Posture for People, Policies, and the Polls

Matt Summers · Beyond the Ballot · James 1:19-20; James 1:22-24; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 5:9

AT A GLANCE

In week two of Beyond the Ballot, preached days before an election, Matt Summers argues that posture is not etiquette but diagnosis: our reflexes toward headlines and opponents record what has been forming us. Through James's mirror, Philippians 2's emptied Christ, and Matthew's peacemakers, he tells hearers on every side of the ballot that Christ's mind is received as a gift first, then slowly practiced.

- Your instinctive reactions to headlines and opponents are not personality quirks; they are a record of what has been forming you over time.
- Convictions are only as deep as character, and Christ's mind is received as a gift of identity before it is grown into through practice.
- Peacemakers step into tension without adding to it, telling the truth without contempt and keeping the relationship without surrendering the conviction.

> *"Posture isn't just a decision you make in the moment. It's a record of what's been happening over time."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

James 1:19-20 — [19]My dear brothers and sisters, always be more willing to listen than to speak. Keep control of your anger. [20]Anger does not help you live the way God wants. (ERV)

James 1:22-24 — [22]Do what God's teaching says; don't just listen and do nothing. When you only sit and listen, you are fooling yourselves. [23]Hearing God's teaching and doing nothing is like looking at your face in the mirror [24]and doing nothing about what you saw. You go away and immediately forget how bad you looked. (ERV)

Philippians 2:1-11 — [1]Think about what we have in Christ: the encouragement he has brought us, the comfort of his love, our sharing in his Spirit, and the mercy and kindness he has shown us. If you enjoy these blessings, [2]then do what will make my joy complete: Agree with each other, and show your love for each other. Be united in your goals and in the way you think. [3]In whatever you

do, don't let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble, and honor others more than yourselves. [4]Don't be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too. [5]In your life together, think the way Christ Jesus thought. [6]He was like God in every way, but he did not think that his being equal with God was something to use for his own benefit. [7]Instead, he gave up everything, even his place with God. He accepted the role of a servant, appearing in human form. During his life as a man, [8]he humbled himself by being fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross. [9]So God raised him up to the most important place and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. [10]God did this so that every person will bow down to honor the name of Jesus. Everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow. [11]They will all confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord," and this will bring glory to God the Father. (ERV)

Matthew 5:9 — Great blessings belong to those who work to bring peace. God will call them his sons and daughters. (ERV)

The argument

Posture Is a Diagnostic Record of Formation, Not a Matter of Etiquette — Reactions that arrive before reflection reveal what we have been consuming

Matt Summers sets aside the familiar counsel to be nicer, calmer, and more curious as true but spent: "I don't think our problem is that we've forgotten our manners. I think our posture is telling the truth about what's been forming and deforming us." He tells of back pain he deferred treating from 2019 until this year. After relief came, his doctor said the body had spent years protecting itself, and "posture isn't just a decision you make in the moment. It's a record of what's been happening over time." Summers confesses the same in himself: a headline about a flying car went from wonder to sarcasm to cynicism to a policy position in three seconds, "and I never decided to have it."

> **Insight —** *What comes out of you before you have time to think is a more honest witness to your formation than what you would say over coffee.*

The Feed Reverses James's Order of Listening, and the Mirror Shows the Cost — Contempt often grows from unaddressed pain, and a diagnosis is mercy rather than punishment

Summers asks his hearers to note the order in James 1:19: quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. "The feed is a machine built to reverse that order," rewarding whoever speaks first, angers fastest, and listens least. He reads James as asking not whether anger is ever wrong but what it produces: human anger does not produce God's righteousness, and feeling right is a long way from it. Then comes the mirror of James 1:22-24, where we glance and walk away and forget. Caricature, moral superiority, and appetite for contempt are what we have been fed. Beneath them is often real pain, and we compensate by bracing and hitting first. But "they don't experience your fear. They experience your contempt." Still, "a diagnosis isn't punishment. It's

the beginning of treatment."

> **Insight —** *Linger at the mirror long enough to see the compensation others see, trusting that what is exposed is exposed in order to be healed.*

Christ's Mind Is Received as Identity Before It Is Practiced — Philippians 2 opens with a reminder rather than a rule, then sets grasping against glorious emptying

Summers notes that Paul begins not with a command but with what the Philippians have already received: "If there is any encouragement in Christ." He names selfish ambition, the word met in the summer James study, which Summers says Greek writers like Aristotle used of those seeking office from self-interest and rivalry. It has "campaign season energy," and Paul says it does not belong in the church. "Grasped" he hears as seizing for one's own advantage, a bracing posture that fears losing. Jesus, holding all power, emptied himself: "humanity is driven towards empty glory, but Jesus chose a glorious emptying." This mind is not willpower's product: "It's not something you achieve. It's something you receive and then you grow into it." Discomfort at considering an opponent's interests "might be proof that your soul is atrophied."

