



Tod Bolsinger: ([00:03](#))

What you have to discover is what you can be wholehearted about. And that doesn't mean suck it up, buttercup, try harder. It means really discern what's the thing you can give your whole heart to. And start with that.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:22](#))

You're listening to The Faith and Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work. Hi, and welcome to The Faith and Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, the director of public engagement at Denver Institute for Faith and Work. And I'm joined today by Jeff Hoffmeyer, our VP of advancement. How is it going, Jeff?

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([00:43](#))

I'm just glad to be here with you, Joe. it's a nice spring day in Colorado, which means snow on the ground and about 20 degrees.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:50](#))

I bet you want to strap on your skis.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([00:54](#))

Yeah, no, I'm going this weekend, for sure.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:56](#))

Oh, how fun. Well, here in Colorado, like in many parts of the country, we've been really encouraged to see COVID numbers dropping and some of the restrictions starting to lift, but wow, after two long years, it is really hard to imagine what life might be like without these really fast changing dynamics of the pandemic. It's so fun to imagine new freedoms, but I know that as we come out of these restrictions, we're not returning to life as we knew it in 2020, and if you have leadership responsibilities, you will face new pressures as a result.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:30](#))

Just a few examples that come to mind would be a business leader. The economy is changing and it's putting new pressures on business from supply chain issues to inflation to continuing to navigate these hybrid work solutions. And the strategies that worked for leaders before may not meet the needs of today's marketplace. Or maybe you're an educational administrator and your kids are so thankful that they're not having to wear masks. But as life returns slightly to normal, you're realizing how much educational ground has been lost over the last couple of years. Or



maybe you're a pastor and your congregation has grown distance as a result of hosting church online.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:08](#))

And over the last two years, people have fallen out of the habit of attending church. And you're wondering, how do I convince people from a heart driven way to restore their habit of church attendance? Whatever your role or level of influence, we need healthy, resilient leaders to face the problems we're facing more than ever, which is why I'm excited about today's guest, Tod Bolsinger, who is a seasoned organizational leader and expert at leading through change. Hoff, I know that Tod has played an important role in your leadership journey. Before we introduce Tod, tell us a little bit more about the role that he played in your life.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([02:40](#))

Yeah, so I was in probably the most difficult leadership challenge in my life, leading a church in Southern California and Tod was my executive coach and was just a lifeline for me in what he would call a crucible experience of leadership. I was beat up, I was isolated, I felt alone. And Tod and his coaching with me just absolutely buoyed me during that season. And I felt like I hit the jackpot with him in terms of a coach because of his writing and his expertise in that topic. So he's a great friend and a mentor.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([03:15](#))

And just a little bit more about Tod, he is the founder and principal now of what's called AE Sloan Leadership. That's a consulting and an executive coaching firm. Tod's also the executive director of the De Pree Center for Church Leadership Institute. He's also an associate professor of leadership formation at Fuller Seminary. He's written a number of really great books, including *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, and his most recent work called *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders are Formed in the Crucible of Change*. And it's that work we're really going to be talking about with him on this podcast. Tod, welcome. So glad to have on the podcast.

Tod Bolsinger: ([04:01](#))

Jeff, it's good to be with you. Thank you for having me.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([04:04](#))

Yeah. So just to jump in, Tod, in your work with leaders and a result of writing and your professional experience, you've become be known as an expert in helping leaders navigate



change. And I've benefited from that personally, just working with you and reading what you've written. But why is that topic important to you personally?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(04:29\)](#)

Yeah, well, partially it's because I went through it. One of the things that I had when I was ... I was a pastor of a church that had every marker going in the direction that you wanted it to go, that's all that kind of famous up into the right thing and felt really good about that, except that the morale was going down into the left and I was stuck. I couldn't figure out what to do. Why were all the markers going up and the morale going down? And I was so confused. And what I realized was the changing world around us required me to change the way I led and that I had been deeply trained, even unconsciously, in a model of leadership that was actually pretty resistant to becoming adaptable. So I had to learn to lead all over again at a time in my life and in my work that I would've thought I would've been hitting my sweet spot. I actually had to retrain entirely.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(05:22\)](#)

Yeah. And that's some of those difficulties and even failures that we'll talk about a bit more later that you learned from.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(05:28\)](#)

Yeah, indeed, indeed.

Joanna Meyer: [\(05:31\)](#)

Your most recent book, *Tempered Resilience* uses the metaphor, forging metal as a framework for the leadership development process. And I'd like to know a little bit more about your experience *Meta* working. That's not what I would have expected of you as a seminary professor. And also tell us a little bit about how it serves as a high level framework for the book.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(05:50\)](#)

So there's a famous line in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech where he says, "With this faith, we'll be able to hue out of a mountain of despair stones of hope." And I saw the memorial and I read that speech many times, I've studied this speech many times and that verb hue stood out to me. And so I started thinking, "What are the kind of tools that could hue? What hues hope from despair?" The line is actually a wonderful couplet, it's, "Hue stones of hope out a mountain of despair. With this faith, we'll be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."



