CITYLIGHT
CHURCH

SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

Winning In Marriage

Spouse Aware, Space Aware, Self-Aware and Jesus Aware

Most marriage trouble does not come from the big, obvious sins but from the small things we have never paid attention to. Wake up and become aware: of your spouse, of your spaces, of yourself, and above all of who you are in Christ.

PREACHED BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

DATE
February 8, 2026

SERIES
Stand-alone message

MAIN TEXT
Ephesians 5:6-17

INSIDE

Contents

01 Sermon Transcript

02 Preaching Notes

03 Scripture List

04 About the Preacher

WATCH THE MESSAGE

youtu.be/OK9XvFbCgaU

0:00 Winning in marriage: the goal is satisfaction

4:08 Ephesians 5: awake and look carefully

10:40 Awareness one: spouse aware

20:44 Awareness two: space aware

26:42 Awareness three: self-aware

34:42 You don't have to be who you have been

36:50 Being Jesus aware

42:58 Consistency, not intensity

47:35 The righteousness of God in the NICU

01

Sermon Transcript

Amen. Well, I want to talk to you this morning on the subject of winning in marriage. This is a message I felt like the Holy Spirit told me to speak. I got a real funny comment online about that. I put it online. We ran an ad, actually, just saying that I had been instructed by the Holy Spirit to preach. Somebody got on there and commented, said, "Don't trust preachers when they say the Holy Spirit told them to do something, because the Holy Spirit is for everyone." And I thought, but preachers — Holy Ghost is for everybody except me. I'm on my own, but congratulations.

Y'all have got the Holy Ghost. Amen. Look at somebody and say, "You got the Holy Ghost." Amen. That's good. That's going to help you this morning. So, but I do want to talk with you this morning on something. I do believe that the Holy Spirit instructed me to share with you this idea of winning in marriage. I'm going to preach a little different than I normally do. But I do believe it's going to help you. I want to just say from the onset that Ashleigh and I, neither one of us are experts in marriage. We do not have a perfect marriage.

We, you know, there are moments that we get after each other and we say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing. We have those moments. But I will tell you that over the years of just having a certain measure of influence, whether that be through the local church or through business or online, we have some influence. And so we hear from people and people reach out to us. And we aren't shy about talking about our marriage and celebrating each other. And so when we do that, it kind of is inevitable. We'll have people reach out and say, "Hey, you know, maybe could you help me with my marriage?"

'Cause, you know, this is what's going on. And when they tell us what's going on, just over the years, we've realized maybe — while we are not experts and while we do not have a perfect marriage — maybe we don't deal with some of the stuff that other people deal with in their marriage. And if that is true, this is going to help you a lot this morning. If you're doing better than us, I still think it's going to help you this morning because you've got the Holy Ghost. Amen. Hallelujah. So it's going to work out one way or the other. I'm not going to share a lot of statistics with you this morning.

But I did read one that I thought was interesting. A handful of studies kind of came to this conclusion. They ran this a few years ago, and they found that statistically regular church attenders are 50% less likely to get divorced than unbelievers and people who profess to be Christian but do not regularly attend church. I thought that was interesting. In fact, people who profess to be Christian and do not attend church, they trend slightly higher than unbelievers in the divorce rate. I'm sure we could dig into that.

There's something there, but that's an interesting statistic if you ask me. And so here's what I want to tell you. I want to help you as much as I can this morning, but if you have an emergency situation on your hand and you are driving 110 miles an hour towards divorce, I have good news for you. If you'll just start coming back to church week after week, we can drop your chances of divorce 50%. Somebody give the Lord a praise. That's good. So the goal, on the other hand — while I don't want you to get divorced, that's not what I'm aiming for, for you.

Amen. The goal is not not to get divorced. That's a pretty low level of goal. The goal is not to not get divorced. The goal is to be satisfied in your marriage. That was — y'all could have — I'm preaching better than y'all are letting on right now. I said, the goal is to be satisfied in your marriage. Amen. So what I want you to do this morning, we're going to start in the

Word. I want you to turn to Ephesians chapter five, and I'm going to go ahead and warn you that Ephesians five is the portion of Scripture — this is the section of the Bible that says, "Wives, submit to your husbands."

> **EPHESIANS 5:22** ESV
>
> 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

I'm sorry. I just wanted to see if it took root on the front row there for a second. Amen. Hallelujah. Y'all better have some fun, or else I'm going to preach two hours. Amen. The more you respond, the faster you get to the buffet. Hallelujah. But I do want to just say, this is the section of Scripture that does say, "Wives, submit to your husband." I just want to say something about this passage real quick, because it's not what we're going to look at this morning. In over 20 years of ministry, in the various conversations we've had with people who are having marriage issues,

I have never met anyone who was hard-lining Ephesians chapter five's instructions for husbands and wives and succeeding in marriage. Every time I've seen someone use it, it's almost like there's a power struggle in the home. And I don't know what that's about. It's just my observation. Now, I could take you through the bottom half of Ephesians chapter five and the beginning of Ephesians chapter six and really show you some crazy stuff.

> **EPHESIANS 6:1-4** ESV
>
> 1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first
> commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."
> 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Because the way we use it, when we toss it at our husband or we toss it at our wife and we put these demands from that passage, is actually sort of an inappropriate way to use the passage.

Because if you look historically at the language that this mirrors in the culture, in the Greek and Roman culture, Paul is actually not enforcing this. He's disrupting it. But I don't think y'all came for a theological dissertation this morning, though I'd love to give you one. Hallelujah. I'd like to do it, but I want to get to some practical stuff. And so this is what I wanted to give you right now: we're not going to use that portion of Ephesians chapter five, because I believe there's a better portion of Ephesians chapter five to help you with your marriage.

And it's found just a handful of verses above it. So go with me to Ephesians chapter five, verse six. I believe what we're about to read will have profound implications on your marriage.

EPHESIANS 5:6-17 ESV

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons
of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now
you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and
true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but
instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when
anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it
says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." 15 Look carefully then how you
walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do
not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians chapter five, verse six says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." I can already feel y'all going, "Where in the world is he going with this?" But hang with me. We're going somewhere. Verse seven: "Therefore do not become partners with them, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Now, when it comes to winning in marriage, there is some easy stuff. There's some easy stuff you can do. If you're screaming at each other every day and you're calling each other names and you're embarrassing each other in public and you're being mean to one another — like, stop there. Because I guess that's all y'all needed this morning. Amen. I just helped y'all out a ton, I guess. There's some easy stuff to identify in your marriage. If you're, you know — I remember the first fight my mom and dad had that I remember. I'm sure they were fighting before this.

