



## Wounded Strength: A Theology of Resilience in Trauma-Informed Leadership

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### Abstract

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Leadership has traditionally been associated with decisiveness, authority, and emotional invulnerability. Contemporary research in trauma-informed leadership, psychology, and neuroscience increasingly challenges this assumption. It suggests that effective leadership often emerges from integrating personal adversity rather than avoiding it. This paper develops the concept of wounded strength, a theological and research-informed model. It reframes hardship as formative to leadership development rather than detrimental. Drawing on trauma theory, neuroplasticity research, spiritual formation, and servant leadership scholarship, the study examines how leaders grow through adversity and how this growth equips them to foster emotional healing in others. The trauma-informed leadership attribute of resilience provides the foundation for understanding wounded strength. By integrating neuroscience with biblical narratives such as Joseph, David, and Paul, the paper demonstrates how suffering can become a catalyst for wisdom, empathy, and transformation. Contemporary examples from the military, nonprofit, first-responder, and adoption contexts further illustrate how lived adversity strengthens leadership capacity. Additional sections on historical leadership paradigms, practical implications, and future research situate wounded strength within broader leadership discourse. Ultimately, this paper argues that trauma-informed resilience is not about returning to a pre-adversity state but about being reshaped through hardship. Leaders who embrace wounded strength are uniquely positioned to cultivate psychological safety, steward emotional healing, and foster flourishing communities in a traumatized world.

*Keywords:* trauma, wounded strength, resilience, leadership, organization

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The demands placed on modern leaders are intensifying across nearly every sector. Rising organizational complexity, mental health challenges, collective trauma, and chronic stress have created environments that test even the most seasoned leaders. Despite these realities, cultural expectations continue to promote an outdated model of

leadership—one that idolizes control, emotional stoicism, and a polished exterior. Leaders often internalize the belief that strength is synonymous with invulnerability, leaving little room for authenticity, struggle, or human limitation.

An emerging body of research challenges these traditional assumptions. Scholars and practitioners in trauma-informed leadership (TIL) increasingly recognize that leadership shaped through adversity tends to produce more profound empathy, compassion, and resilience (Lloyd, 2024; van der Kolk, 2014). Similarly, neuroscience demonstrates that the brain possesses an extraordinary capacity to heal and rewire through neuroplasticity, suggesting that leaders can develop new patterns of emotional regulation and relational functioning even after significant hardship (Doidge, 2007; Siegel, 2012). Theologically, Scripture reveals a consistent pattern of God using wounded individuals to accomplish transformative leadership—from Joseph’s betrayal to David’s wilderness years and Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.”

This paper introduces wounded strength, leadership formed through adversity and surrendered to God, as a more accurate, holistic, and compassionate model of leadership than cultural ideals of flawlessness. Wounded strength acknowledges the reality of trauma while affirming the possibility of transformation. Leaders shaped by adversity do not lead despite their wounds; they lead through them, embodying a form of strength that fosters trust, emotional safety, and spiritual depth within their communities.

To develop a robust understanding of wounded strength, this study synthesizes TIL theory, neuroscience, spiritual formation, servant leadership, and biblical theology. It also incorporates new subsections on historical leadership paradigms, implications for practice, and future research directions. By integrating these interdisciplinary lenses, the paper establishes wounded strength as a comprehensive framework for understanding resilience in leadership, offering fresh insight into the formative role of suffering in shaping effective, compassionate leaders.

## **Historical Background of Leadership Paradigms**

Understanding wounded strength requires situating it within the broader historical evolution of leadership theory. For much of recorded history, leadership has been conceptualized through models that emphasize power, control, and hierarchical authority. Ancient civilizations often viewed leaders as heroic figures endowed with supernatural strength or divine favor, leaving little room for vulnerability or emotional depth (Ciulla, 2020). Leadership during the Greco-Roman era focused heavily on rhetoric, logic, and domination—qualities associated with public success rather than interior maturity.

By the industrial era, leadership paradigms further entrenched the ideal of the stoic, rigid, decisive leader. Early management theories, such as Taylor's scientific management, positioned leaders as rational operators expected to suppress emotion and maintain strict order (Taylor, 1911). Even later leadership models, such as trait theory, behavioral theory, and transactional leadership, continued to emphasize traits like confidence, charisma, and assertiveness as essential components of leadership effectiveness (Northouse, 2019).

