

TOD BOLSINGER

**TEMPERED
RESILIENCE**

STUDY GUIDE

**8 SESSIONS ON
BECOMING AN
ADAPTIVE
LEADER**



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HEWING HOPE AND THE MOUNTAIN OF DESPAIR

The question I find myself asking is not “Can I learn the skills I need to lead change?” but rather “Can I survive it?”

SENIOR PASTOR OF A LARGE CHURCH

READ the introduction, chapter 1, and chapter 2 of *Tempered Resilience*.

Note: This is the only session that requires more than one chapter of reading. Because so many concepts are set up in these early chapters, this first session is more of an overview of the need for leadership resilience before taking a deeper dive into the metaphor of becoming a tempered, resilient leader.

REVIEW

In *Tempered Resilience* we meet leaders who allow themselves in unguarded moments to talk candidly about the experience of leading change in a rapidly changing world. It is daunting, they admit, and often discouraging. But what takes an even greater toll on leaders than the external challenges they are facing is the *internal* organizational and

personal resistance that comes whenever they are trying to bring change within an organization. That resistance can lead to what Edwin Friedman has called a “failure of nerve” as well as what I refer to as a “failure of heart.”

Failure of nerve is caving to the pressure of the anxiety of the group to return to the status quo. . . . Failure of heart . . . is when the leader’s discouragement leads them to psychologically abandon their people and the charge they have been given.”¹ (*Tempered Resilience*, 28)

Using the ancient biblical story of Moses leading the people of God through the wilderness and the more contemporary story of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. leading the civil rights movement in the 1960s, *Tempered Resilience* speaks bluntly about the challenges that leaders face when bringing change.

Leadership . . . is always about the transformation and growth of a people—starting with the leader—to develop the resilience and adaptive capacity to wisely cut through resistance and accomplish the mission of the group. It requires learning and results in loss. And even when we know what we are signing up for, we resist both the vulnerability of learning and the pain of loss. So, to lead, especially in the face of resistance requires that we develop *resilience*.

Resilience is not about becoming smarter or tougher; it’s about becoming stronger and more flexible. It’s about becoming *tempered*. (*Tempered Resilience*, 4)

Perhaps no challenge is as taxing as when the leader faces sabotage, that is, the resistance from the very people and often the very teammates one has. (See *Tempered Resilience*, 22, for

GROUNDED

A tempered leader can be resilient and withstand both failure of nerve and failure of heart. Both are failures of identity. Succumbing to a failure of nerve means that our sense of identity cannot take the rejection of the people we have been called to lead, so we join them in their anxiety and enjoy their ongoing acceptance. Experiencing a failure of heart means that we become so discouraged, so brittle and cynical, that we disconnect from the people we are called to lead and abandon—either emotionally or physically—both the people and our calling. Failure of nerve in a leader is an identity that becomes enmeshed with followers and loses something of the independence of thought and conviction; failure of heart is evidenced by a leader who becomes disconnected from followers and gives up the call to care and lead the people they have been given.



Figure 1.1

To overcome both failures and stay connected to and faithful to the call to lead a people through change requires Christian identity that is *grounded in something other than one's success as a leader*. (*Tempered Resilience*, 39)

the beginning of a specific example that is woven throughout the narrative of the book.)

Resilience in the face of sabotage is the antidote to the leaders' failure of nerve *and* failure of heart. A tempered, resilient leader doesn't comply with the group anxiety to return to the status quo. And a tempered leader does not become brittle and angry or discouraged and disconnected. Resilience is not something that can be mustered in a

moment of “rising to the occasion.”² It is formed over a long period *before* the crisis of testing so that it can continue the transformation *during* the moment of challenge. Like a soft piece of metal that must be transformed into a chisel to hew a hard granite slab, it has to be worked. The steel has to be transformed—forged and formed and *tempered*—so that it becomes strong and flexible enough to, as Dr. King said, hew stones of hope out of a mountain of despair. (*Tempered Resilience*, 29–30)

REFLECT

General Reflection Questions

1. What has inspired you as you read these chapters of *Tempered Resilience*?
2. What raises questions that you would like to have clarified?
3. What do you find yourself resisting?
4. What changes are you considering in your own leadership because of reading these chapters?

Further Questions for Self-Reflection

- What kinds of challenges have you faced when trying to lead change? Which of those energize you even though they are demanding?
- What kinds of challenges are draining or discouraging to you?
- What is the difference between those kinds of challenges?
- When in your leadership have you suffered from either a failure of nerve or a failure of heart? To which are you more susceptible and why?

- What do you think God is doing in your life that requires you to take on this leadership challenge?

RELATE

Discuss the following with a trusted confidant or group:

- What is one insight from the reading and reflection exercises that would be helpful to process with a trusted confidant or group?
- Share about a time when you experienced sabotage? What toll did it take on you? How did you respond to it?
- In what ways have you experienced leadership challenges as challenges to your identity?
- What happens to you spiritually or emotionally when you experience the resistance of your own team, congregation, or organizational colleagues?

PRACTICE: GROUNDING IN GOD WHEN FACING RESISTANCE

Using either a journal or in a conversation with a trusted friend, consider this question: What do you need from God for your identity to be grounded in Christ and not in your success as a leader?

Read Matthew 3:1-17 in your favorite Bible version. Slowly and prayerfully repeat verse 17, putting your name in for “my Son.” *A voice from heaven said, “This is _____, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*

Now, go back to the original question:

What do you need from God to believe this verse about you?

What difference does believing that make in your leadership?

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