And my dad flipped a chair over, a living room chair. Okay. We don't have to turn to the book of Hebrews to figure out what's going on. Don't do that stuff. It's kind of easy. So there's some easy stuff when it comes to your marriage that you can just easily solve. But I found that most of the issues in a marriage do not come from things that are overt. They come from the idiosyncrasies between the two people, the little personality quirks between the two people in the relationship, and figuring that stuff out is what makes it work. And the verse actually tells us that, that we just read.

It says, wake up, look carefully, be wise, discern what the will of the Lord is. This is the solution. You've got to get your mind on what's going on with you and your spouse, and you got to wrap your brain around it, and you got to do some of the work. Amen. I see y'all going to be quiet this morning. So I'm just going to scream the whole message. Hallelujah. And the reality is you need to get a revelation from heaven regarding your marriage. Now, I preached a message last year on how to hear from God, how to get a word from God. And what I told you in that, outside of giving you some good basic instruction, what I told you is that it takes about three years to really start to be able to hear from the Lord.

And some of y'all ain't got three years. I think it'll help you long term, but I want to try to give you some things, just synthesize some things that will help you immediately. In fact, I think if you'll take the stuff that I share with you today,

you might have a significantly better marriage by spring. Hallelujah. So today, what I want to talk to you about specifically when it comes to winning in marriage — I want to talk to you about awareness. I'll talk to you about awareness. Verse 14 says, "Awake." Awake. You got to wake up. You've got to figure out what's going on.

You've got to put your attention on it. You got to become aware of what's happening in your marriage. I want to talk to you about three areas of awareness that will take your marriage to a whole nother level. If you're ready for it, say, "I'm ready." Okay. Number one is you've got to become spouse aware. You got to become spouse aware. You got to be spouse aware. Now, some people would say that this would be selfish — I'm sorry, that this would be self-serving, that this would be self-sacrificing. I can't talk. Amen. I can sing.

No way. I mean, hallelujah. So some people would say this is about being self-sacrificing. You got to be spouse aware. You got to be spouse aware because, after all, the Bible says, you know, "Husbands, love your wife as Christ loved the church, giving himself up for her."

> **EPHESIANS 5:25** ESV
>
> 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

So it's self-sacrificing. But did you know that Ephesians chapter five, verse 28 actually says this: "He who loves his wife loves himself."

> **EPHESIANS 5:28** ESV
>
> 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

It's not self-sacrificing. It's actually self-serving to be spouse aware. Because if you were honest this morning, you would say this, you would say, "I want a better marriage."

Amen. If you're honest, I think everybody's there. No matter how good it is, I want a better marriage. If you agree with that, wave at me. Okay. Here's the problem though. There ain't no "I" in the marriage. There's a "we" in the marriage. There's two of you in the marriage. However, I don't think it's selfish to say, "I want a better marriage." I think it's honest. And too many times people come into environments like this, where we sit under a message, and I can already see some eyeballs in here just waiting for me to put the hammer down on what the Bible says about how the house is supposed to run.

Except every time we put the hammer down, it ain't fixing anything. And so we come into environments like this and we try to put it on. And we try to act like we're somebody that we're not, where if we would just be honest, we might be able to start stepping in the direction of what we actually want to see happen in our life. Somebody ought to say amen right there. And so even though it might sound so, I believe it's honest. And so I want to be clear with this, because this is what you need to know. When you are spouse aware, it is good for you.

It's good for you. Whatever you invest in your spouse will play a major role on the return you get. My wife is a leader in the industry that she is in. She is — I'm bragging on you for a second — she is in the top 1% of her industry. She is one of the top earners in her industry. She has influence throughout her industry. In fact, she did an online teaching the other

day that she got a message back, and the company that she did it for said, "We've never had anything this good." She's bad to the bone. She's a bad mamma jamma. Amen. She's awesome.

I will tell you this. I have at best a conversational knowledge of what she does. When she tells me what's happening in her world, I can follow along. I could not do it. I could not explain it. I could not train it. There is no muscle of mine that contributes to the things that she does. I don't give her content. I don't tell her what to say. I don't tell her how to run her business. I don't tell her what's going on with people. I don't go out and do stuff. And I have no part. There is not a dollar she makes or a cent of influence that she has that I have any part of.

It's a hundred percent her. But you would be sorely mistaken if you think I have not contributed to her results, because every time she goes to do something, whether she feels like she can or not, I'm going to tell her she can. Every time she feels like she's doing a good job, or she doesn't feel like she's doing, I'm going to tell her, "You're doing a good job." I'm going to constantly speak life into her, be encouraging. If she's got something happening and something's going on, guess what? I will figure out a way to make it happen. If at one time Ashleigh goes, "I need the house for five days and I need you and the kids not to be in it" — she wasn't angry with me, we were bringing people over to the house. Amen. And she said, "I need y'all to go."

So guess what? We just rented a hotel and we left, because what she needs, I'm going to invest in her. And this is what you need to understand. When I invest in her, I get the wife that I want out of her. I'm Colton. Hey, so thank you for being here this morning. And no, I'm serious. You have an opportunity, friend, to cultivate the spouse that you want. You have an opportunity to speak into the person you live with and draw out of them the thing that you want from them.

What you invest is going to dramatically, in fact, affect the return you get. In fact, a couple of years ago, in 2022, they did a study. This was the Journal of Psychology and Medicine. They did a study on perceived partner responsiveness. And they said that in their observation, when a spouse feels loved, seen, acknowledged, validated, cared for — when a spouse feels that way, whatever is self-sacrifice feels like less of a burden. Meaning that when I make that investment in her, she is more willing to do stuff she don't want to do. And stuff she don't want to have nothing to do with, she's more willing to do it.

And it doesn't feel bothersome to her. It doesn't feel like a — Why? Because when you are spouse aware, when you invest in your spouse, you cultivate a return that you want. Now, some of the things that are really helpful when it comes to being spouse aware: you got to start observing. You got to observe how your spouse operates. Some of y'all would do good to just take like 15 minutes and find out what your wife's doing around the house, what your husband's doing around the house. Okay. Just be aware. But if you want a shortcut, one thing you can do is you and your spouse can actually take personality tests online, and you can take love language tests online, and you can find out what works for you and your spouse.

For instance, me and my wife, we've done love language tests. We found that my wife really likes to get gifts. That's her thing. I'm not real big on gifts. I want to go buy my own stuff. I like to have a little bit of control. I'm worried about you getting the wrong thing. Amen. And so my wife likes gifts. Her lowest love language, the thing that does not do anything for her, is physical touch. Lowest on the list. There's five of them. I know these two. Amen. My highest one is physical touch. My second highest one is also physical touch.