The late 20th century introduced more relational models, including transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977). Among these, servant leadership was particularly revolutionary because it emphasized humility, empathy, emotional healing, and the leader's responsibility to elevate followers' well-being (Liden et al., 2008). Still, even relational leadership models did not fully integrate psychological trauma or the profound ways suffering shapes character and leadership practice.

The emergence of TIL in the 21st century marks a significant shift. Influenced by neuroscience, psychology, and social work, TIL recognizes that trauma impacts the nervous system, decision making, relationships, and organizational functioning (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). This approach acknowledges human fragility and emphasizes safety, regulation, empowerment, and healing—qualities closely aligned with biblical models of leadership and the Christian call to shepherding.

The concept of wounded strength builds on this evolution by integrating trauma-informed principles with theological insights and the servant-leadership emphasis on emotional healing. Historically, leaders have hidden their wounds to preserve credibility. Today, research has increasingly shown that leaders who appropriately acknowledge and integrate their wounds are more trusted, relatable, and resilient (Brown, 2018; Scazzero, 2015). This historical shift sets the stage for wounded strength as a modern, holistic model of leadership grounded in vulnerability, resilience, and spiritual formation.

## **Literature Review**

The literature on trauma, leadership, and resilience has grown substantially over the past 2 decades, reflecting a broader cultural awareness of psychological distress and its effects on human functioning. Historically, trauma research emerged primarily from mental health disciplines—psychiatry, psychology, and social work—with early contributions focused on understanding the neurological, emotional, and behavioral impacts of trauma. Foundational scholars such as Judith Herman (1992), Bessel van der Kolk (2014), and Peter Levine (1997) established the groundwork for understanding

trauma as a whole-person experience that disrupts safety, identity, and relational trust. Their findings illuminated that trauma alters the brain's stress-response system, leading to difficulties in emotional regulation, concentration, interpersonal connection, and long-term well-being.

While trauma research initially centered on clinical contexts, its interdisciplinary expansion into leadership and organizational studies is relatively recent. Organizations increasingly recognize that trauma – whether personal, historical, collective, or occupational – plays a significant role in employee engagement, trust, performance, and workplace culture (Doyle & Patel, 2020; Phillips & Loyd, 2023). This recognition has given rise to the TIL movement, which integrates psychological safety, emotional regulation, empowerment, and healing into leadership theory and practice.

Within TIL scholarship, resilience emerges as a central construct. Defined by Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) as “the maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions” (p. 3418), resilience is understood not as mere endurance but as adaptive transformation. This perspective aligns with broader resilience literature, which conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic process shaped by environmental supports, personal coping strategies, neurobiological adaptation, and meaning making (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Rather than a fixed trait, resilience is seen as malleable and influenced by neuroplasticity, relational connection, spiritual grounding, and intentional practice (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Siegel, 2012).

Neuroplasticity represents one of the most significant scientific contributions to understanding resilience. Neuroscientists such as Doidge (2007) and Siegel (2012) demonstrated that the brain is constantly rewiring in response to experience, including adversity. Trauma may disrupt neural pathways, but healing experiences – such as supportive relationships, reflective practice, and therapeutic or spiritual interventions – can strengthen new pathways that support emotional regulation, empathy, and leadership maturity. This biological perspective reinforces the theological truth that transformation is possible even after significant suffering.

Leadership studies provide an additional lens. Traditional leadership theories prioritized charisma, authority, and confidence, but contemporary research points toward authenticity, vulnerability, and relational capacity as crucial components of effective leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Brown, 2018). Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness and relational transparency; emotional intelligence highlights the importance of understanding one's own emotions and those of others (Goleman, 2011); and servant leadership underscores humility, empathy, and emotional healing (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008). These modern paradigms create fertile ground for integrating trauma-informed principles, which are inherently relational and healing oriented.

Biblical scholarship contributes a rich theological layer to the discourse on suffering and leadership. Throughout Scripture, suffering is portrayed not as an obstacle to leadership but often as the crucible in which God forms leaders. Joseph's imprisonment cultivated discernment and forgiveness; David's wilderness wandering shaped humility, worship, and dependence on God; Paul's "thorn in the flesh" reframed weakness as a vessel for divine strength (Fee, 2014; Walton, 2016). These narratives underscore a core theme: God often shapes His leaders through adversity, making their wounds part of their calling rather than a hindrance to it.

