



THE ANOINTING OF TENSION

A while back, a close friend, Chad, looked at me and said, “Todd, it seems like conflict follows you.” At first, I laughed it off. Then I got offended. Then I let it marinate, and eventually, I realized he was right. Conflict didn’t follow me—it was *assigned* to me. That wasn’t a curse. That was a call.

Tension has never been my enemy. It’s been my greatest asset. You see, tension is where growth lives, where leaders are forged, and where purpose is pulled out of pain. So, thank you, Chad—for the unintentional prophecy that unlocked this journey. This book is the result of embracing what most people run from.

Let’s talk Paul. In 1 Corinthians 16:9, he drops this fire: “*There’s an amazing door of opportunity standing wide open for me... even though there are many who oppose and stand against me.*” Translation: **opportunity and opposition go together**. You don’t get one without the other. If you’re allergic to resistance, you’re not ready for revelation.

Everyone faces tension—but not everyone leverages it. The key to life is not found in staring it down but leveraging the tension you face. Marriage, parenting, leadership, loss ... pick a lane. Tension's waiting. It doesn't knock. It kicks the door in. It shows up in job offers and pink slips. In new ventures and busted friendships. You can't avoid it. And if you try, it'll wreck you harder than any obstacle ever could. Whether becoming a CEO or leading a church, there will be opportunities for tension. You see, no one is immune to it. Tension is a part of our lives.

Tension isn't your wall—it's your weapon.

Here's what I've learned the hard way: if you don't leverage your tension, someone else will. Growth requires resistance. Period. You want to rise? Then get ready to fight. The further your calling, the fiercer the opposition. Resistance is part of life. If you don't understand that, you will live life disappointed. No one prays for difficulty nor should we, but difficulty will come. Difficulty does not have to define you. It can truly refine you.

Leaders must leverage tension all the time, from the moody employee who wears every emotion on his or her sleeve to the introvert who says nothing in a brainstorming session. It's part of the job. If you want to lead anything, expect tension. As a pastor, I feel it constantly.

"The music is too loud."

"The lights give me seizures."

"Why do we have to do THAT?"

Welcome to leadership. If you can't handle tension, step aside. Because if you're not ready for tension, you're not ready to lead.

Listen, sometimes I intentionally create tension. I'll pull a lever, adjust a system, or say something uncomfortable—not because I'm reckless, but because I know *growth never happens on cruise control*. I change things just to create tension. It's true. People do not grow without it. It happens when you shake the foundation and test what's really solid. That's not dysfunction. That's The Anointing of Tension. I'm not *cursed*. I'm *called*. I've been wired to walk into the tension others avoid—and I've learned to use it as leverage.

Here's the truth no one wants to say out loud: *Everyone wants what someone else has until they see what they went through to get it*. You want the testimony? Then take the test. You want the platform? Then carry the pressure. You want the title? Then become the target. Don't envy anyone's *success* unless you're ready for their *scars*.

And here's a leadership mic drop: *Tension is the microscope that exposes who you really are*. Get close enough to any leader, and you'll see what they're made of—how they handle pressure, pain, pushback. I remember listening to a well-known pastor say, "Everyone wants a large church like mine, but no one wants my scars." That stuck in my mind because it is so true. We see the testimony, but we did not see the tests. We hear the message, but we did not watch them navigate their mess.

Tension is best seen under a microscope.
You have to get close to see the details.

The closer you get to people – leaders or not – you will quickly see how they handle tension. So yeah, pour your coffee, grab your chips, and settle in. You’re about to get a 29-year masterclass in tension.

I didn’t learn this in a *textbook*—I learned it in the *trenches*.

THE GENESIS OF TENSION

I’ve read the self-help blogs and heard the sugar-coated sermons. “You don’t have to be stressed!” Cool story. Tell that to my inbox. Or my staff. Or my body.

Tension is a reality you can’t run from.

The truth is: Stress is part of life. Tension is part of leadership. Avoiding it keeps you stuck. Embracing it without strategy leaves you drained. But leveraging it? That’s where leadership explodes.

Tension comes from all over. Let’s be real.