Tod Bolsinger: [\(06:26\)](#)

And when you put those together, hue and transform, you start realizing there's a kind of an interesting moment here to take these things that are despairing, like these giant granted obstacles in our lives. And if we can transform them, if we can hue them, we can actually do something way better than we had imagined. And so I thought, "Okay, what kind of tools hue?" And I learned that they were tempered tools. And so I started taking this class and I realized that process of turning steel into a tool was very similar to the kind of formation process that leaders tell me, the folks I coach and who I go who tell me all the time, it feels like they're going through, they're being transformed in the same way in the leadership process.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(07:09\)](#)

And so that became the metaphor for thinking about how you become a tempered resilient leader, heeding, holding, hammering, quenching different ... Like it's a process that can feel almost violent that it's being done to you, but it's really transformative. And I think most leaders who I spoke to and the folks I coach and consult all the time, tell me, "Yeah, this is the experience that I know I need to go through that makes it so hard."

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(07:37\)](#)

Tod, let's press into that a little bit about resilience and even just I love that line you quoted from, I Have a Dream. I've heard of that speech. I'm not quite sure of the historical accuracy of this, but I've heard that a certain point, Martin Luther King got to the end of his speech or his notes. And then someone behind him who was kind of in his entourage, said, "Martin, keep going." And that's actually when he really got into the importance part of that speech and it really took off. That's really what you're charging leaders with in terms of resilience is to keep going. And yet, there's so much in the world, no matter where you're leading, that make us want to stop. So let's just talk a bit more about that. How do you describe that word resilience in terms of leadership? What does that mean? And our listeners, they're leading in all kinds of different industries. But what does resilience really mean?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(08:38\)](#)

Well, what's interesting is so the story behind that that you're referring to is Mahalia Jackson. She's the gospel singer who was with-



Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([08:44](#))

Oh, good. So you actually know. Say more since I was just given like a thumbnail, so say more about it.

Tod Bolsinger: ([08:51](#))

Well, it's a great story because, so when he did his original speech, he did a speech that was basically built on a metaphor of a promissory note. Basically the United States of America has made a promissory note to its African American citizens that 100 years after the emancipation proclamation has been returned insufficient funds. So it's time for them to make good on those promises. And what happened at that moment is that line that he thought would be the big line didn't land. So those of us who've ever spoken have had that moment where you think, it didn't work and he pauses and he begins to go off script and Mahalia Jackson who had sung earlier in the day, and who'd heard him before and had heard him in Detroit do this thing that he was just amazing, said, "Tell them about the dream, Martin, tell them about the dream." And then he launches into the now famous I Have a Dream section that wasn't in the original notes. One of the-

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([09:43](#))

[crosstalk 00:09:43] made the speech. Yeah.

Tod Bolsinger: ([09:44](#))

Right, right. Made the speech probably the most iconic speech of the 20th century. And it all happened in the moment because he was encouraged by someone to kind of go deeper than he planned. And so what connects to your question is, I think what most leaders don't understand about resilience is resilience is related to adaptability. It's related to your capacity in the moment to not get stuck, but to actually learn and adapt and get creative at the moment that you're doing it to take risk.

Tod Bolsinger: ([10:16](#))

And so, what we're teaching people, when we talk about tempered resilience is we're not teaching them how to suck it up, buttercup. Gut it out, get deeper. You're actually teaching them to become humble and curious and open and risk taking. So that at that moment you might be able to have more to bring to the table and that's what keeps you going. What keeps you going is your capacity to learn and your capacity to explore and be curious and take some risks. And that's exactly what, not only Dr. King was exemplifying in that moment, but also, and pretty



significantly how Dr. King also needed the voices of other people like Mahalia Jackson in order to keep going.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([11:02](#))

Yeah. So a couple of things with it, clearly resilience, it's not a strength we can build up on our own. We need a community. But a lot of what I've learned from you, both sitting in your office at Fuller when I was going through a crucible of leadership myself. And in fact, you never did tell me, "Suck it up, buttercup." But what you did tell me over and over again is, "Jeff, the change that's going on in you, that's what you need to lean into because that's the change that your community's going to experience that you're trying to lead." So can you say a bit more about that for our listeners? How can a leader focus on her own change, his own change in the midst of trying to lead an organization? And why is that so important?

Tod Bolsinger: ([11:52](#))

So, what's interesting is that when you get into a really disruptive circumstance and when we get disrupted, something happens to us where our anxiety goes up. So I always say to people, "Remember that the root word for family is the same root word as the word for familiar." So when you're in an unfamiliar moment and unfamiliar experience, unfamiliar territory, unfamiliar challenge, you don't just feel disoriented. You feel unfamilied. So you feel abandoned is what you end up feeling with and you feel ... So, what do you do? You want to cling to anything, you want to run home to mama, you want to get back to whatever's the most familiar thing you can, and you go back and default back to your old true tricks, your old programs, your old people.