Spiritual formation literature deepens this understanding by highlighting how disciplines such as lament, solitude, prayer, and confession contribute to inner healing and transformation. In this perspective, adversity, reflection, and honest engagement with God cultivate spiritual maturity (Foster, 1998; Scazzero, 2015; Willard, 1999). These themes parallel trauma theory's emphasis on processing painful experiences, integrating emotional truths, and forming coherent narratives that foster resilience.

Meanwhile, organizational research increasingly acknowledges the prevalence of trauma among workers, whether tied to adverse childhood experiences, systemic injustice, burnout, caregiving, frontline work, or crisis exposure (Felitti et al., 1998; SAMHSA, 2014). Leaders who understand trauma's impact are better equipped to cultivate trust, reduce reactivity, and create environments where employees feel safe to learn, grow, and contribute. Psychological safety, introduced by Edmondson (2019), complements trauma-informed practice by emphasizing trust, interpersonal risk taking, and emotional freedom as prerequisites for innovation and team cohesion.

Additionally, research on moral injury – experienced by soldiers, first responders, medical personnel, and leaders who witness or participate in morally conflicting events – provides insight into why some individuals carry deep wounds that shape their leadership philosophy (Litz et al., 2009). These wounds often heighten empathy, compassion, and moral sensitivity when integrated well, making them profoundly relevant to the concept of wounded strength.

Finally, emerging scholarship highlights the growing need for trauma-informed approaches in Christian leadership contexts. Pastors, nonprofit directors, educators, and adoptive parents increasingly navigate spaces marked by chronic stress, burnout, and collective trauma (Doehring, 2015). Theological models such as Isaiah 61's vision of healing, restoration, and beauty from ashes offer a spiritual framework that aligns directly with TIL values – safety, empowerment, trust, collaboration, and healing (SAMHSA, 2014).

Taken together, the literature demonstrates a strong interdisciplinary convergence: trauma impacts leadership, resilience is formed through adversity and neuroplasticity,

and biblical and servant leadership models emphasize emotional healing as central to leadership identity. This convergence forms the foundation for understanding wounded strength, a holistic model that integrates trauma theory, neuroscience, spirituality, and theology to explain how leaders are shaped through suffering and how that transformation equips them to lead with compassion and purpose.

### **Trauma-Informed Leadership Foundations**

TIL has gained traction as organizations recognize that many employees carry visible and invisible wounds into the workplace. SAMHSA (2014) identified core principles for trauma-informed systems – safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural awareness – which provide a framework for organizational life. TIL applies these principles to daily management and interpersonal decision making.

Lloyd's (2024) TIL framework emphasizes both leadership attributes and behaviors. Attributes such as authenticity, emotional intelligence, relational capacity, and resilience describe a leader's internal development, while behaviors – including understanding trauma, regulating distress, empowering others, and practicing emotional healing – address how leaders engage external environments. Resilience is especially relevant to wounded strength because it involves maintaining stability and flexibility in the face of adversity, rather than suppressing or avoiding difficulty.

TIL also acknowledges that leaders influence emotional dynamics across teams. Neurobiological research has indicated that individuals often unconsciously attune to leaders' emotional states through processes of coregulation (Porges, 2011). Leaders who demonstrate calm presence, emotional boundaries, and thoughtful responsiveness create a sense of safety that allows others to participate fully, learn, and collaborate effectively.

Systems thinking is essential to TIL. Trauma is not only an individual concern but can also operate at the organizational level through unclear policies, inconsistent practices, or cultures of fear and silencing (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Trauma-informed leaders help identify and address systemic patterns that contribute to distress, offering clarity, transparency, and consistency where possible. Wounded strength adds another layer by highlighting how leaders' lived experiences shape their ability to model empathy, respond to distress, and pursue healing-oriented change.

### **Neuroplasticity and Resilience**

Neuroplasticity provides scientific grounding for the claim that leaders can grow through adversity. Research has shown the brain remains adaptable across the lifespan, forming new neural pathways as individuals engage in learning, reflection, and relational connection (Doidge, 2007; Siegel, 2012). Trauma disrupts networks associated

with memory, executive functioning, and emotional regulation, but healing experiences strengthen connections, thereby improving resilience (Cacioppo et al., 2015).

