



DATE	September 18, 2016
SPEAKER	Paul Clark
TITLE	The Essential Journey
SERIES	How do I grow stronger in my faith? How should I nourish my soul? How can I experience transformation in my character? How do I grow closer to God? These are great questions that have been asked by Christ-followers for many centuries. Let's explore the pathway of spiritual formation and discover both our role & God's role in this amazing & essential journey.

The believer's journey does not end in the acceptance of Jesus as your savior; that's merely the beginning. The rest of your life is an ongoing mission to transform yourself into the person God created you to be.

1. Pastor Paul's humorous story of getting lost on a hike with his wife is a great example of why we must remain focused on God to continue heading in the "right spiritual direction." Have you ever had a similar experience in which you assumed you were doing the right thing but ended up far from your destination?
2. How does a person know if they're walking the "right path" or not? How do you evaluate your personal spiritual condition and determine what aspects of your heart need improvement? By what earthly standards do people inaccurately judge their lives?
3. Growing in spiritual maturity and closeness to God is, as Pastor Paul said, an "essential journey" in the life of the believer. Some of the descriptions Paul gave of spiritual formation may have reminded you of sanctification. In what ways are spiritual formation and sanctification similar? In what ways are they different?
4. Read the Beatitudes that Jesus gives us in Matthew 5. What spiritual formation disciplines does Jesus outline for us to follow? What other disciplines can you think of which are part of the believer's journey of self-improvement (including where they're mentioned in scripture)?
5. Pastor Paul read from Proverbs in today's lesson. The book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom and guidance to help you grow in spiritual maturity by improving your behavior and self-disciplines. Which Proverbs have been influential in your life? If you don't recall any or don't have ones to share, take time as a group to browse through the book of Proverbs and share verses that are particularly applicable to your current circumstances and struggles.
6. Paul read Solomon's suggestion in Proverbs to grow in wisdom by surrounding yourself with wise people (13:20). How do we reconcile Solomon's advice to surround ourselves with wise people with the command to go and make disciples by reaching unbelievers? How do we grow in spiritual maturity while being in a corrupt society? How do we know if we're becoming too removed from society to be an effective Christian?
7. One of the most important disciplines of spiritual formation is being able to "guard your heart." In practical terms, how does one guard their heart on a daily basis? How does a believer guard their heart without becoming insensitive or judgmental to those who have not given their hearts to God?

Because of our fallen nature and living in a fallen world, we naturally drift from God without realizing it, our character naturally eroding if we don't constantly, consciously improve it. Like a muscle, we need to train and strengthen it regularly. Make a plan to identify what disciplines you need to improve and find ways—whether on your own, in your group, or through Fairhaven—to accomplish that.