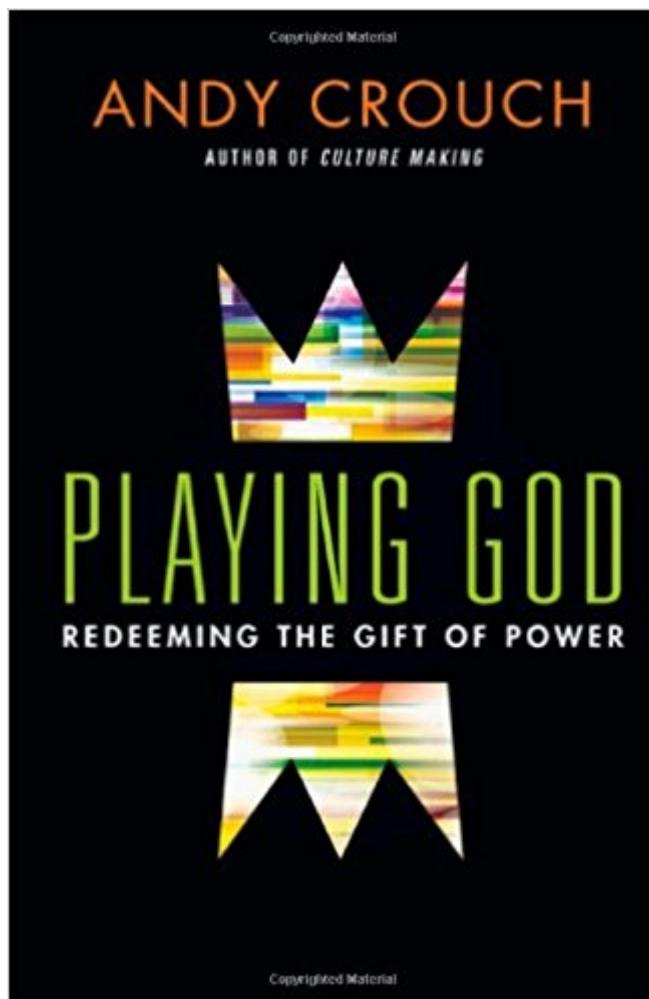


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# Playing God: Redeeming The Gift Of Power



## Synopsis

2014 Midwest Publishing Association Award of Excellence (General Trade) 2014 Outreach Magazine Resource of the Year ("Also Recommended," Leadership) ForeWord 2013 Book of the Year Award Honorable Mention (Adult Nonfiction, Religion) Power corrupts—*as we've seen time and time again*. People too often abuse their power and play god in the lives of others. Shady politicians, corrupt executives and ego-filled media stars have made us suspicious of those who wield influence and authority. They too often breed injustice by participating in what the Bible calls idolatry. Yet power is also the means by which we bring life, create possibilities, offer hope and make human flourishing possible. This is "playing god" as it is meant to be. If we are to do God's work—*to fight injustice, bring peace, create beauty and allow the image of God to thrive in those around us*—*how are we to do these things if not by power?* With his trademark clear-headed analysis, Andy Crouch unpacks the dynamics of power that either can make human flourishing possible or can destroy the image of God in people. While the effects of power are often very evident, he uncovers why power is frequently hidden. He considers not just its personal side but the important ways power develops and resides in institutions. Throughout Crouch offers fresh insights from key biblical passages, demonstrating how Scripture calls us to discipline our power. Wielding power need not distort us or others, but instead can be stewarded well. An essential book for all who would influence their world for the good.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Perhaps no question with such urgent life-and-death consequences is more poorly understood among Christians in our era than the stewardship of power; but gloriously, in *Playing God*, Andy Crouch provides the clarity we need in this once-in-a-generation work of sweeping theological and sociological depth. It is fresh, rigorous, profoundly helpful and a delight to read." (Gary A. Haugen, president & CEO, International Justice Mission)"How are power and idolatry related? What can we learn from powerful people in our business culture like Steve Jobs? How can a Christian in power be a good steward and use it to help solve injustice in the world? These are just a few of the questions that readers will ponder from Crouch's deeply layered study." (Publishers Weekly, October 14, 2013)"If this book hadn't been by Andy Crouch, I wouldn't have read it. A book on power? No thanks. But a book on power by Andy Crouch? Yes, I'll give it a try, maybe a bit reluctantly. Glad I did. (So much so that I started over immediately and read it a second time.) (John Wilson, Books & Culture, "Favorite Books of 2013", December 2013)"Readers will find plenty of insight and inspiration here. As a journalist, Crouch places high value on clarity of style and usefulness for everyday life. He brings in stories from his personal life and from popular culture that sustain interest and shed important light. And he illuminates his theme through multipage explorations of key biblical passages, which will be helpful to readers with preaching responsibilities. Crouch's evangelical perspective bears provocatively on a conversation pertinent to everyone."