The relevance to leadership becomes clear when we consider stress and decision making. Leaders often face situations that require calm thinking, emotional awareness, and relational sensitivity. Neuroplasticity suggests these skills are not simply innate but can be cultivated intentionally over time. Practices like reflective journaling, prayer, counseling, spiritual direction, and coaching support neural integration and emotional stability. Over time, these practices help leaders engage conflict without escalating tension, recognize others' distress patterns, and communicate with compassion.

Importantly, neuroplasticity aligns with a broader understanding of resilience as transformation rather than quick recovery. Southwick and Charney (2012) argued that resilience develops through gradual adaptation to challenge, shaped by purpose, support, and personal agency. Wounded strength extends this idea to leadership identity, suggesting that leaders who face hardship with honesty and relational support often emerge more attuned to others' needs, more grounded in values, and better able to sustain presence in stressful environments.

### **Theological Foundations of Wounded Strength**

Theological perspectives offer a deeper context for wounded strength by framing suffering as formative rather than merely disruptive. Biblical narratives repeatedly show leaders shaped by hardship. Joseph's betrayal and imprisonment exposed him to loss and injustice, yet those experiences developed discernment and prepared him to lead during a crisis (Walton, 2016). David's years in the wilderness cultivated patience, humility, and spiritual dependence as he navigated threat and uncertainty (Brueggemann, 1997). Paul's "thorn in the flesh" redirected his reliance from personal strength to divine sufficiency, expressing a theology of weakness transformed by grace (Fee, 2014).

Themes of lament and sanctification are central here. Lament allows honest expression of grief and confusion before God without diminishing faith (Wolterstorff, 1987). Sanctification views personal transformation as an ongoing process shaped through trial and perseverance (Willard, 1999). Together, these theological concepts suggest that hardship is not a sign of spiritual failure but an environment in which character deepens.

Isaiah 61 describes God as one who heals brokenness, restores dignity, and brings beauty from ashes. Leaders who embrace wounded strength participate in this restorative work—not by erasing their past but by allowing God to transform their experiences into empathy, wisdom, and resilience. Rather than hiding vulnerabilities, they lead with appropriate transparency and spiritual grounding. The theological vision

of wounded strength reframes leadership identity, emphasizing dependence on God, humility in practice, and authenticity in relationship.

### **Servant Leadership and Emotional Healing**

Servant leadership emphasizes relational presence and the well-being of followers as central to effective leadership. Greenleaf (1977) introduced the idea that leaders are called to serve first, then choose to lead, placing empathy, listening, and care at the heart of influence. Later research identified emotional healing as a distinctive component of servant leadership, describing leaders who help others work through pain, restore hope, and develop resilience (Liden et al., 2008).

Wounded strength resonates strongly with this trait. Leaders who have endured their own struggles often carry a different kind of attentiveness to others. Their experience enables them to notice distress earlier, respond without judgment, and create environments where individuals feel seen and safe. This shift fosters psychological safety, which is an essential foundation for healthy communication and team learning (Edmondson, 2019).

Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) noted that servant leaders do not simply encourage; they actively cultivate environments where people can process setbacks and grow. Wounded strength enriches this approach by emphasizing that leaders can offer emotional healing authentically when their own wounds have been acknowledged and integrated. Instead of masking hardship, leaders model realistic resilience, demonstrating that growth through struggle is possible.

This approach does not romanticize suffering or assume that all hardship leads to wisdom. Instead, it recognizes that supported and examined suffering can produce depth of character. Servant leadership, combined with trauma-informed practices, points toward leadership rooted in presence, compassion, and responsibility for the emotional climate of an organization. Wounded strength strengthens this vision by grounding emotional healing in leaders whose lives have already been shaped by adversity and grace.

### **Biblical Case Studies of Wounded Strength**

#### **Joseph**

Joseph's story illustrates how severe trauma can lead to mature leadership marked by emotional intelligence and strategic wisdom. Betrayal by his brothers, forced relocation, false accusation, and imprisonment could have produced anger or suspicion. Instead, Joseph emerged with a capacity for discernment and reconciliation that proved crucial in responding to a national crisis (Walton, 2016). His declaration to his brothers, "You



meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (*New International Version [NIV]*, 2024, Gen. 50:20), reveals a leader able to acknowledge harm without being defined by it.

Two insights from Joseph’s story are especially relevant for wounded strength. First, we see Joseph’s identity shifted from favored son to reflective leader. His experiences required him to reconsider his relationships, ambitions, and sense of purpose. Secondly, his eventual position of power did not erase his history; it informed his compassion. Joseph’s response to famine was not merely administrative but relational, emphasizing restoration over retribution. Leaders who have integrated suffering often exhibit similar patterns; they make decisions with awareness of human cost.

