

Good morning! So thankful to Dwayne and the ReFocus team for the invitation and the trust. It means more than you know. Grateful for you guys and your friendship, your leadership, and your heart for pastors.

My name is TC Mooney and I am one of the pastors on the team at The Pointe Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. And at The Pointe, we like to have a little fun when we study God's word together. We are responsive and a little rowdy so I need you to continue that spirit of enthusiasm with me this morning. We always start off with a little hootin and hollerin'. So when I ask "how is my rowdy refocus conference doing?" I need you to make some noise! Can you do that? Ok then HOW IS MY ROWDY REFOCUS CONFERENCE DOING?! Glad to hear it!

Now I believe good pastors and leaders share what they have learned personally, and lately I have learned a lot of lessons from my 2-year-old son, Reese. Living with Reese has taught me to... stop expecting things to be... where they belong.

He is always finding creative new places for things that aren't quite where we think they should go. I will find his toys in drawers and closets. Even half eaten granola bars in our bed from time to time.

Just the other day, I saw as my wife, Kodie, was pouring some cheesy crackers out of a box when one of Reese's toy dogs fell out... even though it happens all of the time, we still don't expect it when it happens.

And honestly, many of us didn't expect some things when it came to following God, when it came to stepping into ministry or trying to lead others to following him.

...even though it happens all of the time... we still don't expect the hurt

God says, "I will be with you" "I will never leave you" "My yoke is easy", but I have never met a pastor worth his calling who doesn't have scars.

The goal of the ReFocus conference is to encourage and energize. They asked me to teach something that will fill you back up and inspire.

So today, I want to try to encourage you, not when you're winning but when you're wounded. So I naturally picked the most inspirational passage of scripture to encourage pastors... a passage... where some pastors die.

You already feel encouraged don't you? Haha well hang in there.

If you have your Bibles with you and want to follow along we will be taking a look at Leviticus 10. At The Pointe, we have been studying through Leviticus together. It's a book of the bible that can feel pretty tedious with all these details that can get a little overwhelming but the goal of all these commands from God is to transform a very imperfect people to a holy nation where God's presence can live in community.

So Leviticus gives the outline for all the procedures, laws, sacrifices for the people to follow and the priests to guide them in and carry out.

Leviticus 10 comes as the Israelite people are still new to this new way of living and having relationship with God. And this is what we see happen:

Leviticus 10:1-2 (NET) – Then Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his fire pan and put fire in it, set incense on it, and presented **strange fire** before the LORD, which he had not

commanded them to do. So fire went out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them so that they died before the LORD.

There has been a lot of guesses as to what exactly Nadab and Abihu did wrong. Some think they took coals from some place other than the altar God instructed. Others think maybe they were drunk on the job since God specifically forbids priests from drinking while serving just a few verses later.

But regardless of the reason, we know one thing for certain: They brought fire, that God didn't ask for. The author of Leviticus calls it "strange fire"

And I fear so many you might be burning out in your faith, your calling... because you are burning strange fires that God didn't ask for.

Maybe mistaking our dreams and desires for God's will

Trying to launch programs or projects because the people in your church want them now... Trying to make every hospital visit, attend every meeting, fix every marriage, answer every text or direct message...

There was a family in Westlake, Ohio who came home one day only to discover that someone had broken into their house. But as they searched through the rooms and drawers they were surprised that nothing had been stolen, in fact, the house was cleaner than before! Carpets vacuumed, dishes washed, all the tables and counters dusted, cleaned and polished. And left right in the middle of the dining room table was a note from someone named Susan Warren with her address and phone number and a bill for \$75!

They had not hired Ms Warren to clean their home. They had no idea who she was so obviously upset they called the authorities who found her at the address she left on the note and arrested her for breaking and entering. I guess she didn't make a CLEAN getaway...

The news later referred to Warren as The Cleaning Fairy when they discovered she had done this multiple times before! When she was questioned, she claimed she had noticed the front door was unlocked and since she had nothing else to do and needed the money, she let herself in and cleaned their house... it was only fair that they pay her for it.

Too many of us are exhausting ourselves doing work that God never assigned... and we are paying the price...

There are too many needs, too many messages, too many problems, too many opportunities. Your church needs more than you can handle... and that's the point: You cannot be God I have to remind myself of this fact when I find myself at the church more than home in the evenings, when someone asks to meet with me and it means missing my daughter's dance recital. When someone leaves the church because I couldn't be at their gender reveal party for their baby.

I want to do everything I can but that is a dangerous goal.

Doing what you can will take you beyond what you should give.

Instead of do what you can, do what ONLY you can.

This is what I mean: in your church, your job, your home

There are things that you are uniquely gifted and qualified to do. The things that ONLY you can do. This should be where your focus and energy lies.

And then in the things that can be done by someone else, is where you give opportunities to people that want to grow and serve and support!

A leader's job isn't to prove our value by exhaustion, its to equip and empower others.

I have encouraged my team to create something we have affectionately and ridiculously named the **Poke Ball**. Here is the reason: from what I'm told, it looks like a poke ball from pokemon.

