

Small Group Discussion Guide — January 3, 2021

- Sermon: “Practicing Pressing On”
 - Scripture: Philippians 3: 12-14 (NIV), Psalm 139: 23-24 (New American Standard Bible)
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CONNECT:

1. If you had to articulate one lesson you have learned from 2020, what would it be?
2. What is one hope you have for this new year?

ENGAGE:

1. Read Philippians 3: 12-14.
 - Based on these verses, what can we understand about how Paul viewed his journey in faith?
 - What do you think, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” means? Does anything interesting strike you about this verse?
 - How do you think “forgetting what is behind” and “straining toward what is ahead” are linked? Why is each idea necessary for growth in Christ?
2. Read Psalm 139: 23-24.
 - What is God’s part in this prayer?
 - What role does the one offering the prayer play?

APPLY:

1. David talked about two competing visions for life - the vision in which our happiness is tied to the success of our plans, versus the vision in which every circumstance can serve as growth in maturity and increasing intimacy with God. Which vision have you clung to mostly? What has been your experience in following this vision, and what have you learned?
2. Spiritual maturity doesn’t just happen - it takes intentionality and commitment. For the next two weeks (at least), keep a journal that follows the prayer of Psalm 139: 23-24. Commit to a daily list of four categories: heart (motives/intentions), anxious thoughts, hurtful ways, and everlasting way (the gospel promises). Be honest and ask God to reveal these things to you. See if this practice helps you accept the peace that Christ offers, and in turn, guards your heart and mind against destructive habits and thought patterns. (See the Hope app for a template: Media: Resources: Psalm 139 Journal Exercise, or visit [our website](#).)

PRAY:

Dear Father, we know that you desire for us to grow in deeper intimacy and relationship with you. As we enter this new year, open our hearts to your truth and reveal the areas in us that need your presence and healing. Thank you for your faithfulness to come close to us when we come closer to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Set aside a half-hour or so this week to read the book of Philippians. This book will redefine our perspective, reminding us that our joy is found in Christ alone. Pray that God will help you this year to allow all circumstances, the happy and the hard, to bring you closer to Him.
2. Join the Hope family in a 90-day reading of the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The plan begins on Jan. 5. Find the reading plan on the Hope app (Media, Resources, Gospels - a 90-Day Reading Plan), from our [website](#).

SUPPORTING VERSES:

- Romans 12: 2
- Luke 6: 47-49
- Philippians 2: 12

QUOTES:

Prayer:

"Oh, Eternal One,

It would be easier for me to pray if I were clear and of a single mind and a pure heart; if I could be done hiding from myself and from you, even in my prayers. But, I am who I am, mixture of motives and excuses, blur of memories, quiver of hopes, knot of fear, tangle of confusion, and restless with love, for love. I wander somewhere between gratitude and grievance, wonder and routine, high resolve and undone dreams, generous impulses and unpaid bills. Come find me, Lord."

Ted Loder

"We want to skirt the long, arduous process of real spiritual growth and development. The ancients weren't fooled; they saw the hard but rewarding work of character transformation as the normal pathway of every Christian's experience. Common sense tells us that bad habits take time to lose and good habits take time to develop. If someone is willing to learn and to be transformed from the inside out, they will eventually see true, long-lasting changes."

Gary Thomas

"Speaking of God guarding our hearts and minds, in Philippians 4: 6-7, the picture is that our hearts and our minds are under assault. Guilt, worries, threats, confusion, uncertainties - they all threaten our peace."

John Piper

"Cooperation with God's gracious work moves us toward the wholeness of Christ. Rebellion against God's gracious work moves us into destructive and dehumanizing emptiness, into increasingly dysfunctional lives that are self-destructive and treat others as objects to be manipulated and used for our own purposes."

Simon Tugwell