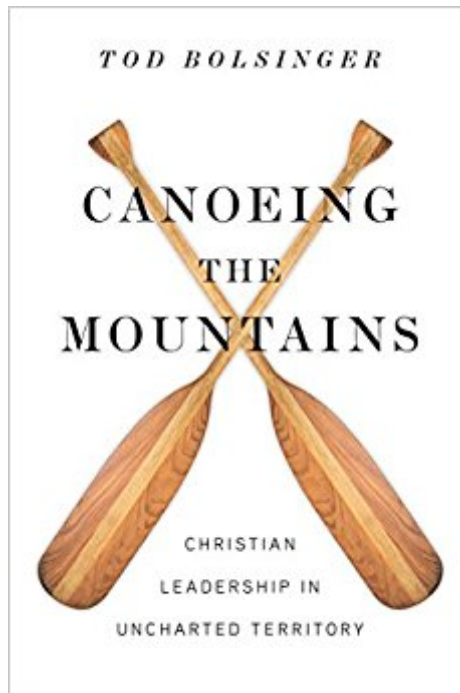




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# Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership In Uncharted Territory



## Synopsis

Explorers Lewis and Clark had to adapt. While they had prepared to find a waterway to the Pacific Ocean, instead they found themselves in the Rocky Mountains. You too may feel that you are leading in a cultural context you were not expecting. You may even feel that your training holds you back more often than it carries you along. Drawing from his extensive experience as a pastor and consultant, Tod Bolsinger brings decades of expertise in guiding churches and organizations through uncharted territory. He offers a combination of illuminating insights and practical tools to help you reimagine what effective leadership looks like in our rapidly changing world. If you're going to scale the mountains of ministry, you need to leave behind canoes and find new navigational tools. Reading this book will set you on the right course to lead with confidence and courage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A superb book on the need for adaptive leadership in the twenty-first-century church. With imagination and insight formed through his experience as a pastor, church consultant and seminary leader, Tod Bolsinger challenges leaders in the Christian community to recognize the unsettling reality of being 'off the map.' We have 'trained for a world that is disappearing.' Bolsinger offers fresh, practical advice that integrates the best of leadership theory with the realities of church leadership, illustrated with vivid metaphors and real-world examples, resulting in a seminal book on how to navigate this new world. A must-read for everyone interested in church leadership." (Uli Chi,

former board chair, Regent College Board of Governors)"Contemporary pastors and church leaders face a daunting challenge. The world and the church have changed dramatically. Congregational expectations have never been higher or more complex. How can we lead our churches with wisdom and kingdom impact in the ever-changing world of today and tomorrow? Tod Bolsinger answers this pressing question in his timely book *Canoeing the Mountains*. Combining solid biblical theology, contemporary leadership theory and years of experience as a pastor and church consultant, Bolsinger offers a new vision of pastoral leadership as well as dozens of practical examples that bring this vision to life. All pastors and church leaders need to read this book, for their own sake, for the good of their churches and for the advance of God's kingdom in the world." (Mark D. Roberts, executive director, Max De Pree Center for Leadership)"Since the missional church discussion began to develop real momentum, the constant question has been how does this theological vision of the church after Christendom translate into the practice of real congregations struggling with enormous challenges? A great deal of excellent work has been done, and there are excellent resources for the community and leadership seriously committed to missional change. But Bolsinger's book is a major step forward. It is based on solid missional theology, rooted in concrete congregational experience, shaped by provocative research of many diverse voices and communicated energetically and creatively. Most importantly, it is shaped by theologically informed hope, not just optimism, and takes the risks that must be taken for the sake of faithful witness today. I strongly commend this book!" (Darrell L. Guder, Henry Winters Luce Emeritus Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary)"As a committed practical theologian, Bolsinger blends the best insights from Scripture and leadership theory with an empathetic understanding of the most pressing questions of today's leaders. If you're like me, you're not only going to want to read this book, you're going to want to read it multiple times." (Kara Powell, faculty member at Fuller Seminary, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute)"Combining the mind of a scholar, the heart of a pastor and the experience of a consultant, Tod Bolsinger is the rare leader who can also teach. Using the example of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, he also authentically shares from his own experience, both positive and negative, to make the most important concepts in organizational leadership accessible to pastors, nonprofit executives and Christians in the marketplace who are charged with giving leadership in a changing world. *Canoeing the Mountains* should be required reading in seminary classrooms and leadership seminars. I know it will be for the pastors and leaders we coach." (Kevin Graham Ford, principal of TAG Consulting, author of *The Secret Sauce*)"*Canoeing the Mountains* is a must-read for pastors and church leaders who want to understand the precarious religious landscape in America today. Seasoned pastor Tod