Tod Bolsinger: ([12:38](#))

The greatest example of this that I talk about in the book is the Hebrews who go on the other side of the Red Sea after the greatest miracle anybody has ever seen, the greatest miracle anybody would've seen until the resurrection of Jesus, six weeks later, they want to go back. Like, "Let's go back to slavery. They killed our children, but we did have leeks and onions and we're a little hungry." So, that experience is what happens to leaders. When you get to the unfamiliar, you get anxious. And then what happens is when your people get anxious, you have what Ed Friedman calls a failure of nerve, where you begin to stop the transformation process.

Tod Bolsinger: ([13:20](#))

What resilience is, is your capacity to keep going. So Andrew Zolli defines it as maintaining core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances, maintaining core purpose and integrity. Now, Jeff, you know me well enough to know that maintained is not a



verb that gets me out of bed in the morning, but maintaining core purpose. If the purpose is to take these people to the promise land, maintaining integrity, we're going to do this in the way that is consistent with our values.

Tod Bolsinger: ([13:51](#))

We're going to maintain our purpose. We're going to serve these people. We're going to lead this company. We're going to do the thing we're called to do, and we're going to do it in the way we believe we're supposed to do it. We're not going to lose that. Even when we get anxious, even when we're totally disrupted by oh, a pandemic or the threat of global nuclear war or the things that we're phasing every day, what resilience calls us to is this deep internal work so that we don't lose our core purpose and our integrity when we are highly anxious. And that's the work that every leader has to do is to maintain their own capacity to continue to keep going when they are anxious and when everybody else is anxious also.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:33](#))

I want to ask, as I was reading your book, there were a few times where I just had to stop and put it down because it felt very personal. I had to take a deep breath and say, "Okay, what will this mean for me?" Which is a sign of a good and meaningful book. But what really hit home were the chapters where you talked about a leader's identity and how resilience is based on the work that's done at the core level, like you said, at the familial level, the things that are closest to us. Would you tell us a little bit more about that? Why is some of that work of understanding our identity in the midst of those high pressure moments so critical?

Tod Bolsinger: ([15:12](#))

Well, so Joanna, this is really one of the most interesting parts of this whole study. So I'm a leadership professor at a seminary and my background is spiritual formation. That's what I did my doctoral work on, communal practices of spiritual formation. So I had kind of live in the intersection of two fields, the long tradition of Christian spiritual formation and the organizational leadership language of institutions like Harvard Business School and stuff like that. If you put them together, you find that there's this incredible overlap and it's right at the identity of the leader. That's the overlap between those two places that just is so profound.

Tod Bolsinger: ([15:50](#))

So even in places like Harvard, they will talk about stuff like having a strong sense of identity, or the psychological world, will talk about having self-differentiation, your capacity to have an identity and maintain relationships with people who oppose you at the same time. Well, the



language, how that shows up in the scriptures is how they talk about stuff like having identity in Christ or having Paul's capacity to say that he becomes like a Greek with Greeks, and he becomes like a Jew with Jews, but he can only do that because he is doing that to serve them because he is anchored in Christ.

Tod Bolsinger: ([16:26](#))

And so, one of the things that we became really apparent when we started thinking about and researching about all this work on resilience is if you ask the question about how a leader becomes a tempered tool, the first question you got to ask is, so what's the steel? What's the quality of a core identity? And you realize that there's this quality that the kind of quality of the steel, a center of who we are is based on having what we call a grounded identity. And that's the way of pulling that together. In the book, I called it a grounded identity.

Tod Bolsinger: ([17:03](#))

And what it means is this, change leaders can only really be successful if they are grounded in something else besides their need to bring change. If your identity is linked to your success in bringing change, you're going to be too fragile because about 70 to 90%, depending upon who you ask, change initiatives fail. So you have to go into this with something that is more secure than whether you're going to be a success or not. And for many of us who go into leadership, we're going into leadership to prove something to somebody. We're going to prove that I'm a successful leader and therefore I'm lovable or acceptable or worthy of respect. And you have to have the opposite.

Tod Bolsinger: ([17:50](#))

And where I really saw this clearly was in the life of Jesus, where he goes to be baptized. And it says in the text, "At this time, Jesus went from Nazareth down to the Jordan to be baptized." At this time. At what time? Before he'd spoken his sermon, before he'd done a miracle, before he'd cast out a demon, before he'd confronted the power, before he'd done anything at all, before he'd done anything that would even identify him as the Messiah, we hear, "You are my beloved child. In you, I am well pleased." Eugene Peterson literally has it translated as you are the pride of my life.

Tod Bolsinger: ([18:30](#))

So when was God proud of Jesus? Before he'd done anything. And I think part of what leaders need to recognize is if our identity is not grounded in the fact that we are people of value who are already loved to have nothing to prove, we will not be able to be transformed into the kind



of leader who can bring this kind of transformation that we're talking about in a really disruptive world.

