

*four postures of*

# Spiritual Authority

by Gary Mayes



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Our culture venerates hard-charging visionary leaders. We are fascinated by the likes of Elon Musk who charge through uncharted waters with uncanny intuition and those with down-to-earth genius like Warren Buffet. However, the essence of leadership is not found in expertise, knowledge, or personality. At the core, real leadership is about influence.

Like the wake expanding behind a large speed boat, lasting influence ripples long after a leader is gone.

More importantly, lasting impact flows out of spiritual authority.

Spiritual authority is that quality found in leaders who speak with a gravitas far beyond themselves. It transcends the cleverness of words and ideas. It is what some would call God's anointing. Spiritual authority is what people experience when they heard Jesus speak and said, *"they were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."* (Matt. 7:28-29)

Spiritual authority is what moved the Sanhedrin as they listened to Peter and John. *"When they saw the*



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*courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)*

The challenge? Spiritual authority cannot be generated on our own. There is no magic formula nor simplistic program to follow. It is that difficult-to-describe combination of his presence, his fingerprint on our character, his favor, and his leadership. It is the fragrance of Jesus himself.

Yet, in a classic kingdom paradox, we also participate in the development of our spiritual authority. The posture of our lives determines whether or not we are in position to receive the authority God desires to exercise through us. In many ways, it is part of the inside-out counter-intuitive nature of the kingdom.

All of this means the real question is, what is the posture of life that enables us to receive the spiritual authority God wants to grant us?

I've labeled these as the “four postures of spiritual authority.” There might be more, but I've studied these four.

What makes these postures so significant is that each one demands deepening dependence on the active rule and reign of God. Each one pries the fingers of our death-grip further away from the joystick of human control. Individually and collectively they cause our leadership to be less about us and more about Christ in us.

First, however, a word of caution. Each of these four postures runs against the grain of much that comes naturally. Each one confronts fundamental aspects of our sin nature. Each presses us to swim upstream against the current of cultural notions about leadership. In every case, it is easy to lie to ourselves and minimize our personal tendencies, rather than pay the price of a counter-culture way of life.



## 1 the posture of **SURRENDER**

**S**urrender is all about giving up the reins of authority over our lives, our plans, and our destiny. It means submitting to the absolute authority of him who sits on the throne and trusting him completely.

- ❑ The posture of surrender confronts our bias to find security from being in charge. It arrests the belief that I am safe when I call the shots.
- ❑ It is not a once-for-all decision, but a continual peeling back of the onion to yield more and more of the authority over my life to the Lord of my life.
- ❑ It forces me to face the fear of not holding the reins myself.
- ❑ In contrast, it looks like Jesus, who surrendered to the assignments and authority of the Father. "Not my will, but yours be done." (Lk 22.42)
- ❑ The posture of surrender challenges me to admit that, just like Adam, my deepest desire is to be the ruler of my own domain.
- ❑ The core question of surrender is, "Will I trust him enough to give him the right to complete control over my life and all I hold dear?"

## two the posture of **ALIGNMENT**

**A**lignment is the process of conforming our priorities, plans, purposes, and even the schedule of our lives to His agenda. It is obedience.

- ❑ The posture of alignment confronts the fact that we love our own ideas. We love to do things our own way. In honesty, we would prefer a world where we make our plans and then ask God to bless them.
- ❑ It means learning to interrupt our tendency to negotiate with God, as if we wanted him to compromise. Negotiating with the perfect king of the universe is tantamount to saying, "Lord, follow me, I have a better way."
- ❑ Do I really believe I have a better idea?
- ❑ In contrast, alignment looks like Jesus who said he does nothing of his own accord, but only what "he sees his Father doing." (John 5.19)
- ❑ It challenges me to confess that deep down I really do believe my own ideas and my own efforts can accomplish the work of the kingdom.
- ❑ The core question of alignment is, "Who's in charge and will I follow him?"



## 3 the posture of **BROKENNESS**

**B**rokenness is the painful process of being separated from reliance on my experience, education, skills, giftedness, curriculums, favorite technologies, etc. It interrupts my desire for people to be impressed with me and makes me desperate for them to see Jesus instead.

- ❑ The posture of brokenness confronts my reliance on expertise. It leaves me no longer impressed by my resume.
- ❑ It is Peter and John in Acts 3, admitting they didn't have any silver or gold and only had Jesus to give.
- ❑ Do I really believe that people should be impressed with me? Consider Paul's words, throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians when he said, "We preach a gospel of foolishness... We have this treasure in (cheap) jars of clay... It is His all-surpassing power... So that His power might be seen in my weakness."
- ❑ In contrast to dependence on my abilities, brokenness frees me to use my limited gifts and abilities without ever believing they were the key to impact.
- ❑ Brokenness challenges me to let go of my desire to become known for "the great things I can do."
- ❑ The core question of brokenness is, "What will I choose to bring to the table, my limited expertise or desperate dependence?"

## 4 the posture of **VULNERABILITY**

**V**ulnerability means letting people beneath my polished veneer to see what is still messy, unfinished, even "un-spiritual." We feel vulnerable because we cannot control what others will think of us or how they will respond to that self-revelation. Transparency says we understand, we have been there. Vulnerability reveals where I am now and it may not be pretty.

- ❑ The posture of vulnerability confronts my desire to manage what other people think of us. It means choosing to expose the truth of my journey while it is still a work in progress.
- ❑ It means learning to admit I need those I am here to serve.
- ❑ It makes me ask, do I really believe a well-manicured image will bring about true change in people's lives?



- ❑ Vulnerability was Jesus asking his disciples to be with him in the garden while he wept and prayed and wrestled with his desire for a “different way.” (Mt. 26.36-46)
- ❑ In contrast with telling stories of my victories after they are complete, vulnerability lets others see the raw authentic stuff in our lives while the outcome is unknown.
- ❑ The core question of vulnerability is, “Will I let people see the unfinished stuff of my life *in real time* and trust God’s ability to manage my reputation?”

## THE POINT

These four postures position leaders for the release of spiritual authority because they position God to shine through us in real time. They put us in a position where we demonstrate that *“this all-surpassing power is from God.”* (2 Cor 4.7)

By living this way, we discover it’s true. *“My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”* (2 Cor 12.9)

If you are willing to move forward in these four postures you’ll find an impact on others that goes inexplicably beyond the things you do as a leader. When you are weak, HE is strong.

I would submit that the world is desperately seeking authentic accessible leaders like this. While our culture is saturated with the superficiality of manipulative advertising and overly managed images, people are starving for leaders who are the real deal.

The question is, will we be those leaders?

## Taking it Personally...

- ❑ Which of these four postures is the most challenging for you? Any idea why that is?
- ❑ Who or what has God brought into your life to help with that posture?
- ❑ Is there a relationship or context where you can safely work on developing this posture? What first steps could you take?