(Charles Scriven, The Christian Century, February 5, 2014)"Andy Crouch's *Playing God* goes a long way to helping a wide variety of audience members understand networks of power and the power they personally hold. Having power is one thing. How one uses power is a whole other matter and strikes at the heart of what Crouch is seeking to argue in his worthwhile read." (Todd C. Ream, Christian Scholar's Review, XLIV:3)"A good book prompts you to ask questions you wouldn't have otherwise. A great book embeds some of those in your gut so that you can't shake them for a while. On that score, *Playing God* is a great book. It provoked nagging questions I haven't been able to shake (or answer!). . . . *Playing God*'s proclamation of the good news about power is crucial and timely--an antidote to both our penchant to seize power exclusively as well as our allergy to assume responsibility." (James K.A. Smith, Comment Magazine, September 27, 2013)"*Playing God* is an excellent resource for pastors who are afraid to use the power at their disposal. Crouch contrasts God-given power that brings light, hope and goodness to the world with a different kind of authority: that which corrupts and can be abused." (Bill Easum, Outreach Magazine, 11th Annual Resources of the Year: Leadership "Also Recommended," March/April 2014)"In the end, power is for human flourishing, and it takes the shape of the cross. As Crouch says, ' . . . We are meant to pour out our power fearlessly, spend our privilege recklessly, and leave our status in the dust of our headlong

pursuit of love,' like Christ, who loved us and gave himself up for us. That is our calling. That is what it means to play God in the truest sense." (Tim Hoiland, PRISM, Winter 2014)"Playing God will be an important resource for undergraduate and graduate classes on leadership, reconciliation, and service. . . . It will also be helpful for organizational leaders in CCCU schools, helping them to think about how they view power and how their institutions organize the flow of power. Crouch is an evangelical thought leader, offering wise and intelligent advice here for Christians engaging a rapidly changing society and world." (Jenell Paris, CCCU Advance, Fall/Winter 2013)"Playing God is an audacious, admirable work. Crouch's first book, *Culture Making*, aspired at nothing less than offering an alternative to Reinhold Neibuhr's seminal *Christ and Culture*. But the sequel is even bolder in targeting the philosophical giants Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche, whose influence on the modern world defies superlatives. Crouch's contention is that the philosophers are right that power is everywhere--but perversely wrong in seeing it as essential coercive and violent. . . . Per Crouch, those called to redeemed lives, freed by the promise of resurrection from the prison of seeking status, can regard their power as a very good gift to be given away for the flourishing of all." (Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, Books & Culture, November/December 2013)"The timeliest aspect of Playing God is its attention to social justice and how American Christians both empower and dispossess people around the world in attempts to help them. Rather than blindly striking at world ills, Crouch encourages us to understand idolatry and injustices as the negative consequences of ill-used power. If we 'play god' by swooping in and saving the day, we make ourselves into idols, rather than restoring the image-bearing capabilities of the people we seek to help. . . . There is something in Playing God both for those who are sensitive about their privilege and for those who feel hopeless to change anything. The reality is somewhere in the middle, and Playing God sets the stage for action, challenging us to acknowledge and use our power to increase mankind's capacity for image bearing." (M. G. Hager, Fare Forward, Issue 7, 2014)"Crouch is insightful and backs up his anecdotal and social discussions of power with biblical examples . . . . This is worthwhile reading for anyone looking to reevaluate power and its wordly place within God's kingdom." (Church Libraries, Winter 2013-2014)"With his trademark clear-headed analysis, Andy Crouch unpacks the dynamics of power that either can make human flourishing possible or can destroy the image of God in people." (Light Magazine, Canada, October 2013)"Playing God is an essential book for thoughtful Christians, a true gift, a must-read. I am thankful that God has graced Andy Crouch with the power of words, with the gift of gab, with the ability to report and to ruminate. Perhaps it is enough to say this: this book will help you understand our world and be God's image bearers with Christ-like fruitfulness. We commend it to you as it is surely one of the most important books we've

seen in years." (Byron Borger, Hearts & Minds bookstore, September 18, 2013, [www.heartsandmindsbooks.com](http://www.heartsandmindsbooks.com)) "Once again, Andy Crouch cuts to the heart of the matter by challenging us to take seriously the One whose image we bear. Playing God is a clear and compelling call for Christians to steward the kind of power that enables flourishing." (Gabe Lyons, coauthor of *unChristian*) "What do poverty, the cello, human trafficking, iPods, loan sharks, wine, the tower of Babel and the Olympics have in common? Crouch shows that all of these are expressions of power, God's unique gift to humanity. With unceasing eloquence, Crouch delivers a unique perspective on everyday life that opens readers' eyes to a whole new world of conflict, meaning and possibility. A truly transformative experience." (Brian Fikkert, coauthor of *When Helping Hurts*) "This book plowed through my heart, leaving idol shards everywhere in its path. Andy Crouch, one of Christianity's most compelling visionaries on culture, examines power and the ways we should harness it for human flourishing and the glory of God. The book will prompt you to rethink assumptions and perhaps to reset priorities. It is a 'powerful' read, in the right sense of that word." (Russell D. Moore, president, Southern Baptist Convention Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission) "Andy Crouch presents an essential treatise on one of the most important yet undiscussed topics for the promotion of justice in American Christianity--the issue of power. The work of God's justice in the world requires an understanding of the dynamics of power. Crouch shines the light of Scripture on what could be a divisive topic. Playing God should spark this long overdue conversation." (Soong-Chan Rah, Milton B. Engebretson Associate Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism, North Park Theological Seminary, and author of *The Next Evangelicalism*) "It's likely that most readers of this book will both possess more power than they realize and feel uncomfortable with the amount of it that they know they've got. This book holds keys to liberation. It illuminates that power is, foundationally, good. It offers 3D pictures of what power is for (flourishing) and what its right use looks like (creative image-bearing that expands our own and others' joyful 'meaning-making'). Crouch's Bible-saturated teaching frees us from guilt and guides us in the active, humble and, importantly, essential calling to steward our power, thus helping us avoid the equal dangers of abusing our power and neglecting it. Playing God is a wise, deeply insightful, imaginative work; by heeding its lessons, Christians will be far more fruitful in their efforts to advance Jesus' kingdom in our broken world." (Amy L. Sherman, author of *Kingdom Calling*) "This is a thoughtful and compelling book about power. Thinking of power as a gift which is meant for flourishing gives the reader much to consider. Institutions are meant for flourishing. Therefore, leaders of institutions must ask the question about how they are using the power gifted to them. Are they image bearers of that power or god players? The author's biblical and personal stories help the