Joanna Meyer: ([18:56](#))

Gosh, I think of a friend of mine who's on a local school board here in the Denver metro area. She's newly elected and how contentious school board meetings are these days and how it would feel for her to enter that meeting with just an unshakable sense of who she is in Christ or-

Tod Bolsinger: ([19:12](#))

Yeah. Oh, Joanna. I was talking with a person who's on a school board in Texas. Like you think, "Oh, well, Texas, everybody believes the same thing." Oh gosh, no. He said, it's been the hardest professional thing of his life. Because he gets yelled at by people who are so anxious. People serving on school boards right now are just taking it in the teeth and you have to be able to hold onto my identity is not built on whether these people like me or whether these people reelect me. Like my identity has to be built on something much more solid so that I then have the courage to be able to keep learning and growing. So what we're talking about with Jeff a minute ago, keep going through your own transformation so you can accomplish the mission and the purpose that you've been asked to accomplish.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([19:59](#))

Tod, as I listen to what you're saying, the good news of what you're saying to use that word gospel is you're encouraging a groundedness in something that's outside of ourselves. And according to the scriptures, we're grounded into Christ, we're brought into that adoption that you were referencing. Tod, I know you're in sunny California, we're in Colorado where it's still cold, there's snow on the ground. So I can't get outside to ride my real bike, but I have been riding my Peloton down in the basement. And sometimes some of those Peloton instructors say some pretty ridiculous things and they're trying to be encouraging, but what I've heard is, be a disciple of your own best self.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([20:40](#))

And I just think, man, I do not want to be a disciple of my own best self. I want to be a disciple of someone who's outside of myself. And so that's that groundedness in Christ that you're really encouraging. And just to shift the topic a bit, that way we can actually handle our own failures. And I'd like to talk to you about those failures, because you've written about it. I've learned about this from a woman named Nina Jacobson. She's kind of in your neck of the woods in Hollywood, a very successful producer. Produced such movies as Crazy Rich Asians.



Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([21:20](#))

But she talks about a failure resume and others have written and talked about that. If we think about our actual resumes, which is a list of successes, it's actually what's in between the lines that we don't put down on our resumes, all of those failures that actually builds in that resilience you're talking about. So the question here for you would be this, is, thinking about those failures, that's a key part of how we develop as leaders. And you've been honest about your own failures in your writing, which many of us appreciate. How have those experiences made you a stronger leader?

Tod Bolsinger: ([22:00](#))

Well, one of the hardest parts about that for me is that I didn't start as a person who would've written a failure resume. I'm an oldest child. I worked at being an honor student. I went to graduate school, all that stuff. One of the hardest things for me to learn was that very quickly focusing only on the things that I could do successfully was making my world smaller, that my fear of failure or my fear of looking bad meant that I was only going to do the things I was comfortable with. And that was going to limit me. And early on, early, early, early in my ministry, that was limiting me. So what I had to basically learn to think about is that failure is actually a way of learning. And so what I say to my clients today is, if you are learning, you're not failing.

Tod Bolsinger: ([22:49](#))

What you're doing is you're experimenting. And the learning is the focus. Right now, I'm working with 60 churches between my consulting work and my work at the Church Leadership Institute. And we tell them all the time, "Your job is to do safe, modest experiments. And when you know you're doing experiments is when you're not asking the question, did it work? You're asking the question, so what are we learning? We'll learn this. We'll do the next one. We'll learn this. We'll do the next one." Well then when I look back at my life, those failures, all of them, what you have on the resume is, "Here's the lesson I learned," and they become valuable. You start realizing stuff like, I can't do this alone. I can't fake it till I make it.

Tod Bolsinger: ([23:35](#))

Here's things I learned of. I'm not the smartest man in the room. I'm not even close to the smartest person in the room. There are 50 women smarter than me and I didn't even see them the first time because I have a bias about that. I started realizing, "Oh my gosh, there were all these things that I was learning that become so important that if you just took away the word failure and the stigma from that, you'd be saying, "Oh no, this person is the kind of person that



we understand can grow." Carol Dweck did an entire thing on having a growth mindset. And the difference between those who succeed in a rapidly changing world and those who don't are mostly based on people who have a growth mindset.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(24:18\)](#)

Do you believe you can keep growing? Well, and the way you keep growing usually is through experiencing something that at one level didn't turn out the way you expected it to. So from my point of view, this has become probably the most life-giving thing that I have. Like the part of my life that is more joyful than anything else is my capacity to keep learning. And my curiosity and stoking my curiosity. Now it doesn't mean that when things don't go according to plan, I'm not mad or that my ego's not ... takes a hit, just means I recover from it quicker so I can look back and say, "Okay, that didn't work."

Tod Bolsinger: [\(24:57\)](#)

When I led a national effort for our denomination, they got voted down by more votes than Barry Goldwater lost for president against Johnson. Like when I watched an entire assembly of people just say no to my big project. But what I learned from that has shaped me profoundly in the last 10 years in really good ways. So, the first reframe about becoming a person who can handle failure is try to get rid of the idea of did it work and instead, always ask, so what are we learning? And then you go on to the next one and the next one and the next one. And it's a prototyping mentality that is much more out of the entrepreneurial space than it is out of the old kind of industrial corporate space, if you will.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(25:48\)](#)

Just to press into that a bit more, what would you say to a leader who's immediately in the wake of actually a sizable failure? Because if that happens on a Thursday and here we are on a Friday, it's probably hard to put yourself in that, what did I learn mindset. So if you're right in the heart of that and the heartache and the ego struggle that you just mentioned, what do we do as leaders immediately following whatever that failure is?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(26:18\)](#)