How about difficult conversations? Had them. Sometimes with people. Sometimes with my own mirror. Any tension in your marriage? Usually it’s my wife Mary saying, “Todd Richard” Just kidding, (but no, not really). Some of my biggest areas of growth from tension have come from *difficult conversations*.

Let me be clear: I do not like those moments, but I need them.

A dear friend of mine, Alan Stein, used to meet me for lunch every other month or so before being promoted to Heaven in 2016. As an

older, wiser, more experienced pastor than I, he would always ask, “What are you preaching on? What’s your text? What is God saying?” Then we would talk. But then there were times when he would pull out his small, pocket-sized notebook and say, “Todd, do you believe this?” He would then share something I posted on social media or something he heard. Al would then tell me how it sounded, even if it wasn’t what I meant. Those were some hard conversations. They were sometimes tense, but they caused me to grow. I miss those talks.

I also believe that *relationships* will always have tension. When Mary and I were first married in 2001, she had to adjust to ministry. That was not easy. The long days and late nights were constant and demanding for a youth pastor in a vibrant church. Mary had the courage to create tension because she loved us. She had the tough conversations because she valued our relationship. It took me some time, but I chose Mary over ministry – still choose her today!

How about in your thoughts? My brain runs like it’s had three energy drinks and a therapy session. ADD-HD? What’s that? “Attention Deficit Disorder in High Def.” In fact, if they were giving diagnoses when I was a child, I would have definitely fit the bill. (FYI: I don’t drink any caffeinated drinks). My thoughts can hijack my whole day if I’m not vigilant.

Mayo Clinic says the average person has 60,000 thoughts per day—and 80% are negative. No wonder we’re jacked up. That’s tension.

“I want to stay positive, but my mind leans negative.”

Yep, I have been there too. When a negative thought comes to mind, replace it with a positive statement. Each morning when I wake up, I go to the bathroom, look in the mirror, and say, “You are the best looking person in this room.” Fact is, I am the only person in the bathroom, but I start each day with a positive expression.

This one might be a no-brainer, but *conflict* creates tension. Conflict creates change and change creates growth! No one likes conflict. However, every person needs it in order to grow. I have never had a conflict that I faced confidently and said, “Yes! I am conflicted!” But on the other side of every conflict, I have found myself stronger, better, and more equipped.

As a leader, you will always have conflict, and if you don’t, you are probably leading a sinking ship!

Let me be honest. I make quicker, more direct decisions when in the middle of conflict. Why? Because I have to. Without conflict, I don’t feel the make-a-decision-right-away urgency. I can wait. But once there is a conflict, I must act.

Your *health* can create tension. I am gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, and soy-free, so basically “flavor-free.” That creates tension.

I changed my diet several years ago. It was very difficult at first. I wrestled back and forth. Today, there is no struggle because I feel better than ever. At first there was tension, but now there is a trust. My diet works. I usually don’t cheat. Sometimes I will on special occasions, but

99% of the time, I live by the pre-decision, thanks to tension, I made based on my health.

As a leader, I love this one: *Leaders* create tension. Leaders who do not create conflict from time to time will not be leading much longer. If you have ever worked for a work-a-holic (my whole team just perked up), you know that they expect you to work as hard as they do.

Day off? Seriously!

I may still text you or email you, because I am always working. The tension is whether or not you respond to them on your day off. If you do, you leveraged the tension. If you don't, the tension may be leveraging you. You have to make a choice.

Politics create tension.

Enough said.

And don't forget the spiritual tension. This world says, "Do what feels good." God says, "Do what's right." Culture screams *convenience*. The cross demands *commitment*. You want to walk with Jesus? Then expect to live in a holy tug-of-war. Our society lives in this debate all the time. Instead of embracing the tension that spirituality or religion create, we marginalize it. We cast it to the side. We don't embrace it, we resist it.

A PLACE CALLED DIFFICULT

Bible story time. Elisha has been following his leader Elijah for about 8 years. Elisha watched Elijah do some pretty incredible things, but

now it was time for Elijah to leave earth. He is about to take a chariot ride to Heaven. Elisha asks for a “double portion” of what Elijah had. Elijah tells him, “You have asked a difficult thing.” Long story short, as Elijah is being taken up to Heaven, Elisha cries, “My father, my father.” Elisha chose to leverage the tension of loss by asking for double the anointing his spiritual father had.