I got this idea from Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian. The idea is that every leader should take everything they do and boil it down into **4 major categories** and then appoint or recruit someone to lead those 4 areas. You direct, invest, and develop this team of four that now lead each of your primary arenas of responsibility. You are investing and teaching and developing these 4 people... then each of **those 4 divide their responsibilities into 4 major categories** and then appoint or recruit someone one to lead those 4 areas and **so on and so forth**. What this does is create opportunities for more and more people to get involved in the mission as well as share leadership and decision making. The more someone can participate and even be trusted to lead... the more invested and passionate they will be about your church or business.

You will need help to accomplish the mission and dreams God has given you but remember Nadab and Abihu where consumed by fire God didn't even want. Have you prayed and sought God about the fires that are burning up your time, your energy, your passion? Don't let the strange fires, the fires God didn't ask you to burn, consume you.

After Nadab and Abihu have been burned up in the strange fire, Moses warns Aaron:

Leviticus 10:6-7 (NET) – Then Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his other two sons, "Do not dishevel the hair of your heads and do not tear your garments, so that you do not die and so that wrath does not come on the whole congregation. Your brothers, all the house of Israel, are to mourn the burning which the LORD has caused, but you must not go out from the entrance of the Meeting Tent lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is on you." So they acted according to the word of Moses.

This feels harsh, right? No mourning? No grieving?

Tearing garments is a common practice you see throughout the Bible. Job, Joshua, Ezekiel, Mordecai, Paul, Barnabas, King David they all tear their garments in despair. It was a public declaration of despair. A way of showing that one's grief was too much to bear, that all hope had been lost. But God tells Aaron he is forbidden... but not just Aaron. He says this of all high priests.

Leviticus 21:10 (NET) – The high priest--who is greater than his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil is poured, who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments--must neither dishevel the hair of his head nor tear his garments.

Why? Because High Priests had direct access to God. They were the only ones that could enter the holy of holies. They had an access to God that no one else had in order to represent the people of Israel before God and to represent God to the people of Israel.

Because they could approach God in such a special way, they could personally approach God's spirit... there is no situation or challenge or circumstance so final that hope could be cancelled

Elvis Presley was a star like no other. Blending various music style from Gospel to Soul to Rock created a revolutionary sound that electrified audiences and drew massive crowds earning him the title "The King of Rock n Roll"

If you dig in to his story a bit, one of the people credited for both the meteoric rise and the heartbreaking fall of The King was a man called Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis' manger.

So desperate for riches and fame, Colonel Tom was corrupted with greed to his core. Elvis' rising popularity was just a means to an end. He took every opportunity to squeeze every dime he could pushing Elvis away from friends and family, scheduling more and more appearances, and selling all the merchandise he could. In fact, Colonel Tom was known to benefit from Elvis' polarizing music. While his fans loved him, Elvis had quite a large crowd of critics that disapproved of his progressive new style. But Colonel Tom saw an opportunity: at every concert, He not only sold "I love Elvis" merchandise, but Colonel tom, Elvis own manager, to double his sales... would also sell "I hate Elvis" merchandise...

Priests were supposed to be guiding the people in the worship of God. Teaching them to trust and follow God regardless of circumstance or challenge. If a high priest, a man with direct access to the spirit of God, tore his garments in complete despair and hopelessness, it's like selling "I Love God" shirts on Sunday and "I Hate God" shirts on Monday.

God isn't telling Aaron "don't feel"... he is saying "don't give up on me"

Hebrews 4:16 (NLT) – So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

You have that same high priestly access because of what Jesus did on the cross. You don't stand at a distance. You don't need permission. You don't need an appointment. You can boldly approach the throne of grace.

I know some of you are in it right now. Betrayal. Exhaustion. Financial pressure. Lonely leadership. Silent Sundays.

But don't rend your garments... don't give up on Him. You still have access. You still have a God who listens. You still have breath. You still have purpose.

Aaron still had work to do. He had priests to train. A nation to shepherd.

And you so do you... you still have people who haven't met Jesus yet.

You still have work to do... but the grief is real and support is needed.

Leviticus 10:19-20 (NET) – But Aaron spoke to Moses, "See here! Just today they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD and such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten a sin offering today would the LORD have been pleased?" When Moses heard this explanation, he was satisfied.

Basically, Aaron says, I showed up, I obeyed even though I lost so much... but today is so heavy... this is all I got. And Moses, and God... accept that

Joel 2:13 (NHEB) - Tear your heart, and not your garments, and turn to the LORD, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity.

Rend your hearts, not your garments... you can't have to pretend your heart isn't torn... when the people you invested in leave, when people you thought were with you tear you down when you're not around, when you are told you're not deep enough, you're not relevant, you don't care enough cuz you didn't call when they didn't come for 4 weeks in a row, when the finances are tight but they want more programs and staff, when you get invited to a lunch and know... they are ambushing you with their frustration or spiritual discontent... don't pretend your heart doesn't hurt... but don't tear your garments... don't give up hope... don't give up on God... but how?