## David

David’s early years demonstrate leadership development under sustained threat. While fleeing Saul, he lacked political power or social favor, yet those wilderness years deepened his reliance on God and strengthened his emotional vocabulary. The Psalms provide evidence of David’s willingness to bring fear, grief, and hope before God without self-censorship (Brueggemann, 1997). His prayers show a leader learning to engage complex emotions rather than suppress them.

There are two takeaways from David’s example. David learned to lead without certainty or control. Living with unpredictability instilled patience and flexibility, qualities essential to TIL. Next, we can see that David’s experiences cultivated humility. When David gained authority, he had already learned to serve, listen, and wait. Wounded strength often emerges as confidence grounded in awareness of personal limitation and dependence.

## Paul

Paul provides a theological foundation for wounded strength. His “thorn in the flesh” became a point of spiritual transformation rather than disqualification. Paul consistently interprets adversity as an opportunity for divine strength to work through human limitation (Fee, 2014). His epistles show a leader shaped not by uninterrupted success but by repeated hardship, imprisonment, and rejection.

Meaning making transformed Paul’s suffering into his mission. Paul reframed hardship under God’s purposes, an approach that mirrors psychological research showing that resilience is strengthened by narrative coherence (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Additionally, Paul cultivated interdependence. He often asked for prayer, reported personal struggles, and acknowledged his need for support, from which we learn vulnerability as compatible with leadership authority.

Together, Joseph, David, and Paul illustrate how suffering can shape leaders who value presence, compassion, and wisdom. Their examples show wounded strength is not a marginal biblical theme but a recurring pattern in leadership formation.

## **Contemporary Case Studies: Wounds as Leadership Formation**

### **Military Leaders**

Military service exposes leaders to trauma, loss, and moral complexity. Many veterans experience posttraumatic growth, developing heightened empathy, clearer ethical priorities, and a deeper appreciation for relational trust (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Leaders who have navigated deployment stress, combat exposure, or moral injury often exhibit a stabilizing presence that helps others remain grounded during crisis.

From this case study, we learn three strengths that align naturally with TIL principles and illustrate wounded strength in practice. To begin, leaders who have served in combat often recognize distress quickly and respond without minimizing it. Next, exposure to profound ethical questions in high-stakes environments strengthens commitment to integrity and justice. Finally, regular engagement with uncertainty cultivates flexible decision making and emotional regulation.

### **Nonprofit Leaders**

Nonprofit founders and directors frequently draw motivation from personal loss or encounters with systemic injustice. Their leadership often emerges from experiences that ignited compassion and conviction (Doyle & Patel, 2020). This purpose-driven approach fuels long-term commitment even when work is demanding or emotionally exhausting.

Two characteristics are common among nonprofit leaders. First, leaders act from a lived understanding of the stakes involved, along with professional responsibility. Second, we see that transparency about personal experience invites others into shared mission and reduces stigma surrounding difficult topics. These leaders demonstrate how appropriately integrated suffering becomes a sustaining source of empathy and direction.

### **Adoptive Parents**

Adoptive parents often undergo intensive engagement with trauma with both their children's trauma histories and the systemic challenges of adoption and foster care. These experiences position them as trauma-informed leaders within families, schools, and communities. This group of leaders shows us two key strengths. First, empathy deepens through exposure to trauma responses, building the capacity to recognize and

respond to distress with patience and support. Second, navigating bureaucratic complexity leads many adoptive parents to become advocates for reform and child welfare improvements. Their leadership illustrates how lived experience can transform into sustained advocacy and relational resilience.

## **First Responders**

First responders encounter acute trauma regularly, including injury, loss of life, and crisis environments. Research has shown these experiences can create strong bonds, heightened situational awareness, and deep commitment to community well-being (Anderson et al., 2020). When properly supported, first responders often become sources of calm and encouragement within teams. From first responders, we can learn three lessons. One, repeated exposure to emergencies fosters emotional regulation and clear thinking under pressure. Two, witnessing suffering sensitizes leaders to human need and motivates protective action. Three, many first responders become wellness advocates or peer support leaders after navigating trauma personally. These lessons demonstrate wounded strength in motion as being leadership that steadies others, supports healing, and protects community safety.