Bolsinger draws on his experience as a church consultant and student of contemporary leadership theory in order to tackle the most pressing ministry leadership issues of our day. Employing Lewis and Clark's experience of exploring the Louisiana Purchase as a driving metaphor for the leadership that is needed in the church, Bolsinger issues a bold challenge to contemporary pastors to learn how to lead all over again. With refreshing honesty and vulnerability about his own ministry, Tod does not allow the reader to wallow in discouragement over the fact that the world in front of us is different than the world behind us. Instead, he insists that this time in history offers pastors and church leaders an unparalleled opportunity to discover a deeper capacity for leadership within ourselves than ever before. He issues a clarion call 'not to try harder, but to start a new adventure' by abandoning our 'canoes' to become risk-taking mountain climbers. I am going to recommend this book not only to the hundreds of pastors in the Macedonian Ministry program, but also to church leaders across the country. Canoeing the Mountains gave me hope for the future of the church of Jesus Christ. I pray that it will do the same for you!" (Thomas K. Tewell, executive director, Macedonian Ministry)"Tod Bolsinger, a colleague of mine at Fuller Seminary . . . uses the metaphor of 'canoeing the mountains' based on the experience of Lewis and Clark, who successfully completed the mission of the Corps of Discovery because of their ability to lead creatively in light of unexpected circumstances. . . . Whether you're a pastor, a small business owner, a branch manager, or a CEO of a major company, you are probably facing challenges not unlike those confronting . . . Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. If so, I encourage you to get a copy of Canoeing the Mountains. You and those you lead will be glad you did." (Mark D. Roberts, Patheos, January 18, 2016)"Do not canoe another stroke or portage another step without Canoeing the Mountains in hand. In today's post-Christian world, we are navigating uncharted waters where our churches demand innovation at every turn. How do we lead for transformation when the world is transforming even faster? For anyone committed to and dazed by the changing realities of today's church, Tod Bolsinger offers a needed vision." (Meritt Lohr Sawyer, executive director, Paul Carlson Partnership, Evangelical Covenant Church)"Unlike leadership books from the business world, Canoeing the Mountains is written by a churchman for church people. He understands the unique pressures and complexity of relationships that exist in a local church. Instead of giving a 'one-size-fits-all' solution, Bolsinger provides guiding principles for doing church in this new era. . . . The book left me hopeful and eager for the adventure ahead." (Matt Merrill, The Presbyterian Outlook, July 4, 2016)"I see many pastors and leaders of churches who are exhausted by the daunting task of leading churches in a culture that is changing faster than it ever has before. There are many books that tell us we need to change, and there are also many books that give a vision of

what a new kind of church could look like. There are very few that address the difficult task of helping leaders navigate the complexities of leading that is necessary for a changing world. Tod Bolsinger's *Canoeing the Mountains* provides the right mixture of theological insight, leadership theory and relevant stories that will give the necessary principles to help leaders face unfamiliar terrain." (Dana S. Allin, synod executive, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians)"There are lots of books these days on leadership, but this one shines because of the author's ability to pull together the many threads of leadership literature. In a most winsome and engaging way, Tod Bolsinger weaves together the best of current leadership research—adaptive change, systems theory, organizational transformation—with the real-life challenges of a pastor/practitioner who has spent years trying to put all this together in a congregation while still preaching Sunday by Sunday and doing funerals on Monday. Tod has lived this book out in denominational circles and as a coach to other pastors trying to bring change within a congregation. Like a master storyteller, Tod also weaves in the story of Lewis and Clark as a historical parable of the change and challenge in which we find ourselves today in the church. This is a book that you simply must read!" (Jim Singleton, associate professor of pastoral leadership and evangelism, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary)"Given our ever-changing, complex and demanding world, all leaders will benefit from *Canoeing the Mountains*. From his personal experience as an accomplished pastor, executive coach and organizational leader, Tod Bolsinger provides powerful frameworks and tools that will inspire and empower twenty-first century pastors and church leaders to maximize their impact on their congregations and in the world." (Andy Chan, vice president, innovation and career development, Wake Forest University)"When I first heard Tod share his insights about questions that keep leaders up at night, I was hooked. Lewis and Clark prepared for river canoeing and then suddenly faced a literal and insurmountable mountain range that threatened their mission. We read headlines every month about some established company confronted with extinction. They were unprepared to adapt and climb. The lessons in Tod's book may be based in history but are so timely and relevant for today. Facing unpredictable and confounding unknowns defines this era of leadership. Tod's book is one I am recommending to my clients. It's a map for navigating the future that I have made part of my practice." (Rex Miller, author, futurist, principal for mindSHIFT)"When Fuller Seminary decided to launch out in our own uncharted terrain, we called on Tod Bolsinger to join our leadership team. When you read *Canoeing the Mountains*, you'll immediately understand why. Bolsinger brings a scholar's mind, a pastor's heart and a wealth of leadership and consulting experience to the task. His ability to translate the most important organizational leadership material into the day-to-day challenges of the Christian leader is without