Well, the first thing you do is you say, "That sucked, that's terrible. I'm sorry that's so bad. That's really, really bad." You don't start bucking up. You actually feel it. But what you say to people is, "This isn't final." There's a difference between going into half time of a game and feeling like the first half didn't go well and be at the end of the game. You're not dead yet. So this isn't final. So



again, what can we do at this moment is to say, "All right, what can we learn?" And then when you're ready and not until you're ready, but when you're ready, go out and try again.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(26:56\)](#)

So encouraging.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(26:57\)](#)

It's really trying hard. It's not trying to put on a happy face or look for the silver line. In the biblical language, it's closer to lament than it is anything else. Like look at the brutal reality and not lose hope. So just quickly going back to-

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(27:16\)](#)

Lament [crosstalk 00:27:16] turn to gratitude.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(27:17\)](#)

Well, just look at Dr. King. When he gives that speech, when he launches into the I Have a Dream set section, he's looking at 250,000 people who have come from the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement. They have come from the protests and the marches and the lunch counters and the dogs and the hoses and the jails. And he looks at them and he quotes Isaiah 40. And he basically describes what the world is going to be like some day when God returns and all the mountains are going to be brought down to a plane and all the rough places are going to be made smooth and a river's going to run through it.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(27:50\)](#)

And he basically says, "If we have the confidence of believing that a day is going to come when God is going to redeem this world down to the dirt, then we go back to work. We go back to the protest and the marches and lunch counters and the dogs and the hoses and the jail. With this faith, we'll be able to hue out of a mountain of despair, stones of hope." It's not saying that it's good or bad, good or it's all great. It's saying, it's hard, but our hope takes us back to work. And to me, it is the hope of my own continual growth that takes me back into, "Okay, what's the next thing I can learn? What's the next thing I can do?"

Jeff Haanen: [\(28:33\)](#)

Hi, I'm Jeff Haanen, founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. And I would like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community, whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's



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Joanna Meyer: ([29:19](#))

Tod, you had said something in the book that really stuck with me. You said that once leaders have decided what will never change, you must be prepared to change every thing else. And even you had alluded to that just now that when stuff fails, you have to be able to try again in a different way. So I have a two-pronged question for you. One is, how do you figure out what's never going to change? Because you want to make sure you're picking the right thing. And my follow up, which I'll ask you again, if you need it later, is, how do you deal with the change fatigue of everything else's going to change?

Tod Bolsinger: ([29:46](#))

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So first of all, that's a paraphrase of something Jim Collins has said, it's actually from him and what it points to, and this is really important when I ... I work with churches and nonprofits and I work with really conservative institutions. Stuff like seminaries, theological education is an 1100 year old business model. So I work with really conservative institutions and they're conservative because they do believe they have something to conserve. So the very first thing you have to teach leaders is discernment. What is never going to change? What's essential about us? What if we lose this we lose everything? That's usually actually a smaller list than most of us want it to be.

Tod Bolsinger: ([30:33](#))

If we get together and we actually really discern, that comes down to a really small set of essentials, but they're critical. That's the core purpose and integrity that you're trying to maintain. So the very first act we do when we start consulting with companies and organizations and stuff is we actually ... they're always disappointed because they want to start thinking outside the box and being all creative. And we're like, "Let's go back to what will never change. And let's get to what our actual values, not even our aspirational values." If you tell me, "This is our value, because this is what we should be," I'm going to stop you. If you say, should, I'm not interested. I want to know what is.



Tod Bolsinger: ([31:11](#))

So you come back to, this is the thing that will never change. Once we get that down, we take a deep breath and we start saying, "Okay, to protect this, this needs to adapt in a changing world. This needs to be preserved." So to do this, we need to be willing to let everything else go and not recklessly and not ruthlessly, but rigorously. Like what do we hold onto? What do we not? What do we drop? So, the first leadership book I wrote called Canoeing the Mountains was literally a book about folks trying to find a water route who ran into the Rocky Mountains. Well, you guys are in Colorado. You can't canoe your way over those Rocky Mountains.

Tod Bolsinger: ([31:54](#))

So if you came on this trip because it's a water route and you invented your own boat, which is what they did, it's a bad day when we tell you, "You're going to have to burn these boats for firewood and we're going to be walking." Because what really mattered wasn't canoeing. What mattered was exploring. "Oh, I came on a canoe trip." No, you came on a discovery trip. Take a deep breath. Feel the loss of dropping that canoe and feel the loss of the identity. If you came on this trip because you're an expert water navigator, now you're just a dude who carries luggage. Your identity takes a hit and you keep going. And that process of loss and reframing is actually what's at the heart of the work we have to do as leaders for helping people go through the change fatigue. You have to actually grieve the loss or letting go and reframe so that we have a sense of identity that is really around our core deepest values that'll propel us to keep going.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:09](#))

Yeah. What would you say to a leader at any level of an organization, it could even be an educator in a classroom. For some reason, I'm thinking of teachers today for our podcast. But somebody at just a real small scale that is absolutely exhausted from two years of adapting and change. And this season is supposed to be exciting. We're heading out of a pandemic and they're tired. They don't feel like they have anything in the tank for this next season ahead. What council would you offer them?