How to Guard the Garments:

1. You Don't Ignore The Pain

This isn't a grin and bear it kind of situation. If you ignore the pain and hurt, it will rot your joy and your calling from the inside out.

You have to grieve. I had a friend tell me once that grieving the process of saying goodbye to what you lost. I always thought grief was what we did when a loved one passed but that's not the only time we experience loss. We have all had dreams that were lost, relationships that we had so much hope for that abandoned us, respect opportunities, confidence... lost

If we don't grieve what we had hoped for... those wounds will never heal

And there is so much blessing that God wants to give you... that you can only receive if you do the hard work of healing and saying goodbye. For me, I had to seek out a counsellor, share the hurts of my past and learn how to allow those old wounds to become old memories. Maybe it's the same for you. Maybe it's calling and apologizing. Maybe it's refusing to think that you are owed or have earned some kind of respect or support from someone... Maybe it's letting someone go of your expectations...

But healing doesn't happen with denial... it happens with honesty

2. You Can't Serve Alone

Aaron isn't alone in the calling and responsibilities of God. Moses and Miriam, his brother and sister, lead alongside him. His other sons Eleazar and Ithamar step up. The community supports and grieves for Aaron's loss.

You need support as well. Let's call them the 4 C's: **Champions, Confidants, Collogues, and Collaborators**

Champions are mentors and teachers. People that invest in you and develop you. That can share how they have made it through what you are going through now. For me, that is **Matt Boone**. I have known him for 24 years, he has seen it all, knows it all. He is a voice of support but wisdom and clarity when life feels most chaotic.

Confidants are people that can listen and advise, that you can let it all out and vent. They help carry your burdens that you can't share with others but also point you back to God. This was a counselor for me for a little while. I had some hurts that I needed support healing from and God used that person to help me find the tools to begin that healing.

Colloquies are peers that are fighting the same battles as you but at other places. Other pastors and business leaders you can talk to that can share what they are doing that is working. I my buddy Trevor who has a church in Utah but has the same focuses and approach to doing church as I do, so its incredibly helpful to hear how he has navigated those same issues I face. Collaborators are the people that fight the battle with you, that help come up with the plan then get in the trenches to help you claim victory.

This is my team, my friends, who I have the pleasure of serving with that help me encourage me and challenge me, everyday as we work to help as many people as possible find and follow Jesus.

There was a catastrophic malfunction on a British Airways Flight 5390 as it travelled from England to Spain. One of the front windscreens on the cockpit came loose and **blew out ripping the pilot, Captain Tim Lancaster, right out of his seat** and sucked him out of the plane. But one of the flight attendants reacted just fast enough to catch the ejected pilot by the ankles... and he held on tight. Against all odds, that flight attendant kept his grip on the pilots ankles for 20 minutes with no idea if the man dangling outside of the plane was still alive or not. He didn't let go until they had safely landed the plane and safety personnel told him to release his grip... and to their surprise, the pilot survived... all because his friend wouldn't let go.

Serving God is tough, life can suck you dry... you only survive because someone else is holding on to you.

3. You Won't Get It All Right

Scripture is brutally honest about Aaron's failures. We get more bad stories about him than good: the whole building and worshipping the golden calf ordeal, him and his sister Miriam publicly criticize Moses' leadership and marriage which results in her getting leprosy, he hits the rock instead of speaking to it too and doesn't get to go into the promised land...

He has a ton of failures... but God keeps using him.

God isn't looking for perfection from us... In fact, if you can only lead from your victories, then it's your power, not His.

Dreamworks quickly stepped out of the shadow of Disney and Pixar's animation supremacy and released hits like Kung-Fu Panda and How to Train Your Dragon

They were always working on new projects with all kinds of talent vying to be a part of what they had next, but there was one project no one wanted to condemned to.

It was even used as a punishment... if you refused to do things the way the boss asked, you would get stuck on this dead end movie. If your designs and ideas didn't quite line up with what they were looking for, you would get stuck on this dead end movie. And eventually this hopeless movie had a team of stubborn misunderstood outcasts working day and night to complete something everyone thought would be a failure...

But it was the furthest thing from a failure: **Shrek** debuted in 2001 absolutely destroying the box office making nearly \$500 million and spawning 4 Sequels and 2 spin offs!

But It shouldn't have been a surprise, what better people to tell a snarky little tale about a stubborn misunderstood outcast ogre... than a bunch of stubborn misunderstood outcasts? Of course it was a success cuz they had lived outcast, they spoke outcast, they knew outcast...

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (NIV) – Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

God doesn't need perfect, in fact, he doesn't want perfect. He uses the broken and messy because that's really the only kind of people that exist, and our mess makes it clear to everyone that His power is at work.

The world is filled with imperfect messy hurting people... but who better to reach wounded people... than people with scars and healed wounds?

You are going to mess up. You probably already have.

But you are not disqualified. You are not forgotten. You are not finished.

Tend the right fires. Guard your hope. Lean into your people.

And don't tear your garments... don't give up on God... because your scars aren't the proof you failed... they are the proof you stayed.