

# Trust, Sacrifice, and Power: What I Learned from Mark in Prison

Perspective #61

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I was talking with Mark\*, a prison student at Indiana's Pendleton Correctional Facility about trying to settle a problem with an outside agency so he could pursue his Grace College education. Talking to him I noticed that he had an attitude that I do not possess and that I do not often see. This led me to a ponder an idea that there are three postures or attitudes to the risen Christ. Mark has the first one.

1. The first posture is in the person who controls virtually nothing and seeks to work on the edges to achieve, survive, cope, and make slight improvements over infuriating long periods of time. He is under God, which is good, but he is under man and especially under the system which can be very challenging.

2. This is the posture of a person who has an actual vision of a better life, an idea of what life should look like, and the hope that things might change if he acts to change them. This posture is full of ideals, goals, plans, strategies, efforts, risks, and sacrifices. This is the posture of the strong leader, even a courageous change agent who serves a worthy cause.

3. The third posture is that of the person who is (or imagines himself to be) in control. This posture is the opposite of the first one. This person can achieve anything, solve any problem, create real improvements quickly and by direct effort, facilitated by other people who he also controls.

So, is there a best biblical posture?

**Trust:** In the first one, God is in charge and men or women humbly take their place under God's care. Much of the Bible, and not just the OT, tells us to live like this. It may seem passive, but it is the posture of dependence and contentment. This contentment comes not from having things right but from trusting the one who does or will make things right. We anticipate good things from his hand. In a word this is trust.

**Sacrifice:** The second posture has characterized Christians for centuries. The strong leader has been brilliant and yet he can be awful. He has sought godly goals, utopian goals, and political goals, and yet he has often been distracted by passions and delusions about what is really needed. Even zealous followers of such people have gone off the rails in distressing ways. His sins are often considered forgivable as the sins of idealists. The "greatest generation" and MLK had this posture of effort and sacrifice.

**Power:** The third posture is that of a person who already sees himself as competent, full of goodwill, and whose attendant affluence augments their opportunities. This is the model especially seen in American leaders today. This is the CEO or political leader. This is Gary Cooper standing bravely alone while the cowardly old West town people hide in *High Noon* (1954). This, oddly, is the current model for the Christian leaders and pastors today who create outcomes for Jesus-who is grateful. This can be proud or even corrupted leading to a sad demise. This is the posture of power, and it is rarely biblical.

**The Salt and Light Zone:** In the first posture, God is all we have. In the second, God is the driving force. In the third, God is the role model and audience. Many people prefer to serve among the people of the first posture as that is frontline ministry where God intersects with life, I think of this as being the salt and light zone.

In the second posture of sacrificial ministry, God intersects with good plans but the salt and light may be thinning as we are more self-sufficient. In the third posture God only intersects with the personal goals or needs of the powerful leader. This posture requires careful effort to stay focused on serving as salt and light. The landscape is littered with those who have achieved much (or not) but are losing salt and light.

As I ponder these attitudes it is tempting to say that the first posture of trust is biblical and best, but we must not avoid circumstances when the opportunity or necessity calls for effort and sacrifice. We must always be careful to avoid the posture of power.

I am grateful to God for Mark. I found him to be a humble 'salt and light' Christian for prompting and modeling these thoughts.

*\*Mark is not his real name nor was he alone among all the faithful men I met in the five Indiana prisons where Grace College had a contract through 2011. I originally wrote this in 2007.*