It was an anomaly. They said, "We've never seen these results before." So guess what? Because I'm spouse aware — let me just tell y'all, I'm trying to help you out, y'all. I don't like it when the preacher gets honest. All right, well, you ain't

going to like today. When I give her gifts, she gives me physical touch. Amen. And guess what? It doesn't have to be a ton. For years, I would just buy her little stuffed animals. And then the children run that and they took them all. And so I'd buy her little stuffed animals. And over the years, we just do more and more.

And I just, when I see things, I'll bring them to her. So I'm aware. I know what she likes. But here's the other thing. You also have to set reasonable expectations around the return you expect to draw. So I invest in her. I do. I invest in my wife. I'm mindful of my wife. I care about my — I think about my wife. Every morning, we don't have shades up in our bedroom yet to cover, so I stack pillows so the sun don't shine in her face. Amen. I'm mindful of my wife. I'm mindful. But here's the reality. I have to have reasonable expectations.

And this is where spouse awareness comes in. When you know how your spouse operates, you limit yourself — or you protect yourself — from getting hurt, feeling neglected, feeling abandoned. And so I happen to know that my wife is not a morning person. So if I go in at seven thirty and try to withdraw on the investment I've made in her, the bank is closed. My wife is not a morning — In fact, I saw this little thing online. This is us. Let me show y'all this. Can I see that little picture of the little critters here? This is actually saying, "I want to wake up with you for the rest of my life."

And then I said, "I get up at 5:00 AM," and then she says, "Nevermind." She's not a morning person. I'm not trying to be ugly, but before 10:00 AM her heart is a dark place. Amen. So I'm telling you right now, she's not a morning person, but guess what? I don't mess with her in the morning. But she came out of the room the other day at eight o'clock — Jocelyn had to go somewhere. And so she came out at eight o'clock and she was real bubbly, big personality, being nice to, talking to me and stuff. And it blessed me, because I knew she was trying 3,000% to be kind to me in the morning.

That's spouse awareness. Amen. So that's the first thing: you got to be spouse aware. If you want to have a better marriage, you got to be spouse aware, because what you invest, you draw the return on. By the way, if you're ugly to your spouse, they ain't ever going to start being nice to you. You will be ugly to your spouse all the time. They're going to be ugly back at something. They're going to mirror what you do. Okay. I didn't put that in my notes. It just felt like somebody needed to hear it. Amen. All right. So that's spouse awareness. The second type of awareness you need is space awareness. Space awareness.

We have different spaces in our life. We have different spaces or something. We have our home space. We've got our workspace. We've got our church space. We've got our in-front-of-the-kids space. That's a space we all need to be real mindful of. I'm going to tell you right now, you want to build the resentment up in your house, be ugly about your spouse in front of your children, stepchildren or otherwise. And I'm telling you, it's going to turn around. It's going to turn bad on you. But I preached a message back — I'm glad I got a little bit of a catalog this morning.

I can send y'all back to some stuff. I preached a message last fall on having peace in the home. I would really encourage you to go back to that. It talks about your space. It talks about your home and some of the things you allow into your home and how you function and operate in your home. But I do want to just mention this, and I want to give you a big takeaway this morning. But there is in your space — you have all these spaces. One of the spaces that you exist in is the online space, the online space. And I just want to encourage y'all that when you go online, you're out for the world to see. The whole world sees it.

And it has shocked us greatly over the years to see how spouses talk about their husbands or their wife on the internet, like out in front. In fact, just like two weeks ago, Ashleigh posts something about our marriage and it was nice. It was kind. I thought it was a blessing. I'm going to read to you a comment that was left on this post. And the only reason I'm

going to read it is because this person put it out there for God and everybody. It's for the whole world. This wasn't a private message. This is a comment. This is what she wrote.

Ashleigh talked about how great our marriage was or something. And she literally writes us. She goes, "I can only dream of this. The marriage I'm in doesn't feel good anymore. Never really did. It's a marriage of convenience. No wonder you're posting it on the internet." This is how she's telling the whole world her marriage is. I'm going to be honest with you. Go online. Just, "My husband's awesome." I just gave you the cheat code there. Amen. You don't go there and write this stuff just for the public to read. I'm not talking about having a Zoom call with your counselor.

I'm talking about Facebook, folks. But here's something else I want you to know about. Apparently y'all really like to post on the internet. Y'all got quiet on me, but y'all do what you want to, I guess. Amen. Here's another thing I want to just talk to you about for just a moment. Have you ever heard the phrase "the elephant in the room"? You ever heard this phrase, the elephant in the room? The elephant in the room is a phrase that basically means that there's something that's happening that everyone is aware of, but nobody wants to address.

And so it's this elephant in the room. It's huge. It's taking up a lot of space, and there's this elephant in the room. You may have different elephants. Your elephant may be that you get cranky when you're hungry. Your elephant may be that you have a short fuse. Your elephant may be that you don't like to talk to anybody before 10 a.m. Amen. Yeah, that's your elephant. But everybody has an elephant. Everybody has an elephant. Everybody's got one. And here's the bad news. Your elephant ain't going nowhere. Your spouse's elephant ain't going nowhere.

I said something the other day to someone. Someone told me something about my kids, like doing something with the kids. And I go, "I don't think I have the patience for what you're talking about right now." And they looked at me and go, "Well, Jesus changes things." I said, "Well, I was saved a lot longer than I had kids, and I'm telling you right now, I don't have patience for it. I knew Jesus way before I met Jocelyn." Amen. I'm pretty sure this is where I'm at. Everybody got an elephant. Everybody's got a thing. It's just going to be there.

Now, the bad news is the elephant is not going anywhere. The good news is you can house train your elephant. An elephant isn't going anywhere, but you can at least keep that thing from running through the house and jumping on the furniture and breaking stuff and messing on the floor. And you can house train your elephant. And one of the ways that you do this is through this space awareness. When you know what's going on with you, when you know when you're feeling a certain type of way, and you're in a certain space, you can communicate with your spouse.

You can tell them, "Hey, this is where I'm at. This is how I'm feeling." And guess what? All of a sudden the elephant is trained. The elephant is kind of put at rest. It doesn't have to run all over the place. My elephant is this. I have two emotions. Okay. I have whatever this is right now, and angry. I don't have any other emotions. I don't get excited. I don't get super over the top happy. I don't — none of this. I have two emotions: whatever this is — we don't even have a label for this, this is just called normal mode. Okay. And then I get angry about stuff.

