

2009 Christmas Greetings from the Helgrens (www.helgren.com)

December 22, 2009

Looking back over 2009 I would have to assess this year as probably the most difficult, yet joyous year I have experienced. Difficult because of the personal challenges that we faced as a family. Joyous because at every turn God's sovereignty and glory could be clearly seen. Even in the celebration of this season of hope, where God miraculously, and at just the right time, delivered to us a Savior, we also remember the cruelty that accompanied it (the slaughter of the innocents). Joy and struggle: the reality of a faithful people in the loving arms of God.

So we will start with challenges: My brother Todd, not yet 50 years of age, succumbed to the physical ravages of diabetes on April 29th. Todd had experienced his own physical and emotional challenges after the death of my Mom in 2002 and it all took a toll that resulted in his death. I miss him a great deal. But it resulted in some quality time with family and some healing all around.

In July I learned that the contract I had with the Jersey City Public Schools would not be renewed. With it went about 70% of my income (bad) and weekly travel to New York (good). After 15 years it is a little weird not to be booking regular travel to the east coast. Although I still have some sources of income it has been an interesting time. My Teaching Leader responsibilities with Bible Study Fellowship have been the quiet blessing during this uncertain time.

In late October Debbie's mom, Stella, suffered a stroke that put her in the hospital for 4 weeks and has placed her in a skilled nursing facility at the moment. This was a bit of a shock because it is Debbie's father, Gus, who has had the majority of health challenges. Stella is improving and Deb and I have traveled up to Boise a few times to help out. We will see what the future holds as we sort out how to assist Gus when Stella comes home.

We are thankful to God for all His mercies during these challenging times. We are given the opportunity to rely more fully on Him and He has never let us down.

Woohoo! Jonas graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from ITT technical college. The timing couldn't have been better as our income dropped

just as our commitment to tuition also dropped! He continues to work for Mediaport (mediaport.com) and has had the "hardship" of two business trips to France to assist Sony with their media displays at the MIPTV and MIPCOM conferences. There is great joy in seeing Jonas succeed in doing something he loves to do. On the other hand, seeing him less and less is hard to deal with. The "Cat's in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin comes to mind.

Sam is still, and in some ways, miraculously, a student at the University of Utah. He continues his involvement at the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity and relocated to the fraternity house this summer with a predictable effect on his grades (predicted by mom and dad). After being sent a "love letter" from the University of Utah ("love to have you stay but you gotta fix those grades"), Sam appears to be finding a better balance between the siren call of "extra curricular" activities and academia. We are keeping our fingers crossed. Sam is the current Public Relations council liaison for the Interfraternity Council at the U of U which we hope will lead to him improving his own relations with his parents by improving academically. You gotta love this guy. His enthusiasm for campus life is noteworthy!

Deb continues to be challenged by her Bible Study Fellowship Teaching Leader commitments and also her part time work at the U of U Orthopaedic Center. BSF has undergone some fairly radical changes with the addition of an under two year old program and she is scrambling to find leaders to staff the program. Her work at the Center is a blessing as it provides our only steady income and gives us the opportunity to purchase health insurance.

Some would look at the contents of this letter and think: Wow, it must be tough! The truth is, it has been such a blessed year as each event has drawn us closer and closer to the God who loved us so much that He did not even spare His Son to redeem us. A God like that deserves joyful praise, not a mournful "why me?".

May the God of Love fill your heart during this joyful time! Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.