Tod Bolsinger: ([33:34](#))

Well, one of the things that has actually really, really helped me through the pandemic has been this quote by a poet named David White. So David White was going through a vocational crisis. He was a poet, but he was working, running a nonprofit. And he ended up in a meeting, like a retreat, a private retreat with Brother David Steindl-Rast, who's kind of a famous monk. So Poet David asks Brother David, "Tell me about exhaustion." And Brother David looks at him and says,



"You know the antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest, it's wholeheartedness." And he says to him, "You are so tired because you are half here and half here will kill you after a while. You need something to which you can give your full powers, you must do something heartfelt and you must do it soon."

Tod Bolsinger: ([34:33](#))

And what I would say to the teacher in a classroom, to the parent who's doing double duty, to the company person who's trying to keep it alive. Restaurant tours who are trying to figure out how to keep their restaurants alive, just go down the list is, you are so tired because you did not sign up for this. This is not what you intended to do. I work with pastors. No pastor I know wants to pastor people over Zoom. Nobody. I said, "You became a pastor because you love God and you love people and you want to help the people you love meet the God you love by creating a church they would love. And right now, they're so mad at you they're leaving churches. You didn't sign up for this. So you're at most half-hearted. What you have to discover is what you can be wholehearted about."

Tod Bolsinger: ([35:23](#))

And that doesn't mean, "Suck it up, buttercup, try harder." It means really discern what's the thing you can give your whole heart to and start with that. Just simply start with that. And Howard Thurman said, "Don't worry about what the world needs, worry about what makes you come alive because what the world needs is people who come alive." So we spend a lot of our time ... Our little company is about helping faith leaders thrive as change leaders. And we come back to, what is it that makes you come alive? What is the thing you are wholehearted about? Come back to the center.

Tod Bolsinger: ([36:02](#))

So look a child in the eye, even over Zoom and remember, what can you do? What can you do? I've been thinking about this. I was told in seminary this story, it may be apocryphal because I can't seem to find it, but it's so stuck with me. The story was told that in the ghettos in World War II, the Jewish ghettos, when the Nazis were coming, the grandparents, the grandmothers started teaching the Hebrew alphabet to their grandchildren. They could hear the tanks coming and they're teaching the Hebrew alphabet because what they said was, "If they know the Hebrew alphabet, they will find the Torah. And if they find the Torah someday, they will find God again." And I often say to leaders, what's the Hebrew alphabet? What's the thing you can do that you so can give yourself to? And you can trust that God can use that to build on, to build



on, to build on. You don't have to overcome the tanks. You can teach the Torah by teaching the alphabet.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(37:05\)](#)

Tod, with that idea of wholeheartedness and returning to the center, finding what makes us alive, talk to us about what you write about in terms of finding a rule of life and why that's important for a leader. Just so you know, you're talking our language at the Denver Institute. We actually have a rule of life as a staff, including regular times for prayer and retreat and seeking physical health. It's actually one of the really life giving things about working for this organization, but explain what you mean by a rule of life. And why is that crucial for leaders now? And maybe even just to connect what you're just talking about, how does that lead to that center and that place of wholeheartedness?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(37:49\)](#)

Well, the whole notion, as you know the rule of life came out of St. Benedict's rule that was a monastic rule. So people who were going to live in a monastic community needed a set of practices that they all agreed to live by so that they could have the community they wanted and accomplished the spiritual work that God wanted to do in their lives. So most of us think about rules, just the way you guys do. And if you work at a place like the Denver Institute, how great you have a shared rule, but most people don't get to live in a place or get to work at a place that has a shared rule. So my encouragement to them is to create a rule of life for yourself that is built around your deepest values and around what you are called to do.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(38:27\)](#)

So in the same way that the Benedictine monasteries were built around integrating work and prayer. So to this very day, you can go to a Benedictine monastery, you show up there, they're going to invite you to pray. You don't have to be a Catholic. You don't have to be a Christian. They'll just invite you to pray. It's what they do. And if you stay there more, in a couple of days, they're going to ask you to do the dishes because they want you to know that prayer includes work. So boom. And so you guys really on one sets are a really deeply kind of the Benedictine institution. It's beautiful. But a lot of us are more like Jesuits who are like sent around the world to go wherever God would want us to go. And we don't get to live in a monastery. And we don't get to be part of an organization that has a rule.