That's it. Two emotions. Well, when I walk into the house and I'm starting to feel pressure and stuff, well, what emotion do you think is going to come out? Anger. Nobody has to make me angry. It can just be I'm feeling pressure. And so when I start feeling pressure, I start wanting to get angry. Well, when I walk into the house and I look at Ashleigh, I say, "Hey, look, I'm feeling a certain kind of way right now." Then she's able to kind of step in and help me with that. And because we've looked at the elephant, we've named the elephant, we've talked about it — guess what? Elephant got house trained.

Now you can only do this if you are able to operate in the third level of awareness. This is the most powerful version of awareness. This is the super secret weapon. If awareness was a superpower, this would be Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, Superman all rolled into one. Okay. This is the superpower of awareness. Number three is self-awareness, self-awareness. Proverbs chapter 16, verse 32 says that "a man that can rule his spirit is better than a man who can take over a city."

> **PROVERBS 16:32** ESV
>
> 32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

A man who can rule his — I'm talking about self-awareness, because when you have self-awareness, you start to get a measure of self-discipline.

When you know how you operate, you are able to take control of how you function. And I'm going to tell you something: a person who has a great degree of self-discipline is a force to be reckoned with. People who have self-discipline, people who know how they operate, who are self-aware and have self-discipline — they are virtually unstoppable. Thought y'all would say amen right there. I'm sorry. I just was waiting on y'all. Hallelujah. Thank you for three of you. I appreciate that. And this is the reality: you've got to be aware of your stuff. You got to know your stuff.

Every person in here has got their own stuff. Look at the person next to you and say, "You got stuff." You've got stuff. Everybody's got it. And in marriage, when you have not identified what your stuff is, when you're not self-aware, when you have no idea what's going on with you, when you haven't identified what's going on with you, you will have unintentionally created a moving target of expectations and triggers that your spouse isn't able to anticipate. Again, I want to be very clear: being spouse aware is self-serving, because he who loves his wife loves himself.

She who loves her husband loves herself. It's self-serving. When you're spouse aware, it helps. When you're self-aware, you're helping your spouse create a better environment for you. At the end of the day, I want Ashleigh to make all my dreams come true. It's a little insatiable, but that's what I want. I want to have the wife of my dreams. She can't do that on her own. She can't do that when there's this invisible moving target. She cannot help me. She cannot support me. She can't make me feel better. She can't do anything for me. She can — you get as strict as you want it.

She can't submit to me. She can't serve. She can't do none of that stuff if she has no idea what's going on with me. And I'm going to tell you something, she's going to figure it out way after I figure it out. I'm the one that's got to figure out what's going on with me first. Self-awareness, self-awareness, self-awareness. There are times where you might feel like your spouse is intentionally ignoring you or smothering you, or you might feel like your spouse is neglecting you or intentionally angering you. But I'm here to tell you that most of the time it has nothing to do with your spouse.

It's the fact that you have these moving targets and triggers that they can't figure out. And you've laid landmines out all over your life and your spouse keeps accidentally stepping on them. And the next thing you know, you're blowing up. Why? Because something's going on with you. Something's going on with — say, "Something's going on with me." Y'all didn't sound like you believed it, but you'll catch on here in a little while. Amen. Here's the good news though. This is the good news: that if you can define it, if you can figure out what's going on with you and you can define it — if you can define it, you can defeat it.

When you identify the weight that you carry. See, some of you haven't taken time to figure out what you're carrying through your life. Some of you haven't figured out what weight do you carry, when you figure out the emotions that you

feel. When you can identify these things — what puts me in certain frames of mind, what's happening when I walk into the house, what am I walking in there with? When I came into the marriage, what did I bring into the marriage? What's going on with me? When you can figure that stuff out, first of all, you can better self-regulate.

Now we can talk about how your spouse can help you, but I'm going to tell you right now, if you can figure you out, you're like 95% of the way there, because now all of a sudden you know. So now there's some things I know about myself. I told y'all I've been dealing with the IRS, you know, and I mean, that phone call ought to come with antidepressants. You know what I mean? It's a rough one. You know what I'm saying? Just the hold music is bad. You know what I'm saying? And you're going to listen to an hour and 15 minutes of it, brother.

I'm going to tell you right now, it's a long — So I've been feeling that, right? So when I come into the house and somebody in there's doing something — I already told y'all my thing, I'm set off. You know, if I'm stressed out, you know, I'll be yelling at you over dumb stuff. The forks are facing the wrong direction. You know what I mean? I'll be upset. But when I come in and Ali's doing something, or Jocelyn's doing something, or Ashleigh's doing something — I don't always get it right, but it's helped me a lot over the past six, seven years, this has gotten a lot better, because now I know what they're doing is not making me angry.

The IRS has gotten me wigged out right now. This ain't them. It's that I'm carrying stress. I'm not getting angry at my kids. I'm not getting angry at my wife. My wife's not doing anything. It's that. So it allows me to self-regulate. And so before I go and scream at one of my children — which I want to be very clear, because I never want my kids to be like, "He's a hypocrite." I do sometimes. And sometimes I enjoy it, to be real transparent here. Amen. So before I do that, I have a moment to self-regulate and to evaluate. This is what's happening with me.

Slow down. Okay. That's the first. But also, if I know what's going on with me and I've had some measure of communication with my spouse and I'm able to say, "When this stuff happens, when this goes on, I need you to know this, this is how I feel. This is what I'm going through. I think this thing from my past has affected me in a way I hadn't realized before, and when this goes on, it feels like that." And so when you start to, you know, figure all those things out, you can communicate with your spouse. Guess what will happen? You walk into the home.

You're feeling that way. You communicate to them. And now you don't just house train the elephant. Your spouse comes in and starts to relieve you of the things that hurt you. So Ashleigh, if I'm stressed out, she kind of steps in and makes things happen in the house. If she's stressed out, I kind of step in and make things happen in the house. It's an ebb and a flow. See, some of y'all are in a struggle, not realizing it's a dance. Y'all keep trying to lean back at the same time. No, no, no. Somebody's got to lean back and somebody's got to lean in.

It's a dance. We're in this together. Say, "We're in this together." Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're in this together. And so, man, I feel like preaching all of a sudden. And so what I want you to hear is that when you become self-aware, when you're able to figure out what's going on with you, you create an environment where your marriage can succeed in ways that you've never seen a marriage succeed. No matter what you've come through, no matter what you've come from, no matter what you grew up with. Let me tell you something. We are both testimonies that you don't have to mirror what your parents did.

