trials?

David S. Dockery has shaped the landscape of Christian higher education for more than four decades, leading prominent institutions through seasons of challenge, reform, and renewal. From humble tasks in locker rooms to high-stake decisions in the halls of learning, Dockery's leadership has been marked by an unwavering commitment to faith, a bold strategic vision, and deeply held values of excellence, trust, and mission.

In these pages, you'll discover the convictions and values behind the man—drawn from years of research into his life, his words, and from those who know him best. *Steadfast: The Leadership Journey and Model of David S. Dockery* offers a model of Christian leadership rooted not in charisma, but in character. It's a story of faith forged in providence, vision anchored in hope, and a legacy calling every leader to lead from what matters most.