But Elisha didn’t flinch.

He grabbed his mentor’s mantle and ran with it. According to the Bible, Elijah did 14 miracles. Elisha? 28. That’s what happens when you don’t run from difficulty—you double down on it. Most people whine about their problems. Elisha leveraged his pain into purpose.

I’ve had thousands of convos with pastors (and other leaders too). You know what I hear a lot? Discouragement. Depression. Disillusionment. We’re not just preaching sermons. We’re carrying people’s wounds. It’s heavy. But it’s holy. And if you don’t learn how to leverage their pain, it’ll bury you.

Most pastors, like me, can feel overwhelmed. We have to learn to leverage the tension of people’s pains or else those things will manage our lives.

The same is true of every leader: ***if you don’t manage life, life will manage you!***

This is where *perspective becomes your superpower*. If you live for the next five minutes, you’ll always be miserable. But if you zoom out and see the big picture—you’ll realize *God wastes nothing*.

Paul wrote from prison, and he said, “*Everything that’s happened to me has helped advance the gospel.*” My guy was *in chains and still had purpose pouring out of his pores*. That’s the mindset of a dangerous leader. One hell can’t stop.

If I am being really honest, I whine about my problems way too much. There are times when I get upset that things don’t go my way and that usually happens when I lose my perspective. We will all face storms, difficulties and problems but never forget *that if God wasn’t going to use it – He would never have allowed it*. Leverage what you face.

Don’t build a *mansion* in your *misery*.

Leverage what you are going through!

I DON’T WANT IT

Nobody wakes up saying, “I hope I get rocked by tension today!” But hear me loud and clear: You **NEED** it. You won’t always want it—but if you learn how to use it, it’ll elevate you faster than any self-help book ever could. As I look back on my life, I am now grateful for all that I went through. I was not thankful for it at the time I was going through it. But in order to leverage your tension, you must embrace what you face and find something to be grateful for each day.

Let’s rewind to Genesis.

Adam and Eve lived in literal paradise—and still messed it up. Why? Because they made a long-term *decision* on short-term *data*. You can’t let the pressure of the moment dictate the trajectory of your life. We all know how that worked out!

I grew up in a multiple divorce, low-income home on the church pantry assistance program. We did not always have the funds to do what my friends were doing, but my mother (aka my childhood superhero) tried to make a way – even if that meant sacrificing her hair appointment or clothing purchase. I faced a lot of challenges growing up that created tension.

Contrary to what you may think, I was an introvert growing up (truth be told, I still am). I had to work hard at relationships – they never came natural to me. I was made fun of growing up. I never heard my father say (until decades later) that he was proud of me. It got so difficult that I tried to take my life in my basement in Alden, New York (Something I held in my heart for years without ever telling anyone).

So yes, I know about tension.

I never wanted tension. But as Chad reminded me, conflict follows me, and it became something I chose to leverage.

Pain doesn't get to be your landlord.

You evict it, then build something better.

I went into full-time ministry to take everything I went through—and give it purpose. For 14 years, I poured into teenagers. I wanted them to know: You're not alone. Your story matters. And I still lead like that today—with a youth pastor fire and a no-quit mindset. After nearly 30 years of ministry, I have more passion today than ever before. I will never know how many students I impacted over those years, but I hope one day I will fully know what a difference I made in their lives.

You see, a lot of people will allow their pain to stop them. They will live life on pause, but at some point, you have to push through the pain to find the purpose!

Too many people live paused by pain. Let me be real: ***God never wastes a hurt—but we sure do sometimes.***

We recycle regret instead of releasing it.

You may not want tension, but I promise you every single person will face it. You can't get away from it. Tension is part of life. It's part of what builds you and your story.

TENSION TIME

Look inside to see what needs to be built better.

1. Where are you facing the most stretching?
2. What tension has caused you the greatest hurt?
3. What 'place called difficult' have you built a mansion instead of pitching a tent?