I'm going to tell you, we grew up with crazy and crazier. Y'all heard of Dumb and Dumber? Our parents were their cousins. We saw some nonsense in the house — nonsense, sinful, reckless nonsense in the home. We never had it. We've never had it. I've never hit Ashleigh, partly because I'm afraid. She already knows all my little spots that she can

just put her thumb into. I don't know what would happen if she got loose on me. Amen. But we've never had — we've never walked in that. And if you've walked in that, guess what? You can walk away from it.

You can change. Not only do you not have to be your parents — let me just say, under the Holy Ghost right now, you do not have to be who you have been. Hallelujah. In fact, look at this, Second Corinthians chapter five. I know some of y'all are going, "When's he going to use the Bible?" Well, here we go. Get ready. Buckle up.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17** ESV
>
> 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Second Corinthians chapter five says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old's passed away. Behold, the new has come." You don't have to be who you are. You don't have to be like you were. Hallelujah. We used to sing a song that said [worship]

It even said this, it said, [worship] I'm telling you, you could be changed today. But even if you've got a transformation moment today, some of you in here are Christ followers and you're still struggling with this stuff. I want to talk to you for a minute, because you have the advantage. If you have given your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, you have a major advantage, not only in winning in marriage, but in winning in life.

And I want to help you with this a little bit. This morning we were talking about being self-aware. If you want to take self-aware to a whole nother level, I want to talk to you about being Jesus aware. I want to talk to you about your identity in Christ for a moment. Okay. Your identity in Christ. I want to share with you this interesting little passage of Scripture that has done a great work in my life. You know, the Bible says in Romans chapter five, verse 17, that those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

> **ROMANS 5:17** ESV
>
> 17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

We have a promise that when we anchor our life in Jesus, we have access to reign in life. Someone asked me one day, said, "What does that mean?" I said, "I don't know, but it sounds really good." You can reign in life. You can live a successful life. And I know there's people who are going to get on the internet and down in the comments go, "That's that prosperity gospel." I don't understand why we want Jesus to make life hell on earth. What is our obsession with this? I'm not saying you can sow a seed this morning and get a Bentley, but I would imagine it would need to be a big one.

If you want to try — amen, I won't stop you from experimenting. Hallelujah. But that's not what I'm saying. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not saying that if you just say, "God, I need a million dollars," you'll get a million dollars. That's not what I'm saying. I'm also not going to say this: if you ask God for a million dollars, he's not going to give you a million dollars. James said, "You have not because you ask not." Amen.

> **JAMES 4:2** ESV
>
> 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

Jesus said it too.

> **MATTHEW 7:7** ESV
>
> 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

So I think that's pretty trustworthy. And so that's not what I'm talking about, but you can succeed in life.

If Jesus — the Bible says in Romans chapter eight that if he did not withhold his Son, how will he not also with him freely give us all things.

> **ROMANS 8:32** ESV
>
> 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

So you can win in life. If you've given your life to Jesus, you have the ability to succeed that other people do not have. I'd like to say it this way: Jesus makes life incredible. Somebody shout that: Jesus makes life incredible. Let me give you another chance. Jesus makes life incredible. There's a transformative power that comes when we see our identity in the finished work of Jesus Christ. If you have your Bibles, I'm going to invite you to turn with me one more time.

I don't normally do this in the middle of the message. This is actually the end of the message. For those of y'all that just got nervous — the middle. Hallelujah. I say I preach 30 minutes. We really haven't figured out how long these messages are yet. Amen, everyone. Hallelujah. Second Corinthians chapter three. Go to Second Corinthians chapter three. This is one verse I want you to look at, but you can make a note in your Bible. This will be helpful to you.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 3:18** ESV
>
> 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Second Corinthians chapter three, in verse 18, it says, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." We're talking about being transformed. If you are self-aware, you will recognize how much you need transformation. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you walk around getting angry all the time, that you might need some transformation power to flow in that area. Amen. Second Corinthians chapter three. I want you to see this word. If you look at the word "beholding" — some of your Bibles, if you

use an NASB, I think the NKJV says this, I'm not sure — the word "beholding" there in the Greek actually means beholding as if you are looking in a mirror. It's like looking in a mirror.

Well, it says here that when you look in the mirror, you're beholding, you're looking in the mirror and seeing the glory of God. You're seeing the glory of God. But what do you see when you look in the mirror? This isn't an existential question. What do you see when you look in the mirror? Yourself. When you look in the mirror, you see the person looking back at you. There was a country song I'd sing. It just ain't coming to the top of my brain right now. Hallelujah. I know there is one.

So when you look in the mirror, you see yourself, but you're beholding the glory of the Lord. You're beholding the glory of the Lord. The Bible says that when you look in the mirror as a born again believer, you see the glory, your identity in Christ, the glory of the Lord looking back at you. And when you see that glory, when you can see it, you begin to transform. There is something about recognizing who you are in Christ and seeing that, regardless of who you are, that brings about transformation. And you may say, "Well, preacher, I don't see any transformation in my life.

I'm a born again believer. I believe all that stuff. I believe my identity's in Christ. I believe all that stuff, but I'm not seeing any transformation in my life." Well, the good news is that James, the book of James, tells you what the issue is. It gives you a diagnostic for this.

> **JAMES 1:22-24** ESV
>
> 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word
> and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and
> goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

James says in James chapter one, verse 22, it says, "Be doers of the word and not hearers only." Does this sound familiar to y'all? Okay, good. Because I want you to see this connection. If you know the Scripture, I'm about to help you. "Be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourself.

Or if anyone is a hearer and not a doer" — this is people who are not getting the transformation results of their identity in Christ — "he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. He looks at himself and he goes away, and at once he forgets what he's like." James says that when you're looking in the mirror and you're seeing the glory, you're recognizing your identity in Christ, but yet you turn away and forget what you look like, there you will not be a doer of the word. You will not experience transformation. You just go back to who you were.

You just stay the same. Well, there's a word here that tells you what it is. There's a key word in the verse. The word is "intently." It's intently. Do you remember the statistic I shared with you when we started the message this morning? That just regularly attending church drops your likelihood of divorce by 50%. If you just regularly attend church, your chances of divorce drop 50%. When James says that these people look intently in the mirror, they are living a spiritual existence that is so normal for most people. Most people live the spiritual experiences of their life in short, dramatic bursts.

