



Strong and Weak

By Andy Crouch • IVP Books 2016

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Nutshell

Chapter 1: Beyond the False Choice

Two questions haunt every human life and every human community. The first: What are we meant to be? The second: Why are we so far from what we're meant to be? This book is about how to embrace the life for which we were made which is the life that embraces the paradox of flourishing, that pursues greater authority and greater vulnerability at the same time. There really is no other goal higher for us than to become people who are so full of authority and vulnerability that we perfectly reflect what human beings were meant to be and disclose the reality of the Creator in the midst of creation.

Chapter 2: Flourishing

Authority without vulnerability will not suffice. Neither will vulnerability without authority. These two together, I have come to believe, are the very heart of what it is to be human and to live for God and others. Think of authority this way: the capacity for meaningful action. What I mean by the vulnerability that leads to flourishing is exposure to meaningful risk, which includes the possibility of loss. Vulnerability at root means we can be wounded. When authority and vulnerability are combined, you find true flourishing.

Chapter 3: Suffering

Suffering can be the result of injustice and evil, but it touches even the most sheltered lives. So how do we help move people from suffering toward the authority for which they were made? The only truly sustainable response is to help build lasting authority. We will be called to seek out suffering, go to its depths, if we truly want to bring flourishing to the world. But when we journey to the heart of suffering, whether by circumstance or by choice, we are only going to where Another has gone before us. When we find our place in that story and in that journey, our vulnerability, too, becomes the path to flourishing.

Chapter 4: Withdrawing

For the first years of my son's life, it was my deepest desire as a parent to protect him from too much of either authority or vulnerability. A healthy childhood is one where capacity for action and exposure to meaningful risk are meted out in measured doses, gradually increasing as the child matures. Another way to fail your children is too much swaddling. What we call "Safety" when they're young becomes "Withdrawing" as they mature and that leads into an adulthood of risk-adverse entitlement.

Chapter 5: Exploiting

There is, in the long run, no such thing as true authority without true vulnerability. Our idols inevitably fail us, generally sooner than later. As they begin to fail, we begin to grasp ever more violently for the control we thought they promised and we deserved. This drives us to exploitation by ripping from the world, and especially from those too weak to resist, the good things our idols promised but are failing to deliver.

Interlude: The Path to Flourishing

Leadership does not begin with a title or a position. It begins the moment you are concerned more about others' flourishing than you are about your own. It begins when you start to ask how you might help create and sustain the conditions for others to increase their authority and vulnerability together.

Chapter 6: Hidden Vulnerability

Sometimes flourishing comes with invisible vulnerability, especially in leadership. Almost by definition, leaders have evident authority but they also bear vulnerability that no one else can see. They may have access to more complete information than those they lead. They may simply possess deeper insight and intuition of the challenges they and their organizations face. This is what it is to be a leader: to bear the risks that only you can see, while continuing to exercise authority that everyone can see.

Chapter 7: Descending to the Dead

Our mission in the world is to help individuals, whole communities and ultimately, all humanity to flourish. To do so, especially to set free those who have suffered the most from idolatry, addiction, injustice and tyranny, requires us to go where no one wants to go: voluntary exposure to pain and loss. In a healthy world, every increase in authority would be matched by an increase in risk. This is the pattern that would keep us dependent on God and one another, empowering others rather than hoarding our power, and discovering new dimensions of flourishing.

Chapter 8: Up and to the Right

In my frequent conversations with students about their callings and careers, I've observed the felt need of nearly every young person is how to acquire authority—

which to them means how to gain the capacity to act in the workplace and in the broader world. Yet, my advice to them almost always comes down to embracing more risk. Only those who have opened themselves to meaningful risk are likely to be entrusted with the authority that we were all made for and seek. Indeed, to seek out

meaningful risk actually is its own kind of act of authority, because in the economy of the world's true Creator and Redeemer, meaningful risk is the most meaningful action, the life that really is life, the flourishing for which we were created.