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

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STRONG AND WEAK: EMBRACING A LIFE OF LOVE, RISK, AND TRUE FLOURISHING

By Andy Crouch
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press
(2016)
Kindle Version, 192 pages

Reviewed by GREGORY J. BULLION

Strong and Weak by Andy Crouch is an interesting little effort to succinctly lay out a leadership model based on the paradox of the experiential necessity of both authority and vulnerability as a leader. I say “little;” not in a condescending way either. The book is literally little. Part of what makes this book worth the read is the ease with which the main idea is digested. Although, at 192 pages, it seems that the author could have boiled it down even more. The whole book is focused on an x-y axis, two by two diagram, to explain that leadership is not a choice between vulnerability and authority, but rather that true leadership will have both. His term for the top right corner of the two by two is “flourishing,” and this is the author’s goal: Get us there.

To flourish, one must master the delicate balance of authority—defined by the author as “the capacity for meaningful action,” (loc 35)—and vulnerability, or, “exposure to meaningful risk” (loc 40). If that balance of authority becomes out of balance, we fall into the pitfalls of “exploiting” (authority without vulnerability), or “suffering” (vulnerability without authority), or worst of all, “withdrawing” (an absence of both). I don’t want to ruin this for anybody, but that’s where the reader is left. In fact, if the book left it at something as

simple as that, and the reader was left to work out the rest of the application, this may be a better explanation than the author goes through. While valuable at times, there were definite moments when the author seemed to overexplain a very simple idea. He describes this book as an answer to a difficult question posed years ago from a former student of his, who did not appreciate his own call to vulnerability, which at the time seemed to place the student in an either-or scenario with authority. He states that this book is an answer to how one may still be a strong leader, but also remain vulnerable. It is this balance which will lead to flourishing as a leader and individual, in turn helping others flourish as well.

There is something strange about discussing the strengths and weaknesses of a book titled *Strong and Weak*, and this is likely one area the author would not like balance, but nonetheless it is there. The strength of this book lies in the simplicity of his two by two diagram, and the first part of the book explaining the main idea remains strong, if not a bit overdone. The second part of the book, which is the author’s explanation of how to move “up and to the right,” into the flourishing square, was interesting, but parts of this section left something to be desired. His call for experiencing hidden vulnerability as a leader—which means you know about weaknesses that you never mention, all the while wielding visible authority as though there are no weaknesses—honestly doesn’t seem to fit in with some of his earlier explanations, and harkens back to a “great man” theory of leadership. He is also fixated on the idea that Jesus’ “descent to the dead” (loc 146) is what gave Him His authority. This public vulnerability is then something that a leader should plan for in

the author's scheme.

As a Christian leader, I can see the Biblical nature of the author's two by two diagram. His major ideas have potential to really help identify a need in someone who is struggling in a pitfall of the diagram. His applications left something to be desired, but anyone who has read the Gospels can see that Jesus had this very struggle before Him every day: bear Godlike authority, and yet expose yourself to risk in real vulnerability. As Christ is our example, it would do well for us on a much smaller scale, to come to just such a balance.

I would love to say that this book got me there in that upper right hand corner, but I can't. Being exposed to the ideas of the book has helped me start the thought and action process. With that, though, there are some clear weaknesses this reviewer found benefit in the reading of this small book, and because of its smallness in time commitment and bigness on potential for growth, I will still recommend it for those who recognize in themselves a lack of "flourishing." If you are there, or if you would like to increase your "flourishing," this book may help you move up and to the right.

GREGORY J. BULLION is the associate pastor at Omaha Memorial SDA Church, and is completing his Masters in Pastoral Ministry at Andrews University Seminary.

DESIGNED TO LEAD: THE CHURCH AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

By Eric Geiger & Kevin Peck
Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group
(2016)
Kindle Version, 256 pages

Reviewed by SHAWN ELLIS

Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development was written by Dr. Eric Geiger, who received his doctorate in leadership from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has co-authored the bestselling discipleship book, *Simple Church*, and is currently Vice President of LifeWay Christian Resources. The book is also co-authored with Dr. Kevin Peck, senior pastor of the multi-campus Austin Stone Community Church.

Early in the book the authors challenge the status quo by stating that most churches exist to keep programs and services running in the absence of spiritual growth and, if spiritual leaders are developed, it is by accident, not intention. Geiger and Peck assert that most churches are unhealthy and cannot effectively grow leaders because they lack one or more of the following "three C" components: *Conviction*—the deep passion to develop leaders; *Culture*—a healthy environment for leaders to develop, and finally, *Constructs*—systems which help to systematically and intentionally build leaders. For example, a church with Constructs but no Conviction results in apathetic members with no desire to disciple but simply seek to fill slots for volunteer positions. Constructs without Culture results in leader exhaustion as added systems are seen as burden-