We'll show up once every four months, have us a good cry, cleanse a little bit, have our hands up, talk to the preacher, have him lay hands on us, leave. Nothing changes. And we'll see you again in four months. And you may think, "Do people really do that?" Well, we've all seen it in churches like ours. I don't know who it is. I think I've met the lady since I've been here, but I need a few more months to find out if it's her. Because we've all been in Pentecostal churches long

enough. We all know the lady, the lady who shows up once every six months. She's never around, but when she shows up, she's going to come down here to the altar.

She's going to make sure everybody knows that she's here. And then she's going to walk back and forth in worship. She's going to be the only person. Amen. And me, that Sunday. She's going to be loud as all get out. She's probably going to bring some little accessory with her. She's going to have a flag or something. That Sunday morning, have a tambourine. If you bring a tambourine, we got security that will take you down. I need you to know that that's the one no-go. Amen. That's off limits. Hallelujah. And so they come in, they'll act up, and then — but we all know her life is dysfunctional.

Anybody that knows her knows that her kids have problems, her husband can't stand her. And then she leaves. We don't see her again until six months have passed. I know y'all know this lady. Somebody's going to come up to me after church and say, "I'm going to tell you who it is. It's Dorothy Blankenship." Amen. I don't know. That's a name I made up. If that's real, the spirit of prophecy is on me. I am not liable. Amen. And so that's Dorothy. You watch out for her. Because we all know this. We've seen this. It happens in a way that's not that demonstrative.

Life's falling apart. I'm going to run into the church. I'm going to have my little moment and I'm going to leave. And then I'm going to hold God liable for the results I'm not getting. When you looked in the mirror and then you ran the other way, you looked in the mirror and forgot what you — Why? Because it was an intense burst of spirituality. Here's what you need though. You don't need intensity. You need consistency. I noticed the statistic didn't say people who pray, people who read the Bible, people who serve in ministry, people who are in ministry, people who give a lot, people who tithe regular. It said all you gotta do is the simplest thing.

Come back to church every week. Bam. Well, when you do these things consistently and you remember your identity — come to church every week, start to pray, start to read the Bible, throw a worship leader in the mix of your country music you listen to. I knew a guy one time, he would only play country music in his store. And I asked him one time, "So why do you only play country music?" He goes, "Because we're Christians." Okie doke. Best chicken sandwich you ever had though. So, bad theology, good chicken sandwich. And you know, but we change. Throw a worship leader in, turn Joe Rogan off, turn ESPN off, listen to a preacher once in a blue moon on a podcast.

Look, make Jesus a little bit. We're building a Jesus-centered, Spirit-filled church for all people. And I'm telling you, when people get Jesus centered in their life, transformation starts to happen. That's how you get this. You can be self-aware, but you can take it to a whole nother level. When you know who you are in Christ — I tell you this, and I'm going to close here. Almost 13 years ago, almost 13 years ago, Ashleigh was pregnant with our second daughter, Ali. And I try to be careful with the stories I share with them, but this was — she wasn't actually there for it.

So I guess it's all right. But Ashleigh was pregnant with Ali and we just sensed something was wrong. It was the day before Easter. And so we went to the emergency room for the same reason you go to the emergency room when stuff don't feel right: for them to tell you everything is fine. Ain't nobody ever gone to the emergency — you have to be missing a limb, you know, to be going, "I know they have to fix me today." You go in there for them to say, "Everything's okay." And then you go back home. That was our intention. We went in, turned out Ashleigh was in labor about four months early, and it was a deal.

They threw her in an ambulance. I was at the hospital 30 minutes away faster than the ambulance was. I took off. And so we go in, Ashleigh has Ali. It is super traumatic. She was one pound, 13 ounces when she was born. They had just made some breakthroughs, but we were living in this precipice at 24 weeks at the time where it was really like — we

were prepared for her to pass away. We thought we were not going to have a child by the end of the week. Like, we thought this was going to be our story, reasonably. It wasn't a bad confession.

Just this, we're working with the information we're getting. And so Ashleigh had been through the wringer. They put her in the hospital, wouldn't let her have any water. They were giving her little sponges on sticks, like every hour, for her to wet her — I mean, it was just, it was — she was miserable. Ali was born, and the first thing out of Ashleigh's mouth is, "Can I have a Coke?" I mean, she was just miserable. They had put her body through the wringer. And we finally got Ashleigh to the point where we could move her out of the room and we got her in a wheelchair, and I wheel her over.

I had already seen Ali — devastating to see a baby at this size. And I wheel her over, and we're going into the NICU. We're going into the NICU, and right as we're crossing over, I just leaned down into Ashleigh's ear and I just said, "This is no fault of our own. We are the righteousness of God in Christ." And I'm going to tell you, I don't know how, but being anchored in who we are in Jesus Christ, we walked through what was easily the scariest and most devastating season of our life. And somehow the Lord sustained us, strengthened us, made us better.

And I'm going to tell you, I'm grateful for the miracle. I'm grateful for the outcome, because Ali didn't take no left turns. Ali was getting better every single day. We saw the miracle working power of God. But I'm going to tell you something: in the difficulty, in the hardship of it, knowing who we were in Jesus Christ, we never wavered. We never wondered. We kept moving. We weren't screaming at each other. We were on the same team. Our marriage was strong. We were in it together. Why? Because we knew who we were in Christ. When you know who you are in Jesus, I'm telling you, transformation power flows into your life.

Hallelujah.

02

Preaching Notes

Before You Preach

This is a stand-alone, practical message on marriage. Tell the church plainly that you are not an expert and that your marriage is not perfect. The authority of the message is the Word, not your track record.

It deliberately sets aside the submission passage (Ephesians 5:22-33) and builds on a few verses earlier, where Paul says to wake up, look carefully and understand the will of the Lord. Say why in a sentence or two and move on; this is not the day for a household-codes lecture.

The message runs on one word, **awake**, which becomes **awareness**: spouse aware, space aware, self-aware, and finally Jesus aware. Keep the humor light and the stories honest. Land the close on identity in Christ, not on technique.

Introduction

I believe the Holy Spirit told me to preach this message: winning in marriage. Ashleigh and I are not experts in marriage, and we do not have a perfect marriage. There are moments we get after each other and say or do the wrong thing. But over the years people have reached out and asked for help, and we have realized we may not deal with some of the things other couples deal with. If that is true, this will help you. If you are doing better than we are, it will still help you, because you have the Holy Ghost.

Pastor Jason cited research finding that regular church attenders are about 50% less likely to divorce than unbelievers and than people who call themselves Christians but do not regularly attend church, and that the non-attending group trends slightly higher than unbelievers. So if you are driving 110 miles an hour toward divorce, here is the first piece of good news: start coming back to church week after week.