## **Implications for Practice**

Wounded strength offers a practical lens for leadership development and organizational culture. First, leadership programs can expand beyond traditional competencies to include emotional regulation, trauma awareness, and reflective practice. While most training focuses on communication or strategic planning, TIL emphasizes the internal conditions that allow leaders to respond wisely to stress and uncertainty (Lloyd, 2024). Practices such as journaling, debriefing, and structured peer support can help leaders process experiences that shape their identity.

Second, organizations can benefit from normalizing vulnerability as a healthy part of leadership rather than a sign of weakness. Research has shown that employees often mirror their leaders' emotional tone (Boyatzis et al., 2012; Goleman, 2011). Leaders who acknowledge challenges appropriately and seek support when needed contribute to healthier team climates. Formal structures such as coaching, chaplaincy services, or confidential peer discussion groups can create sustainable avenues for leaders to engage in their own healing.

Third, TIL highlights the importance of coregulation. A leader's emotional presence can stabilize a room during conflict, uncertainty, or crisis. Training in grounding techniques, nervous system awareness, and compassion fatigue is especially valuable in high-stress environments, including healthcare, child welfare, and first responder

contexts (Porges, 2011). Stability and calm presence support psychological safety and reduce the likelihood of escalating tension.

Fourth, wounded strength encourages organizations to rethink resilience. Rather than measuring resilience by how quickly leaders “bounce back,” organizations can recognize growth through adversity as a process that deepens insight and develops relational capability. This approach values rest, healing, and community support as essential components of resilience rather than optional supplements.

Finally, servant leadership models reinforce the practical value of wounded strength by prioritizing emotional healing. Leaders who learn from personal adversity tend to listen more carefully, maintain appropriate boundaries, and offer compassion without losing clarity or accountability. Such leadership is not merely comforting; it is strategic and sustainable for long-term organizational health.

### **Future Research Directions**

Several areas of research would advance the study of wounded strength in TIL. One potential direction is to examine how leaders integrate personal adversity into their professional practice over time. Longitudinal studies could explore whether leaders with significant traumatic experiences show sustained growth in empathy, decision making, and team engagement.

Further research is needed on the neurological aspects of leadership development. Neuroplasticity research has demonstrated that adversity and healing reshape neural pathways (Doidge, 2007; Siegel, 2012), yet little work investigates how spiritual practices, coaching, or mentoring might reinforce neural integration for leaders. Connecting leadership studies with neuroscience could provide additional insight into how emotional regulation and resilience are cultivated.

Future studies could also explore spiritual formation as a component of leadership development. Although biblical and theological literature highlights transformation through suffering, empirical research linking spiritual disciplines with leadership resilience remains limited. Qualitative research could examine leaders’ experiences with prayer, Scripture reflection, or community support as sources of healing and growth.

Another vital direction involves examining wounded strength across demographics. Experiences of trauma, access to resources, and cultural interpretations of vulnerability vary widely. Research that includes diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds would offer a broader understanding of how wounded strength develops in different contexts.

Lastly, work at the intersection of servant leadership, moral injury, and trauma-informed practice may provide valuable insight. Leaders in high-stress environments, such as the military, healthcare, ministry, or child welfare, often encounter moral dilemmas that shape their sense of identity and purpose. Studies exploring how leaders repair moral injury and develop a constructive narrative of suffering could help clarify the long-term implications of wounded strength.

## Conclusion

Wounded strength offers a meaningful model for TIL, grounded in research from neuroscience, spiritual formation, and biblical studies. Rather than treating hardship as a barrier to leadership, wounded strength suggests that adversity can become a source of resilience, empathy, and relational credibility when acknowledged and supported.

The biblical narratives of Joseph, David, and Paul show that God often forms leaders through seasons of difficulty rather than exemption from them. Contemporary examples of military leaders to nonprofit advocates, adoptive parents, and first responders demonstrate similar patterns in practice. Their experiences show leadership shaped by humility, presence, and emotional awareness.

Wounded strength is not a call to seek suffering or romanticize trauma. Instead, it recognizes that hardship is an inevitable part of life and leadership. Leaders who engage their experiences with honesty, support, and spiritual perspective often emerge better equipped to lead with compassion, clarity, and endurance. In a world marked by crisis and change, wounded strength offers a model of leadership that values healing, cultivates psychological safety, and supports long-term resilience.

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## About the Author

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