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Striving Side by Side

Pressing On

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

One of the key points to remember throughout this series is that we are not called to wear ourselves out. Pressing on is not about throwing ourselves against brick walls with no regard for our own well-being.

REFERENCES

Exodus 16:2-15

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

Focus text: [Philippians 1:21-30](#)

Are you feeling life pressing in all around you? The global events, the local concerns, the too-full schedules, the sudden surprises? Are you staring at your calendar, social media feed, or news app, wondering how we'll all get through this? I recently saw a reel from a therapist who was talking about how common it is for eldest daughters who are now in adulthood to daydream about having a minor medical emergency so they can get some rest. Maybe it's because I'm an eldest daughter, or maybe it's the world we're in right now, but I found myself resonating just a little too much with what that therapist was saying. Whether we're in the pulpit or the pew, a lot of us are wishing for a

way out of the stress and worry that inundate our lives. Thankfully, we're not alone. Though they weren't facing stressors like 24-hour news alerts, the uncertainties of AI, and a constantly fluctuating economy, Paul and the Philippians were not strangers to stress, worry, and the struggle to live faithfully amid it all. So, consider this an invitation over the next four weeks to stop, take a breath, and mine Paul's wisdom for pressing on toward Christ as we move *through* the struggle together.

As you begin this series, think about the heart songs in your congregation. What hymns or choruses might you weave into worship over the next four weeks? Maybe you sing a traditional hymn like "How Firm a Foundation" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 529) in a new way by singing one verse a week in preparation for prayer or singing the hymn in a variety of styles throughout the series. Maybe one week, the congregation meditates on the words while a pianist plays an arrangement of the tune, and another, you sing the hymn congregationally but in a new way—a folk style or with a small instrumental ensemble. This might also be an opportunity to introduce a new hymn into your congregation's musical and spiritual vocabulary, such as "**We Labor Unto Glory**" by **Porter's Gates** or "We Will Follow"/"Somlandela" (*Worship & Song* 3160).

One of the key points to remember throughout this series is that we are not called to wear ourselves out. Pressing on is not about throwing ourselves against brick walls with no regard for our own well-being. Rather, pressing on is about persevering faithfully in love for God, self, neighbor, and creation. So, throughout this series, we encourage you to incorporate a breath prayer—a simple, meditative prayer practice—into worship and/or as an offering for the week ahead that reflects on Paul's words to the Philippians and the theme of pressing on. For this first week, consider using this breath prayer: ***(Breathe in)* We are God's people; *(breathe out)* together, we press on.** May it be so.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences, as well as the New Day Amani/Upendo house churches in Dallas. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, Lisa earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement.

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