But not getting divorced is a pretty low goal.

The goal is not to not get divorced. The goal is to be satisfied in your marriage.

SET ASIDE THE USUAL TEXT

Ephesians 5 is the chapter that says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). We are not going to work from that part of the chapter this morning.

In over 20 years of ministry, in conversation after conversation with couples in trouble, I have never met anyone who was hard-lining those instructions at their spouse and succeeding in marriage. When it gets tossed across the room, it is almost always a power struggle. Read against the household language of the Greek and Roman world,

Paul is not enforcing that culture; he is disrupting it. But there is a better portion of Ephesians 5 for your marriage, and it is just a handful of verses above it.

THE BETTER TEXT

> **EPHESIANS 5:6-17** ESV
>
> 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the
> sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were
> darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all
> that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the
> unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that
> they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that
> becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine
> on you." 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time,
> because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

There is some easy stuff in marriage. If you are screaming at each other every day, calling each other names, embarrassing each other in public and being mean to one another, stop. You do not need to turn to the book of Hebrews to figure that out.

Illustration: the living room chair. I remember the first fight between my mom and dad that I can recall. My dad flipped over a living room chair. Don't do that stuff. That part is easy.

But most issues in a marriage do not come from things that are overt. They come from the idiosyncrasies between two people, the little personality quirks, and figuring those out is what makes it work. The verse tells us how: "Awake, O sleeper" (Ephesians 5:14). "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15). "Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

You have to get your mind on what is going on with you and your spouse, wrap your brain around it, and do some of the work. Learning to hear from God takes years, and some of you do not have years. So here are some things that can help you right away. Take them home, and you may have a significantly better marriage by spring.

Awake means awareness. Here are three areas of awareness that will take your marriage to a whole new level, and then a fourth that takes it higher still.

1. Become Spouse Aware

Some would say paying attention to your spouse is self-sacrificing. After all, the Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). But three verses later Paul says, "He who loves his wife loves himself" (Ephesians 5:28).

Being spouse aware is not self-sacrificing. It is self-serving.

If you are honest, you want a better marriage. No matter how good it is, everybody wants a better marriage. There is no "I" in marriage; there are two of you. But it is not selfish to say "I want a better marriage." It is honest. Too many of us sit under a message waiting for the preacher to put the hammer down on how the house is supposed to run, and every time the hammer comes down, it fixes nothing. Be honest about what you want, and you can start stepping toward it.

WHAT YOU INVEST, YOU DRAW A RETURN ON

Whatever you invest in your spouse will play a major role in the return you get.

Illustration: Ashleigh's business. My wife is a leader in her industry, in the top 1% of it. I have, at best, a conversational knowledge of what she does. I do not give her content or tell her how to run her business. Not a dollar she makes is mine. But you would be sorely mistaken to think I have not contributed to her results. Every time she wonders whether she can, I tell her she can. I speak life into her constantly. When she needed the house for five days to host people, the kids and I rented a hotel and left. When I invest in her, I get the wife I want out of her.

You have an opportunity to cultivate the spouse you want. Pastor Jason cited a 2022 study on what researchers call *perceived partner responsiveness*: when a spouse feels loved, seen, acknowledged, validated and cared for, sacrifice feels like less of a burden. When I make that investment, she is more willing to do the things she does not want to do, and it does not feel bothersome to her.

OBSERVE

- **Watch how your spouse operates.** Some of us would do well just to spend 15 minutes finding out what our spouse does around the house.
- **Take a shortcut.** Take a personality test and a love language test together, and find out what works for each of you.

Illustration: gifts and physical touch. Ashleigh's top love language is gifts; her lowest is physical touch. My highest is physical touch, and my second highest is also physical touch. So I am spouse aware: for years I bought her little stuffed animals (until the kids took them all), and now when I see something she would like, I bring it to her.

SET REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

You also have to set reasonable expectations about the return you draw. When you know how your spouse operates, you protect yourself from feeling hurt, neglected or abandoned.

Illustration: the bank is closed. Ashleigh is not a morning person. If I go in at 7:30 and try to withdraw on the investment I have made, the bank is closed. So I don't mess with her in the morning. But the other day she came out at eight o'clock, bubbly and talking, and it blessed me, because I knew she was trying 3,000% to be kind to me in the morning. That is spouse awareness.

One more thing: if you are ugly to your spouse, they will never start being nice to you. They are going to mirror what you do.

2. Become Space Aware

We live in different spaces: the home space, the work space, the church space, the in-front-of-the-kids space. Be mindful of every one. If you want to build resentment in your house, be ugly about your spouse in front of your children or stepchildren. It will turn bad on you.

THE ONLINE SPACE

When you go online, the whole world sees it. It has shocked us over the years to see how people talk about their husband or wife on the internet.

Illustration: the comment. A couple of weeks ago Ashleigh posted something kind about our marriage. A woman left a public comment saying the marriage she is in does not feel good anymore, never really did, that it is a marriage of convenience, and that no wonder we were posting ours on the internet. She told the whole world what her marriage is.

Here is the cheat code: go online and write, "My husband's awesome." Save the hard things for your counselor, not Facebook.

HOUSE TRAIN THE ELEPHANT

"The elephant in the room" is the thing everyone is aware of and nobody wants to address. Everybody has one. Yours may be that you get cranky when you are hungry, that you have a short fuse, or that you do not want to talk to anyone before 10 a.m.

The bad news: your elephant is not going anywhere, and neither is your spouse's.

The good news: you can house train your elephant. It does not have to run through the house, jump on the furniture and break things. When you know where you are and what space you are in, you can tell your spouse, "Hey, this is where I'm at. This is how I'm feeling." And the elephant is put at rest.

Illustration: two emotions. I have two emotions: normal mode, and angry. When I walk into the house under pressure, nobody has to make me angry; the pressure looks for a way out. So when I walk in, I tell Ashleigh, "I'm feeling a certain kind of way right now," and she can step in and help. We named the elephant, and the elephant got house trained.

3. Become Self-Aware

You can only house train the elephant if you have the third level of awareness. If awareness were a superpower, this would be Wonder Woman, Spider-Man and Superman rolled into one.

"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). Self-awareness produces self-discipline. When you know how you operate, you can take control of how you function, and a self-aware, self-disciplined person is a force to be reckoned with.

Everybody has their own stuff. Have the church tell each other, "You've got stuff."

When you have not identified your stuff, you create a moving target of expectations and triggers that your spouse is not able to anticipate.