Tod Bolsinger: [\(39:08\)](#)

So what are the rule we can live by? What are the spiritual exercises, if you will? And what I started doing in Tempered Resilience is started talking about the rule of life that people needed to be able to be leaders who could lead change and especially lead change when their own people are resisting them. That's the most soul sucking thing for a leader, are not the challenges in the world, it's the resistance of your own people. It's sabotage. So what we started thinking about is, what are the practices you need at this stage of your life to lead and be faithful and be resilient when you're facing resistance?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(39:46\)](#)

And every leader, if you talk to almost any Christian, they might not not use this language, but they know there were different seasons of life that they needed different practices in order to grow in different ways. So when I was a new Christian, they taught me to read my Bible every day and pray every day. And I did that for years. That was my spiritual practice. Read my Bible every day, pray every day, go to church every week. And that was great until I-

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(40:10\)](#)

They called it quiet times, right?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(40:12\)](#)

Yeah, exactly. And it was great until I became a preacher, that wasn't enough Bible. I had to spend hours, hours studying the scriptures. And that became part of the rhythm of my life, the deep study of scripture. Well, now, I don't preach every week. I tell people, I got four sermons. They're all pretty good. I do them over and over again. But I spend every day working with leaders in really different contexts, trying to help them discern what they need to do. So I need a different set of practices to be good at that.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(40:47\)](#)

I need to learn how to listen better. I need to learn how to empathize with people over distance. I need to learn how to hold back my own assumptions and when I want to project them onto people, because their world is really different than my world. And so those, when I start thinking about where I need to be changed, I start thinking about the practices that I need in order to cultivate those character qualities. And when I codify them into sets of daily rhythm of practices, it becomes a rule of life.



Jeff Hoffmeyer: ([41:22](#))

Yeah. It strikes me as the freeing part of what you're describing is, it's not up to us to form this change within us. As Christians, we believe the Holy Spirit's doing that work, but committing to a rule of life and one that's going to change and morph as our leadership rules change, that just creates space for the spirit to do that work. And then we're free from the burden of kind of like, "I've got to change, I've got to change." And that's up to God, but committing to this rule allows that work to happen.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:59](#))

I would love to know a practical example in a non kind of legalistic or routine way or lifeless way. Would you give an example of some elements someone might consider adding to a rule for their life?

Tod Bolsinger: ([42:12](#))

Well, so I join up with leaders. And so I often say to leaders, "In a changing world, the very first quality you need to be able to develop is your capacity to learn." And that many of us, by the time we get to some level of leadership, it's been a long time since we've had to learn something new. We're experts, you're good at it. You're person who's often speaking, you're often teaching. And so what I want to say is, you've got to overcome the expert expectation by creating habits of learning in your life. So one of my practices is to be always doing something that I suck at, like just reminds me to be a beginner or that I think I'm good at. So, I'll give you an example. This will be a relevant example.

Tod Bolsinger: ([42:53](#))

So I have been skiing for 50 years. I've been literally skiing for 50 years. Just this last year, I got this app that you put stuff in your boots and it actually analyzes your skiing. So the very first time I'm setting it up, they're asking me how good a skier you are. And I'm thinking I'm pretty good. I've skied a lot of stuff. So, they said, "Ski racers are 150." So I said, "I'm going to score 120. Yeah. Not that good, but I'm good." First time I skied, 82 is the score they gave me. 82. I was like, "What?" Well, I started realizing that what I have is 50 years of bad habits. That it's been a long time since I took a lesson because I just like getting out there and bombing.

Tod Bolsinger: ([43:36](#))

And when I looked at the analytics, which is the cold hard data, it said stuff like, "You're way out of control. You're not smooth enough. You're not control enough. You're not balance enough." My balance is off. Well, that was humbling. All of a sudden I'm like, "Oh my gosh." Well, so 50



years into skiing, I'm learning how to ski all over again. And there's something about that that's both really humbling and really energizing because now I'm 58 years old and I'd like to ski another 20 years or more.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(44:08\)](#)

I say my goal is to ski when I'm 80. So I need to probably ski differently than the way I ski in my brain is, which is the way I skied when I was 25. That process of just giving yourself things you can learn, learn new, learn blacksmithing, go learn a foreign language. Put yourself in a place where you are experiencing the humility of learning and begin to love that. And you'll realize it starts doing all kinds of things. Like the way you read the scriptures, the way you approach a meeting, the curiosity that you have, for me, the most tangible thing in my life is really having a practice of I'm always trying to learn something new.

Joanna Meyer: [\(44:50\)](#)

Tod, I'm going to give you the final word. We often like to allow our guests to have a moment to address our audience directly and say, what charge would you have for them? And I would love to have you talk about relationships, because I know that you are one of the most relationally connected leaders we know. You have, I don't want to say mastered, but you've made it a definite area of study in your life of what does it look like to be involved in healthy, healthy relational networks as a tool for shaping our leadership. So would you give a final word to our listeners in this journey of resilient leadership?

Tod Bolsinger: [\(45:26\)](#)

Yeah. Well, thanks for letting me do that. Even this conversation is fun for me because one of the greatest mistakes of leadership is to buy into the myth that it's lonely at the top. We were never meant to lead alone. From the very beginning of creation, Adam is told, "It is not good that you are alone." And we get Adam and Eve. The whole notion that we are not meant to be alone. So one of the things I always say to leaders is, if you want to become a resilient leader, if you think about the blacksmithing illustration, you're thinking of the fire and the hammer, you're thinking about this which melts it down and this which shapes it, don't forget the anvil. The anvil is the center. The anvil is the place where the work gets done.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(46:18\)](#)

And the anvil for a leader is our relationships. Our relationships are what hold us when we are feeling as if we are molten and oozy and we are being shaped by the fire around us. It's the anvil that holds us. And I'm really very specific about this when I coach and when I work with people.



