Every leader has scars. Here's what they're for.

The good news: he was a surgeon.

The bad news: I was going to need one before the day was through.

Years back, while in grad school, I worked for a contractor. One afternoon I was installing ceiling molding in a fixer-upper tucked away in the suburbs of north Dallas. Near the end of the day, while trimming a small piece of molding, my utility knife slipped and filleted my thumb. Realizing the cut was deep, I wrapped it in a handkerchief, secured it with duct tape, packed up my tools, and headed out to find the nearest urgent care.

On my way out, I told the homeowner I needed to get it looked at and would be back tomorrow to finish the job. Sensing I was in some pain (and noticing my oddly wrapped thumb!), he asked what happened. Then he mentioned he was a surgeon. So the good doctor drove me to Parkland Hospital, numbed me up and laced me up with a handful of stitches, and sent me on my way.

For the next few days, my thumb hurt a lot. Eventually the pain gave way to a numbness that lasted for months.

And all I have now is a scar.

Do you have any scars? Of course you do. You can't do life without collecting a few. Maybe quite a few.

But what about the scars you can't point to on your knees or elbows? The invisible ones? The ones that mark your heart, your soul? The ones that heal ever so slowly?

Odds are you've got some of those too. Probably more than you signed up for.

And if you're like me, your first instinct is to reach for the duct tape. Wrap it up, keep moving, finish the job. But wrapping it up doesn't heal anything; it just hides the damage. Leave it long enough, and the pain settles into a numbness we mistake for healing.

Truth be told, scars are part of the deal. They're part of life.

And they're part of leadership.

When all is said and done, scars are reminders—storylines we carry.

Scars remind us that we've been in a battle. That life is risky. That it offers few guarantees. Scars remind us that we are all works in progress. We fail. We make mistakes. We're not yet what we want to be. But by God's grace, we're closer than we used to be.

Scars remind us that healing happens. They stand as witnesses that our present pain can and will give

way to God's restorative work. And as we cooperate with what He's doing in us, our hearts are shaped to look more like His.

I'm convinced that's what Joseph had in mind in the closing chapter of Genesis. Years after his brothers had heartlessly sold him into slavery, he looked them in the eye and said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Those are audacious words, the kind that only come from a healed heart. A scarred heart, to be sure. But a healed one.

And perhaps most of all, scars become our talking points. In quiet, reflective moments with family and friends, they let us tell the story of how faithful God has been through the painful chapters of our lives and leadership. God doesn't exempt us from pain. He uses it to accomplish something worthy *in* us, so that He can accomplish something worthy *through* us.

So, is it time to take another look at a few of your scars and claim them as part of God's work of heart in your life and leadership?

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life