

Folks,

As we begin a new year in a new decade, we do so with a great deal of hope and vision for this incredible fellowship called The Heights. We believe God has big plans for each of you and for our church this year. God clearly lays out our four core values all throughout the Scriptures – We truly are called to Worship, Grow, Serve, and Share. We are going to give some extra focus to SHARE this year, because, out of all the things Jesus could have spent directed time teaching His disciples, he chose to teach them how to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

Check out Hebrews 12:1-17 (The Message):

Discipline in a Long-Distance Race

“Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through—all that bloodshed! So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children? My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects.

God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live? While we were children, our parents did what seemed best to them. But God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best. At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.

So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!

Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you'll never get so much as a glimpse of God. Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time. Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act and wanted God's blessing—but by then it was too late, tears or no tears.”

The Holidays were glorious and convicting. I had a great time with my family and I hung out with the golden child, Adlie (my Granddaughter). However, I was so convicted about all the stuff that I have and yet I honestly tried to talk myself into some sick idea that I needed more at Christmas! I was convicted by a closet full of clothes and coats, the heat and freedom I take for granted, and the money I spend eating out! I am way too comfortable and way too full of wanting.

1 John 2:15-17 (The Message):

Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.

Dave Ramsey's quote keeps ringing through my head, "Live like no one else, so you can live like no one else!" We're making changes as we speak, but to be honest, I have lived way too long like everyone else, I'm afraid.

Conviction is a glorious thing – it reminds me that I belong to Him and it reminds me that He doesn't want me to live like this – it's not who I was made to be! So, we're giving stuff away, travelling lighter, living simpler, enjoying the glory of peanut butter, and sensing God's pleasure and the hope of better days.

Along the lines of Hebrews and of God training us to live His "Holy Best," here are two opportunities to do something together:

1. We're going to invite you to take the E100 Challenge at church this Sunday. We are going to read 100 Bible passages together as a church that will give us all the Big Picture of the Bible and have us focusing and praying through the same verses.
2. A dear friend, who we are praying with and for, is struggling with some unexpected cancer and he quoted Charles West in a Tweet the other day. West said "We turn to God for help when our foundations are shaking, only to learn that it is God who is shaking them." Join us for worship and prayer on the first Wednesday of every month in the Chapel from 6:30-8:00 p.m. You can walk and pray through a self-guided expression; you can pray in small groups; you can come and go. Members of our staff will be there to pray for you and with you for specific needs.

Let's live together in a story that God is telling in 2010.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Wills