> **Insight —** *Because the mind of Christ is already yours in him, humility is a gift you grow into rather than an attitude you strain to manufacture.*

Peacemaking Is a Family Resemblance, Not a Communication Technique — Jesus separates peacemakers from both peacebreakers and peacekeepers, and the difference shows in how we treat people, policies, and the polls

Matthew 5:9 landed, Summers says, among frightened people under Rome, each group with a strategy for peace, including Rome's own Pax Romana, "a peace kept by the sword." Jesus names neither peacebreakers, who escalate, nor peacekeepers, who avoid, but peacemakers, and making takes work. They "step into the tension without adding to it," tell the truth without contempt, and pursue the relationship without abandoning the conviction. In the ancient world, he says, being a child of something meant sharing its resemblance, so "your posture doesn't just reveal what's been forming you, it reveals what you resemble." Summers turns this into three postures. For people, speak of opponents as if they sat beside you, and pray for them by name. For policies, describe the opposing view so well its holder would agree, and own your side's failings. For the polls, practice a peace that does not depend on the outcome.

> **Insight —** *How we handle disagreement shows whose family resemblance we carry: our party's, our own strength's, or our Father's.*

Healing Precedes Retraining, and Retraining Needs a Faithful Friend — Formation is slow, awkward, and communal because we cannot see our own posture

Phil's word last week was that when politics becomes primary, identity becomes fragile. Summers answers that being loved by God gives "room to examine ourselves," since worth need

not be won. So the order matters: "the healing came first and the retraining came after." We do not fix our posture to earn our place; Jesus emptied himself so that we could be healed and forgiven. Retraining is slow, and Summers admits his own is taking longer than he wants: "Healing can happen in a moment. Formation happens over time." Because "you can't always see your own" posture, he returns to Proverbs: faithful are the wounds of a friend, while the feed is generous with kisses and never asks how you're doing. His practical offer is a sixty-second pause before reacting.

> **Insight —** *You are healed by grace before you are retrained by practice, and you are retrained best beside someone who loves you enough to tell the truth.*

Cross-references

- Proverbs 27:6 — Faithful are the wounds of a friend, set against the generous kisses of the news feed

DEVOTIONAL

A doctor watches a man stand up and knows the years. Nothing has been said about the pain; the body has already told it, in the bracing, the compensation, the muscles that quit because they were never asked. Posture is a confession the body makes without permission. The soul keeps the same record. A headline arrives, and before any thought forms there is a sneer, a verdict, a policy position assembled in three seconds. We call it conviction. It feels like standing firm. But those who watch us see no wound; they see only the clench. James holds up a mirror and asks us not to walk away. It is a gentle, difficult thing to look long at one's own face. Yet the mirror is not a courtroom. A diagnosis is the first mercy of treatment; it names what needs healing so that something better can be formed. And the healing is not ours to manufacture. The one who held all power did not grasp. He emptied himself and came down into our conflict. He does not hand us a better attitude to strain after. He hands us his own mind, already ours, and then begins the slow retraining of muscles gone slack: humility, curiosity, the willingness to keep a seat at the table for someone whose ballot cancels ours. It will feel awkward, like using something we forgot we had. That awkwardness is not failure. It is what formation feels like in the first reps. Beneath every vote, the Father's words are waiting: you're mine. Come here. Let's get you healthy again.

Reflection

- When did a headline last move you from wonder or concern to cynicism in seconds, and what does that reaction suggest you have been consuming?
- What pain, fear, or grief might be hiding beneath your contempt or moral superiority, and how does it show up to the people around you?

- Who is the faithful friend who can tell you the truth about how you carry yourself, and what would it take to ask them?

Closing prayer

God, thank you for the mirror of your Word and the chance to see ourselves clearly. Let today be an invitation to know how we are meant to stand. Help us question what fuels our convictions, and restore in us a character that bears your mind and heart, giving hope to us and to those around us in a broken world. Retrain in us what has atrophied. For those walking this alone, put honest, lifting people beside us. In your name, amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

You cannot always see your own posture, so let a faithful friend tell you the truth about how you stand, and be willing to hear it.

This week

This week, when a headline hits you, wait sixty seconds before sharing or reacting. Notice what you feel, name it, and ask, "What is this story trying to form in me?" Then pray by name for the people on both sides before deciding whether to engage.

Return to James 1:19-20