reader work through these and many other great questions." (Mary Andringa, president/CEO, Vermeer Corporation)"In deft moves of integrating sound biblical theology with astute observations about culture, Andy Crouch wades into the immense topic of power--the powers, institutional power, cultural power, racial power--to offer the alternative Christian perception of power, a power that can be reshaped by the gospel about Jesus Christ, refashioned by love and reoriented by a new community called the church. In this book worldly power is deconstructed and replaced with a new kind of gospel power." (Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary)"Playing God is certainly a healthy challenge to the spiritual-power paradigm by which many of us may be operating without even knowing it. For anyone interested in a firmly theological yet brilliantly practical discussion on our place as God's children on this earth, Playing God is most certainly a great place to begin. Any leader who fears an inability to use their power well should pick up this book and take comfort from its stories." (Andrew M. Whytock, Haddington House Journal, 2015)"Crouch helps us place power within the overall biblical story, beginning not at the fall but at creation. By doing so we discover that power is a gift, rooted in creation and tied to our calling (or 'vocation') to bear God's image in the world." (Fitz Green, Study Center Newsletter, Fall 2014)"Playing God is highly commendable reading for any student of scripture who longs for a deeper understanding of how we, as stewards and witnesses, are to use our gift of power to live and flourish in this world between Creation and New Creation. It will inspire your heart and engage your mind, while simultaneously confronting and challenging any strongholds of power that you may cherish." (Susan M. Haack, Ethics & Medicine, Vol. 31:1, Spring 2015)

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.

Andy Crouch can write. This book -- like his first book "Creating Culture" -- is far from light reading, but he has the gift -- or is the learned skill? -- or both! -- of making extremely complex issues and arguments understandable. His prose is a pleasure to read even if the content was not particularly significant: but, of course, the content of this book is, indeed, very significant. His illustrations are often personal and always memorable. In "Creating Culture," Crouch argued that Christians should not simply analyze or copy or consume the culture around us, but should, instead, be culture makers, culture creators. In "Playing God," Crouch again challenges the conventional -- and virtually universally accepted (both among Christians and non-Christians) -- belief that, as Lord Acton wrote, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Instead, Crouch argues that power is on display from the very beginning of the Bible when God says, "Let there be....," and that what God created was good -- even very good (in the case of men and women), and that while power can be abused, it is not, in and of itself, bad -- and it can be very good. Crouch certainly recognizes that power can be abused, and he gives powerful examples of some of the worst abuses of power in the world today: bonded slavery and the human trafficking phenomenon throughout the world. But he argues that the remedy for this is often simply the encouragement of those who have power but, for whatever reason, refuse (often passively) to exercise it on behalf of justice. Crouch highlights, as he did in "Creating Culture", the work of International Justice Mission, but in "Playing God," he applauds that organization's work in prodding local police and other government officials to exercise the power they already have to bring about freedom for those who have been abused as well as bring to justice those who have abused their power. It is not often that I say to myself, as I am reading the book, "I know I will read this book again, and much more slowly the second time," but I said that very thing several times as I read. Rather than give away more of Crouch's arguments, I will simply end by encouraging readers to read this book slowly (unless, like me, you cannot read a book slowly the first time!) and prepare to be moved, encouraged and motivated not to run away from power, but as one made in the image of a loving, good, God, live out that image -- including the exercise of the power the Creator has given each of us -- in ways that will help the entire creation flourish. Highly recommended.

ehhhh.... Most of it he seemed to be rambling. The book is way too long and most of his points could be written in less than 30 pages

Just as described!

GREAT

Consistently insightful, inspiring and challenging. Written in such a way that, though filled with great content, it is a quick and enjoyable read.

Good read especially for those in any form of leadership

Great book! Andy crouch did some good thinking on the topic and moves the discussion beyond the simplistic 'using power is negative' narrative

I was drawn in by the stories in the beginning chapters, but disappointed by the pious answers to the question of power in our personal and political lives.

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