

DEEP SIX STUDY

March 16th, 2026

New Light: Ephesians – “Growth is Optional”

MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS *(You can view the full message online at youtube.com/capecodchurch)*

Opening: In Ephesians 4:17–31, Paul delivers a direct challenge: growing old is inevitable, but growing up is a choice. This week, we identify two essential steps toward spiritual maturity. The first is a decisive moment that breaks the cycle of spiritual incrementalism and calls out the “casuals.” The second is inner transformation — the Spirit’s work of renewing the mind with a new way of thinking, not from fear or pride, but from gratitude.

1. Decisive Moments (Ephesians 4:13-14, 17, 20-22)

- “Live no longer as the Gentiles do” (Eph. 4:17) Paul makes a direct call to stop drifting and **make a decision**. Spiritual growth is rarely accidental; it is marked by moments of commitment. Commitment isn’t just for new believers: it’s for anyone who is **spiritually stalled**.
- Incrementalism — one step forward, one step back — is what happens when we avoid the ‘decisive moment.’ We can **look busy** spiritually without actually moving anywhere!
- Decisive moments root out **hidden resistance**. Like the “What are we doing?” conversation in a long dating relationship, a spiritual crossroads forces the question: “What is actually holding me back?”
- Paul also calls out the “**casuals**” — people who enjoy the benefits of proximity to Christ without the commitment (Eph. 4:22). Paul calls us to go all in, not halfway.

2. Inner Transformation (Ephesians 4:23-31)

- The laundry list of Eph. 4:25–31 (stop lying, control anger, quit stealing, watch your words, ditch bitterness) is not a to-do list for becoming a Christian. It is the outflow of a life already being transformed from the inside out. “Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes” (Eph. 4:23)
- Spiritual transformation begins with how we think, not just how we behave!

a. New Mind (Ephesians 4:23)

- Pastor Ben gave us an analogy for understanding the Spirit’s work. It’s like a GPS: the Spirit guides us, calls us out when we go the wrong way, and lets consequences teach us when we ignore both. God’s presence is persistent and never gives up, even when we go our own way.

b. New Motives (Ephesians 4:24)

- We’ve been given a new nature created to be like God (Eph. 4:24), which means new motivations. The chief driver is no longer fear (“Don’t get caught”) or pride (“Don’t embarrass yourself”) but gratitude for what Jesus has done.
- As Tim Keller observed: most of us have been trained by the twin lessons of fear and pride and barely know any other way to motivate ourselves. The gospel offers a completely different engine!
- The result is not reluctant obedience but a genuine longing to be like Christ — the natural outflow of a life shaped by grace.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

These passages may provide additional insights related to the subject of this week's message. All verses are NLT unless otherwise noted.

Colossians 1:28; James 1:4; Romans 6:11-14; Galatians 5:22-25; John 1:43-51; Matthew 16:13-19; John 21:15-19

Video of the Week: ["Holy Spirit"](#) by Bible Project

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of a decisive moment in your life — not necessarily spiritual — that changed everything? What made it a turning point?
2. Decisions help us combat 'spiritual stalling' so we can grow. Which of the spiritual pitfalls do you most relate to: waffling back and forth, unconsciously holding back, or enjoying the benefits of faith without commitment?
3. The GPS illustration described three ways the Spirit speaks: commands, redirecting, and consequences. Which of those three do you tend to notice most in your own life?
4. Tim Keller said the world tends to shape us by the twin lessons of fear and pride, whereas the gospel shapes us through gratitude. How does motivation by gratitude actually produce different behavior than motivation by fear or pride? Is this how you usually think of religion or God?
5. What is one thing you can do this week to cooperate with the Spirit's work of renewing your mind rather than resisting or ignoring it?
6. Is there a specific area of your life where you've been avoiding a decisive moment? If so, what would it look like to stop avoiding it and lean in?