peer. His vulnerability and authenticity resonates as he shares his own leadership learning journey. This is the leadership book the church needs today." (Mark Labberton, president, Fuller Theological Seminary)"How does the pastor trained in the twentieth century connect the Word of God to the society of the twenty-first century in the face of the dramatic societal changes of the last few decades? Tod Bolsinger brilliantly creates tools for the pastor who works in these uncharted areas. Drawing on the historic Lewis and Clark, he shows the way to navigate a world that is not on any map. Along the way this wisdom spills over into meaning and insight for any leader in business, education or politics. This is an important new resource. Every pastor and leader should read it carefully." (Albert Erisman, executive in residence, Seattle Pacific University, retired executive, Boeing, author of *The Accidental Executive*)"Ministry in post-Christendom is indeed uncharted territory. For so many pastors and leaders, this is a time of uncertainty, the unknown and displacement in finding a way forward. In *Canoeing the Mountains*, Tod Bolsinger cleverly solicits imagery and vocabulary that today's pastors and leaders can cling to as they begin to truly climb the mountain of adaptive change necessary to transform churches to better health. While there are many books about adaptive change, the process takes years to grasp and understand. Tod's retelling of the story of Lewis and Clark provides concrete stepping stones to a fluid journey and repackages these concepts in a way that is digestible, inspiring and thought provoking. I will use this book with my own congregation as we continue to canoe the mountains of adaptive change." (Theresa Cho, copastor of St. John's Presbyterian Church, San Francisco)

Tod Bolsinger (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is the vice president for vocation and formation and assistant professor of practical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Lives and Show Time: Living Down Hypocrisy by Living Out the Faith*. A frequent speaker, consultant and blogger, he serves as an executive coach for corporate, nonprofit, educational and church organizations in transformational leadership. For seventeen years, he was the senior pastor of San Clemente Presbyterian Church in San Clemente, California, after serving for ten years at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. Tod and his wife Beth have two children.

Great book! I'm not going to write a full out review of the book but basic things.1) I LOVE the Lewis and Clark references in this book!! I'm living in the Northwest (Idaho) and really resonate with him because I love outdoors, discovery, and adventure. After reading this book I now have a name and further inspiration for the coffee shop church concert venue I'm going to plant in the next few

years.<sup>2</sup>) I bought this book as part of the pastoral meeting I attend once and month and we met and talked about this book.<sup>3</sup>) The book basically has 3 sections we (the pastoral meeting) agreed; Inspiration - Administration - Demonstration (my words). Inspiration; this part of the book ROCKED. MY. WORLD! I love the inspiring reframing he gave to the post-Christendom world we are in/entering. SO much good stuff in this part. If you read nothing in this book, read the first few chapters. I felt what the author did in this first section could have been the entire tone of the book...(\*spoilers\*) whereas I feel the last two sections veered away from this gold and became a guy on the map (Lewis and Clark on the Missouri River) trying to write about what they would experience off the map (crossing the Lemhi Pass and ditching the canoes), but in the mindset with the experience and education of "on the map" thinking and practice, which he spent the entire first section of the book refuting. I still, however, feel there were some good things to be wrought in the last couple sections. Administration; in this section he started talking about competency ON the map in order to lead OFF the map. Some good stuff. Demonstration; I felt like this was the part of the book where the author brought his own experience to the table and tried to help us get a glimpse of the way CURRENT church leaders can try and lead people into new uncharted territory - which for baptists is quite difficult, even though he's a presby. :-) This is were I think he was going back to his "on the map" thinking for how to lead people off the map, which I tried to read from the perspective of a church leader in a well established church who is trying to figure out how to navigate this historic church full of old crotchety unchanging pew dwellers to move on from their old thinking and see what the LORD is doing. Many of these congregations will die off, many of which - honestly - should. For heath in the vine, you have to prune. Christianity is not dying - Christendom is dying - which I believe is a good thing.<sup>4</sup>) I GOT the concept he was trying to make with the last two sections, but it felt like he was undoing all of the dreaming and inspirational aspects of his first section by trying to approach the rest of it with administrative charts, graphs, and "church growth" or "churchy smartiepantsness." Which he may or may not agree that the kind of church leadership we have experienced (specifically in the American West) is moving beyond much of the syncretism of business and Church - we need to kick corporate out of the marriage bed of the bride and the lamb. If anything THIS I believe is going to be one of the defining marks of the future of the Christian Church.<sup>5</sup>) As a current church leader going into the world of church planting, I feel that if nothing else, the first section of this book has inspired me and driven me into a great excitement for being able to pave a new road for the future of the Christian Church in the world as we manifest the presence of our LORD Jesus Christ in this world.<sup>6</sup>) One of the main things I believe in the discussion of the new direction of the Christian Church in America is that the churches that will