I say, "Look, you need to have partners, you need to have mentors, and you need to have friends." You need all three, all three categories. I think about it this way. My partners are people who care about the mission more than they care about me. I know they're my partner because if I stop, they will keep going. They will look at me and say, "I love you Tod. I appreciate you. It's been good to walk this journey with you, but I'm committed to this mission. So we'll keep going."

Tod Bolsinger: [\(46:59\)](#)

That's what a partner is. A partner is more committed to the mission than it is to me. My friends are more committed to me than they are to the mission. So my friends are the people who look at me and say ... they'll say, "Hey Tod, congratulations. I heard you got a new book out." And I'll say, "Yes. Do you want to read it?" And they go, "No, I'm not interested in that, but I care about you. So, congratulations." My partners care about the mission more than they care about me. My friends care about me more than they care about the mission. And many leaders need to make sure you don't confuse the two. I always say, you know you're with a dysfunctional leader when a leader asks you for personal loyalty, that is dysfunction every time.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(47:40\)](#)

Loyalty is toxic in leadership, we are to be committed to a mission, not loyal to a leader. And so when we recognize that health is about the alignment, about our missional alignment, now we need to be committed and caring for each other. But my friends are the people who will care about me if I'm not doing the mission. My mentors are the people who care about me for the sake of my mission. My mentors are the people who want me to be at my best because they know my life reverberates beyond myself. So they are my spiritual directors, my therapists, my coaches. And I always say that I'm a Presbyterian. So this is the kind of a tongue in cheek.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(48:23\)](#)

But if I was a bishop and Presbyterians don't have bishops. And I work with a lot of bishops these days who look at me and they roll their eyes, like, "You have fantasies about being a bishop, that's a little scary." But if I was a bishop, I would want people to know that if I am your spiritual supervisor, if you try to lead anything without a spiritual director, a therapist, or a coach, or a mentor, I'm going to consider that leadership malpractice. I don't care where you are on the org chart. I don't care what you're doing. It is leadership malpractice to lead alone.



Tod Bolsinger: [\(48:56\)](#)

And I didn't make that up. My wife was a marriage and family therapist, and she worked on our clergy sexual misconduct task force. Her job was to walk alongside women who were experiencing the spiritual and sexual abuse of pastors who had bad boundaries. And she came home one day and looked at me and said, "I just don't understand you pastors. I have 15 clients. And the State of California expects me to have supervision. You have 1500 members and nobody ever asks you anything." I really believe it is dangerous to be alone.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(49:28\)](#)

And when you see stuff like megachurch pastors saying things like, "Well, I can't have a mentor, unless that person's got a bigger church than me." That's hubris and dangerous and we watch that church crumble. And so to be really aware that we need an anvil because we're going to be vulnerable. And if we're not willing to be vulnerable, we're not going to be transformed. So partners, mentors, friends, all three. And if nothing else to know, recognize one of the reasons why institutions like yours exist and companies like mine exist are to walk alongside and help leaders not feel alone in all of this, because it's that critical.

Joanna Meyer: [\(50:05\)](#)

What a gift of a conversation. Thanks for your time, Tod. We will link in our show notes to your book, Resilient Leadership. And I can't wait for our listeners to dig into it more. Thanks for your friendship. I'll let Hoff have a final word too.

Jeff Hoffmeyer: [\(50:21\)](#)

So grateful for you, Tod. And thanks for that closing word, not just the encouragement that we're not alone, but being specific about the kind of relationships that all of us as leaders need. So we're grateful speaking of friendship for your friendship with us and Denver Institute and thanks for your work with leaders around the country.

Tod Bolsinger: [\(50:40\)](#)

It's nice to be with you both. Thanks.

Joanna Meyer: [\(50:46\)](#)

I can't tell you enough how much I appreciated Tod's book Resilient Leadership. So we will link to it in the show notes as well as to his consulting practice, AE Sloan. A couple other resources if you are thinking about these topics of navigating change. We have a new course on Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs by Steve Cuss is available The Faith and Work classroom.



We will link to it on our show notes. And it's an amazing conversation with one of the leaders I respect most in thinking about how personal self-management affects our leadership. So you won't want to miss that.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:20](#))

And finally, a reminder that the application period for the 5280 Fellowship is open through May 2nd. That's that nine month intensive discipleship program for emerging leaders, exploring areas of faith, work, and culture. It's an amazing experience and you can learn more about it at [5280fellows.com](http://5280fellows.com). Thanks for joining us. If you've enjoyed this episode of The Faith and Work Podcast, please subscribe, leave a review, or share it with a friend. Your support is critical to helping other listeners discover this vital resource. The Faith and Work Podcast is produced by Denver Institute for Faith and Work where we believe that work is a way to love God and serve our neighbors. To learn more or to make a financial contribution, visit [denverinstitute.org](http://denverinstitute.org).