Being spouse aware is self-serving, and so is being self-aware. Your spouse cannot help you, support you, serve you or make you feel better if there is an invisible moving target. And they will figure it out long after you do. You have to figure out what is going on with you first.

Sometimes you feel your spouse is ignoring you, smothering you, neglecting you or angering you on purpose. Most of the time it has nothing to do with your spouse. **You have laid landmines all over your life, and your spouse keeps accidentally stepping on them.**

IF YOU CAN DEFINE IT, YOU CAN DEFEAT IT

Identify the weight you carry. What puts you in certain frames of mind? What are you walking into the house with? What did you bring into the marriage? When you can name it, you can self-regulate, and if you can figure you out, you are most of the way there.

Illustration: the IRS. I have been dealing with the IRS lately, and that phone call ought to come with antidepressants. An hour and 15 minutes of hold music. So when I walk in and the forks are facing the wrong way, I want to yell. But because I know what is going on with me, I can stop and say: this is not my kids, this is not my wife. I am carrying stress. That moment lets me slow down, self-regulate and evaluate. I don't always get it right, but over the past six or seven years it has gotten much better.

Then communicate. "When this happens, this is how I feel. I think something from my past affected me in a way I did not realize." Now you do not just house train the elephant. Your spouse steps in and starts to relieve you of what hurts you. When I am stressed, Ashleigh steps in at home. When she is stressed, I step in.

Marriage is a dance. Some of you are struggling because you both keep leaning back at the same time. Somebody leans back, and somebody leans in. We are in this together.

4. You Don't Have to Be Who You Have Been

When you become self-aware, you create an environment where your marriage can succeed, no matter what you came through or grew up with. Ashleigh and I are both testimonies that you do not have to mirror what your parents did. We saw sinful, reckless nonsense in our homes growing up, and we have never walked in it. If you have walked in it, you can walk away from it.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17** ESV
>
> [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Not only do you not have to be your parents, **you do not have to be who you have been.** You can be changed today.

5. Become Jesus Aware

Even if you have a transformation moment today, some Christ followers are still struggling with this. If you have given your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ, you have a major advantage, not only in winning in marriage, but in winning in life. To take self-awareness to a whole new level, become Jesus aware: know your identity in Christ.

Those "who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17). When we anchor our lives in Jesus, we have access to reign in life.

Some will call that the prosperity gospel. This is not "sow a seed and get a Bentley," and it is not "say you need a million dollars and you will get it." But Scripture does say, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2), and Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). And "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

Jesus makes life incredible. Have the church say it together. There is transforming power when we see our identity in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

THE MIRROR

> **2 CORINTHIANS 3:18** ESV
>
> [18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The word *beholding* carries the sense of looking as in a mirror (the NASB renders it "beholding as in a mirror"). When you look in a mirror, you see yourself. But as a born-again believer, when you look in the mirror you behold the glory of the Lord: your identity in Christ looking back at you. When you see it, you begin to be transformed.

If you are self-aware, you will recognize how much you need that transformation. If you are angry all the time, you need transforming power to flow in that area.

"But preacher, I believe all that, and I am not seeing any transformation." James gives the diagnostic.

> JAMES 1:22-24 ESV
>
> 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

The person who sees and walks away forgets what he looks like, is not a doer of the word, and goes back to who he was.

CONSISTENCY, NOT INTENSITY

The key word is **intently**. Remember the opening statistic: simply attending church regularly is associated with a dramatically lower likelihood of divorce. Most people live their spiritual lives in short, dramatic bursts: show up every few months, have a good cry, get hands laid on them, leave, and nothing changes. Then they hold God liable for results they are not getting.

Illustration: the lady who shows up every six months. Anyone who has been in Pentecostal churches long enough knows her. She comes once every six months, makes sure everyone knows she is there at the altar, brings a flag or a tambourine, and leaves again while everyone knows her life at home is falling apart. Most of us do a quieter version of the same thing.

You don't need intensity. You need consistency.

The statistic did not say people who pray, read the Bible, serve or tithe. It said the simplest thing: come back to church every week. Do that consistently, and keep remembering your identity. Start to pray. Start to read the Bible. Put a worship leader in the mix with your country music. Turn off the podcasts and sports talk now and then and listen to a preacher. Make Jesus central. We are Building Lives on Jesus, and when people put Jesus at the center of their lives, transformation starts to happen.

Conclusion

You can be self-aware, but when you know who you are in Christ, you go to a whole new level.

Illustration: Ali and the NICU. Almost 13 years ago, the day before Easter, Ashleigh was pregnant with our second daughter, Ali, and we sensed something was wrong. We went to the emergency room expecting to be told everything was fine. Ashleigh was in labor about four months early. Ali was born at 24 weeks, one pound, 13 ounces, and we were prepared for her not to survive the week. Ashleigh had been through the wringer. When we finally got her into a wheelchair and I wheeled her toward the NICU, right as we crossed over, I leaned down and said in her ear, "This is no fault of our own. We are the righteousness of God in Christ."

Anchored in who we were in Jesus, we walked through the scariest and most devastating season of our lives, and the Lord sustained us, strengthened us and made us better. We are grateful for the miracle: Ali got better every single day. But in the hardship, knowing who we were in Christ, we never wavered. We were not screaming at each other. We were on the same team. Our marriage was strong.

- Be **spouse aware**: what you invest, you draw a return on.
- Be **space aware**: name the elephant and house train it.
- Be **self-aware**: if you can define it, you can defeat it.
- Be **Jesus aware**: look intently, and keep looking.

When you know who you are in Jesus, transformation power flows into your life.

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

EPHESIANS 5:6-17	6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
2 CORINTHIANS 5:17	17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
2 CORINTHIANS 3:18	18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
JAMES 1:22-24	22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

EPHESIANS 5:22	22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.
EPHESIANS 5:25	25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
EPHESIANS 5:28	28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.
PROVERBS 16:32	32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.
ROMANS 5:17	17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.
JAMES 4:2	2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.
ROMANS 8:32	32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

EPHESIANS 6:1-4	1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
MATTHEW 7:7	7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

INSTAGRAM

@thejasonmayfield

CITYLIGHT
CHURCH

KEEP LISTENING

Never miss a message.

Watch, listen and follow Citylight Church. New messages every week.

YOUTUBE
@citylightalabama

PODCAST
Apple Podcasts & Spotify

INSTAGRAM
@citylightalabama

FACEBOOK
/citylightalabama

JOIN US SUNDAYS AT 10:30AM

907 Shelton Beach Rd, Saraland, AL · citylightalabama.com

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.esv.org