**Pressing on from the Past (Leader’s Handout)**

**Introduction**

Good evening everyone! I’m so glad that each of you made it here tonight. I’m guessing that some of you are super pumped to be here and others of us are just drained (pause) from all the fun of the past couple weeks of holidays and presents! (And maybe from the grind of this whole past year.)

And because it’s the first week of the year, tonight, the leadership team wanted to use our time together for each of us to take stock of 2019 and to consider and to ask God about the things that He would have us do in 2020. So to start us off, I would like to break us off into a little bit smaller groups of about 3 to 4 people. So let’s count off by XYZ. Ones over here, twos over there, threes over there…

**Chart it**

Now before we share in our small groups. I would like for each of us to fill out this piece of paper. As you can see there are 12 months on it and there is a high of 5 and low of -5. So I would like you to graph your highs and lows starting from the beginning of last year to the end of this year. And if there was a big event that occurred, then you can label it.

Now as you are thinking about your graph. Know that you are going to share it with your group.

Everyone got it! Alright, let’s go! Now I’m going to give you about 10-15 minutes to fill it out.

**Share it**

Ok, looks like everyone is done. So, I would like for us to share your graph within our small groups. Now, if there is something too personal or too hurtful to share, you can say that. Like, “This was a really painful and dark time in my life and I can’t talk about it right now.” That’s ok, I think we all get it. We’ve gone through situations or we’ve seen people go through things where there still needs healing and talking about it can be just too painful at this point.

So, when someone is sharing, keep this verse in mind. Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” So, as a listener, if you sense that if someone shared something praiseworthy, praise God for it. Maybe stop before they go to the next high or low and praise God for it. Give Him glory, worth that He is due. Likewise, if you sense that someone shared something really deep or painful, maybe, stop them before they move on and lift them up in prayer. And if you are the sharer and they stop you to pray for you, I’m asking please let them.

So as you are sharing, you have about 5 to 7 minutes each (not including prayer time).

Let’s come back together. Thank you everyone for sharing your past year, I’ve overheard some new and even deep things that help me know and understand you more. And I’ve also heard some awesome things that God has done. Praise God.

**Think About it**

In Philippians, Paul looked back on his life and the things that he had done and this is what he wrote:

**Philippians 3:8-14**

8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I may gain Christ, 9 and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness —a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness. 10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, 14 with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

* **List what you think were some of Paul’s highs and lows at this point in his life.**

(He persecuted the church, he hunted down Christians, he locked them up, split up families, approved and watched over people’s death; he considered himself flawless in terms of righteousness towards the Law, he was an apostle, he was a church planter, he performed miracles, he wrote scripture, and he prophesied)

* **Why does Paul regard all of his life events as liabilities, even dung?**

(Paul’s life events could have held him back in his ongoing walk with Christ and in the things that God would have him do. For example, his past lows of hunting down Christians, imprisoning them, watching and approving of people’s death could have held him back from pursuing Christ. Maybe thinking, he can’t be used after hurting so many people. Likewise, Paul did not rest on his past accolades and think that was enough. Instead, He considered it as rubbish and pressed on from it to pursue Christ. So, if there are things that hold us back from Christ, toss it out and leave it on the past (right hand pushing to the right).

* **What are some the common past life experiences that hold Christians back from pursuing Christ?**

(Un-forgiveness, having been hurt in the past, sin like anger, porn, rage…, abortion, drugs, taking someone’s life,

* **How can the community of faith support someone who’s past life experiences are holding them back from pursuing Christ?**

(Remind them they are new in Christ; that they are not a sum of their past, but in process of becoming like Christ; listen to their story, we can share them our stories of failure and God’s redemption, remind them of this passage of forgetting the past and moving on with Christ).

Here, Paul looks back at his past and states that in view of knowing Christ, all everything in the past is like trash, things to be discarded. Not that they are trash, but in comparison of continuing to know Christ. So whether it be good or bad, high or low, if it does not help us to gain Christ, to be found in Him, we should move on from it. For Paul, it was to continue to know him, to experience his power, to share in his sufferings and to be like him in his death.

So as we look to 2020, a question that comes to us is: What are the areas where we want grow in with Christ? Think about it for a moment. Ask God about it. And if you are not sure about it, that’s ok. If your heart is inclined to be more like Christ in a certain area, I believe God is going to respond to that inclination and make things clear. But you got to start somewhere. So think about it.

**Plan it**

And then after you have something, I want you to write it down. And then right underneath it, I want you think of ways that God can use to accomplish it. For example, I need someone to text me once a week to encourage me, I need someone to ask me how I’m doing in this area, I need someone to point me to resources or people I can go to for help, I need to read a book on the subject, I need to ask someone more mature in that area for advice, I need to take a step of faith for something new, I need to maybe it’s even I need to take a step away from something I’m doing to make room for greater growth, like Facebook, videogames, tv shows…

**Support it**

And once you’ve done those two things, I would like for you to share them with your small group. Now just to be clear, your small group is not obligated to help you in the way you suggested, but we should consider it. Then, finally, I would like for you pray for one another.

Everyone done? Excellent. One last thing the leadership team would have us do is to fill out this survey. We want to know from you what topics you would like to have on Friday nights as we pursue Christ as a fellowship group. After you are done you can hand them into me, Edward or Trixie. Thanks!