survive and be the healthiest are those who have a strong/high view of scripture and the authority of the Word of God above and over individuals, the local churches, and denominations. The Bolsinger touches on this when he references the changing nature of the church, first being able to figure out what will NOT change - what is foundational - what is the hill the church should die on? This is the gospel of our LORD; we are saved by grace through faith in Christ according the Word of God for the glory of God. The authority of the scripture is going to be the hill I believe many churches will die off from not defending because they never made standing on His Word the immutable truth they could stand on, the rock of their salvation, and the winds and rains came and because they were founded on sand, they were destroyed. #boomshakalaka #HolySpiritBomb #Another#Boom :-POkay that became a longer review that I anticipated...

Half way through the book and either it's the timing of the read (3 years post a church merger) or just the great content, but this is about the best leadership book I've read. It's not the simple rehashed stuff you'll find in the typical "how to be a good church leader" etc. book. I appreciate how Bolsinger brings in several other leaders to reiterate his points covering them from multiple angles. Also, the analogy of Lewis and Clark is great, not to mention the main premise of the book which is basically "change is here, change is coming, and adapting is a way of life or else you die!" On the personal side, this book is fantastic because what Tod is writing about is exactly what our denominational president has been telling me for a couple years now... "seminary is not equipping men to plant churches" and further more, those young men who do attend seminary have a much lower chance of succeeding as church planters. If you follow the trends and connect the prophetic dots, we need more gospel minded entrepreneurs and less astute and potentially theologically arrogant 25 year old's paying off college debt if we want to make a greater impact on the kingdom. This book is not specifically about church planting, but it is about adapting and doing things different in a breadth of church contexts. I've recommended it to several people and may this review be my official recommendation to you as well.

This is a great book for motivation, thinking outside the box, and leadership from a common sense point of view. It is a great read of human nature and what you need to know to lead. However there is a dimension in the Christian world not heavily emphasized here. Our motivation has to come from a transcendent relationship first not from a wise leader. We need to see and experience God at work, doing only what he can do, to go into uncharted territories. Our guide has to be God himself working to transform our lives. Then we follow his leading. Tod does gives us good pause here to



understand what worked in the past will not work in the future. It is good to experiment with change but primarily the need of redemption and transformation hasn't changed. Ways to have that dialogue with our culture stills needs consideration. I did enjoy the analogy of Lewis and Clark. There wisdom is a big take away from this book.

My husband read this book and loved it. His words on the following: He really enjoyed the book in how it presents the problems of leadership when you don't even have a clue the 'mountains' exist or how they present themselves. This book helped clarify some events in my life that I didn't understand. The book helped identify the issue of change and your role in navigating the change as well as others' roles in the change. I didn't Agree with every part of the book but I loved the wrap up of the main points. A good book for church leaders as well.

This is a fantastic book for any church leader who is struggling to navigate culture change and culture wars. The book balances great academics with practical application and is well written. Every pastor needs to read this more than once and keep it close at hand. Excellent material.

I train pastors in a variety of places across the country, integrating missional theology, adaptive leadership, spiritual formation and family systems. This book synthesizes those disciplines in a comprehensive and practical way with great story telling that resonates with the authors boots on the ground experience. I'm recommending it everywhere I go to pastors, congregational leaders, and to anyone who is seeking to learn "off the map" leadership competencies.

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