

Purpose as Resistance: Leading with Courage When the World Feels Unsteady

By Bryce Thomason · November 13, 2025 · 3 min read



You can sense it in conversations, in the pace of the news cycle, and even in the background hum of daily life. Uncertainty doesn't just surround us; it seeps into us. Leaders feel this weight acutely: the responsibility, the pressure to hold things together, and the fatigue of navigating unpredictable systems.

When life becomes unsteady, many of us instinctively react in the same way: we brace. We tighten, we take on more than our share, and we convince ourselves that if we work hard enough, we can outrun the discomfort. I've done this more times than I can count. Years of leading organizations, congregations, and teams through complex moments have taught me how easily the body slips into protection mode without asking permission. The scanning for the next crisis, the tension in the shoulders, the narrowing of focus—all of it feels familiar.

What took me much longer to learn is that bracing offers the illusion of control, but it drains the clarity we need most. It limits our presence, and presence is the very tool leadership relies on.

Somewhere along my journey, I began to understand a truth that would have helped me immensely earlier in my career: purpose is the antidote to fear. Purpose is a form of resistance—not the loud, oppositional kind, but a quiet refusal to let pressure define who we become. Purpose restores clarity when everything around us feels unstable. It doesn't eliminate difficulty; it grounds us so we can meet that difficulty with steadiness rather than reactivity.

When you reconnect with why you're here—what matters to you, what you stand for, and what you're willing to offer the world—something shifts internally. Your breathing slows, your field of vision widens, and the bracing softens. You realize that purpose is not just an abstraction; it's a physiological settling, a moment when your nervous system recognizes that you have something sturdier to rely on than urgency.

In my coaching work, I see this pattern constantly. Leaders who feel overwhelmed or depleted are not typically struggling because they lack skill. Rarely is the problem technical. More often, the issue

stems from drifting away from purpose—a rupture in connection with the deeper “why” that makes work meaningful. When purpose fades, pressure rushes in to fill the void. But when purpose returns, leadership does as well.

I also wish someone had told me sooner that purpose is not soft. Purpose is courage. It is the courage to remain open when everything around you encourages you to close. The courage to stay present when pressure insists you should hurry. The courage to protect what matters without hardening your heart. The courage to make decisions based on values rather than fear.

Purpose shapes your leadership in ways effort alone cannot. It centers you, steadies you, and clarifies what deserves your attention and what does not. It reminds you—again and again—that you are part of something larger than yourself, a truth that can be easy to forget when everything feels overwhelming.

If the world feels unsteady to you lately, you are not alone. Many leaders are experiencing this moment in their bodies as much as their minds. But unsteadiness is not a sign of failure; it is an invitation to return to what is true. It calls you back to the deeper commitments that live beneath your responsibilities.

So pause and ask yourself: What purpose is trying to lead me right now? Which part of me is tired of bracing? Where is courage quietly urging me forward?

You don't need a perfect plan. You don't need every answer. What you need is an anchor—a way to orient yourself that doesn't depend on external stability.

Purpose can be that anchor. When you lead from purpose, you navigate the world with a different quality of presence. You listen with greater depth, decide with more clarity, and serve from a place of steadiness rather than fear.

The world may continue to shift around you, but purpose gives you a center that turbulence cannot take away.