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Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing

By Andy Crouch



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Flourishing people are strong and weak. Two common temptations lure us away from abundant living?withdrawing into safety or grasping for power. True flourishing, says Andy Crouch, travels down an unexpected path?being both strong and weak. We see this unlikely mixture in the best leaders?people who use their authority for the benefit of others, while also showing extraordinary willingness to face and embrace suffering. We see it in Jesus, who wielded tremendous power yet also exposed himself to hunger, ridicule, torture and death. Rather than being opposites, strength and weakness are actually meant to be combined in every human life and community. Only when they come together do we find the flourishing for which we were made. With the characteristic insight, memorable stories and hopeful realism he is known for, Andy Crouch shows us how to walk this path so that the image of God can shine through us. Not just for our own good, but for the sake of others. If you want to become the kind of person whose influence leads to healthy communities, someone with the strength to be compassionate and generous, this is the book for you. Regardless of your stage or role in life, whether or not you have a position of leadership, here is a way to love and risk so that we all, even the most vulnerable, can flourish.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Crouch has a good grasp of both the text of Scripture and also our cultural context, and he's a good translator, taking robust theological ideas and making them accessible to the general interest reader. His thesis that human flourishing is embedded in the paradox of both greater authority and greater vulnerability echoes Jesus's incarnation and teaching, and inspires the reader to pursue the far-reaching implications of the gospel in our broken world, even our broken work." (2016 The Gospel Coalition Book Awards)

"There are very few books that speak candidly and biblically about the nature of power. Christians tend to err in one of three directions with regards to power. Either they worship power as the ultimate goal; they naively deny the power they are capable of and responsible for; or they avoid leadership for fear that power might corrupt them. *Strong and Weak* gives a theologically grounded approach for a biblical alternative. By embracing vulnerability while exercising authority, power can be used to serve the kingdom of God. This is a worthwhile and needed encouragement for the church and its people." (Paul Taylor, Themelios, August 2016)

"Church leaders looking for a new lens to view the impact of sin on a lost world will be well-served by this book. It's also an excellent book to read together with a group of friends to discuss the nature of the gospel?and its impact upon both individuals and communities?from a fresh perspective." (Tobin Perry, On Mission, Summer 2016)

"A book whose entire message can be summed up in a 2-inch by 2-inch chart at first may seem overly simplistic and unworthy of its 186 pages, but Crouch effectively digs beyond the surface of his message. He rewards readers with helpful insights into how Christians can flourish by acknowledging vulnerability instead of suppressing it. Both the pastor and the layperson will walk away from *Strong and Weak* with a fresh outlook on how God's power is perfected in weakness." (Daniel Camp, The Baptist Standard, May 2016)

"*Strong and Weak* is a small book?approximately 175 pages. But for me, it packed a large punch, almost with the force of a revelation. As a Christian and as a leader, I try so hard to insulate myself, my family, and those around me from risk, all the while enlarging the scope of my effective action and theirs. Far from contributing to my flourishing, however?or theirs?this effort makes it impossible to grow spiritually or to minister effectively. To do either, we must like Jesus descend from privilege into pain, for only by accepting meaningful risk can we also develop capacity for effective action. To borrow Paul's phrase, when we are weak, then we are strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). And only then." (George P. Wood, Influence, May 10, 2016)

"This book challenged me to think authentically as a leader and to bring my real self into the work of leadership. Andy Crouch offers a simple yet profound framework that examines the important relationship between authority and vulnerability?and how various combinations can either help or hinder human flourishing. This roadmap exposes the all-too-easy pitfalls of withdrawal and exploitation while reminding us that it is in vulnerability and suffering that strength dwells. *Strong and Weak* is an empowering guide for anyone who seeks to live against a culture of safety and into a life of meaningful risk and flourishing." (Jena Lee Nardella, cofounder, Blood:Water, author of One Thousand Wells)

"God's Word focuses so much on the interplay between weakness and strength?as well as other opposites

that drive us toward the greatest opportunities to flourish. All of discipleship seems to center around these opposites. When we experience poverty, we comprehend the riches that God generously bestows on us. When we experience helplessness, we recognize the might of his strength! Andy Crouch's excellent book gives insight into understanding all this more clearly." (Ravi I. Jayakaran, director, Community Transformations, e3 Partners, senior associate for integral mission, Lausanne Movement)

"Andy Crouch has done it again! *Strong and Weak* is an intellectually insightful, socially relevant and prophetically passionate book that shows us how to multiply our power to create a world where people from every tribe and nation can flourish and reach their full God-given potential. I love it!" (Brenda Salter McNeil, Seattle Pacific University, author of *Roadmap to Reconciliation*)

"This book is going to have a profound impact on our world. It's built on a clear, deep, life-changing insight that opens up vast possibilities for human flourishing. Classic, elegant and utterly illuminating." (John Ortberg, senior pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, author of *Soul Keeping*)

"In his latest, Andy Crouch asks: What virtues of character will guide most directly toward the sort of flourishing God desires for us? He suggests the answer lies in the combination of two paradoxical virtues: authority and vulnerability. The book nudges us to reimagine the shape of our faithfulness." (Relevant Magazine, March/April 2016)

"*Strong and Weak* gives biblical substance to the call to stewardship in the broadest sense?stewardship of self, vocation, gifts, resources and suffering. The stewardship of suffering is perhaps the most critical work of a leader, and often the most overlooked. This will become required reading for our leadership and development work." (Lisa Slayton, president, Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation)

About the Author

Andy Crouch (MDiv, Boston University School of Theology) is executive editor of *Christianity Today* and the author of books such as *Culture Making* and *Playing God*. Andy serves on the governing boards of Fuller Theological Seminary and Equitas Group, a philanthropic organization focused on ending child exploitation in Haiti and Southeast Asia. He is also a senior fellow of International Justice Mission's Institute for Biblical Justice. His writing has appeared in *Time*, the *Wall Street Journal* and several editions of *Best Christian Writing* and *Best Spiritual Writing*. Crouch served as executive producer for the documentary films *Where Faith and Culture Meet* and *Round Trip*, as well as the multi-year project *This Is Our City*, which featured documentary video, reporting and essays about Christians seeking the flourishing of their cities. He also sits on the editorial board for *Books & Culture* and was editor-in-chief of *re:generation quarterly*. He also spent ten years as a campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Harvard University. A classically trained musician who draws on pop, folk, rock, jazz and gospel, Crouch has led musical worship for congregations of five to twenty thousand. He lives with his family in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

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