

CHRISTMAS 2010

Merry Christmas!

"Christmas time is here!" For many, these words evoke memories of a certain animated television special. For others, the *Jars of Clay* "Christmas Songs" production (which I saw on 12/11/10 in Omaha). But what do the words *really* mean? It is once more that time of year where we celebrate the coming of Christ in human form. God taking on flesh and blood to live on earth for thirty-three years to bring about the redemption of His people.
Reconciliation between God and man.

It's also a time when, traditionally, we send letters and cards to family and friends, sharing the latest news and telling others about what God has done in each of our lives.

As I mentioned in the 2009 letter, the beginning of 2010 was to be a time of house-hunting for me, as I had decided to purchase a home rather than continuing to rent a small studio apartment. Weekends in January were spent trudging through three-foot-deep snowdrifts to look at various homes for sale in a few neighborhoods of north-central and northwest Omaha. In late January, I made an offer on a house. But I soon learned it was going to be complicated as it was a short sale. Basically, the seller was underwater on two mortgages and the sale would require approval of both, plus all parties keeping paperwork current. To make a long story short, it fell through a couple times, then still looked possible a couple times, before falling through for good in April. With little time to spare before the tax credit was to expire, the process was back to square one. I expanded the search area and began once more looking at possible homes, found one, and after a couple rounds of offers had a signed deal. Closing was on May 21 and by May 31 I was out of the apartment and into a house in the Benson neighborhood of north-central Omaha.

June was a month of moving in, making some renovations, and also spending a week on the Omaha Indian Reservation (Walthill, Nebraska) for the fourth straight year. This year I also served as the team leader of my church group. (Later in the year we would also do some more single-day ministry in Walthill, including another back-to-school picnic in August.)

continued on reverse



Photo from late June after setting up my upstairs living room

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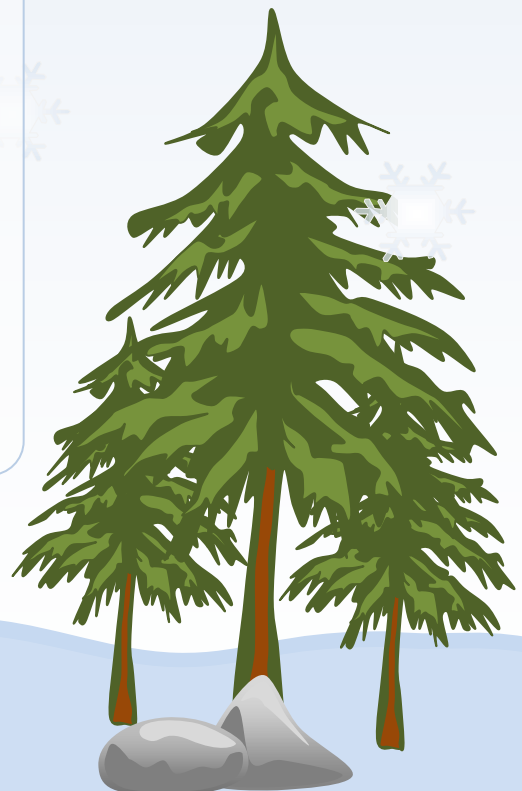
The List, 2010 Edition

2010 Travels

Winter Park, CO – end of Jan.
Yellowstone – July
Chicago – Labor Day
Niobrara, NE – Oct.
Chattanooga/Nashville – Nov.

Recommended Albums 1st heard in 2010

"The Suburbs" – Arcade Fire
"The Shelter" – Jars of Clay
"Raising Up the Dead" – Caedmon's Call
"For Emma, Forever Ago" – Bon Iver
"Sigh No More" – Mumford and Sons
"The House You're Building" – Audrey Assad
"Feedback" – Derek Webb
"Counting Stars" – Andrew Peterson



The month of July turned out to be an unexpected blur. On July 8th, expecting to have a normal Thursday evening with my grandma, I walked in to find out, after asking questions and observing symptoms, that she'd had a stroke earlier in the day and needed to be transported to the hospital. The next week was spent with many trips back and forth to Lincoln, and time spent with most of the family – aunts, uncles, cousins too – gathered at the hospital. My parents and siblings and I then had a previously scheduled vacation, which after discussing with the extended family determined she would have wanted us to still proceed with as planned. I spent Thursday evening, the 15th, with her and then also got to talk to her once more from my motel room in Valentine, NE on the 16th. Early afternoon Saturday, soon before re-connecting with family in South Dakota (I had left a day later) the news came through that she had entered eternity. While it was a sad time for the family, we know with confidence we will see her again. She had a strong influence on the spiritual upbringing of her grandkids, much like grandmother Lois as referred to in 2 Timothy. I can't remember now if it had already been decided by that point or if it was soon after it was decided, but the extended family decided that I should do the memorial service if I was fine with it (which I was...actually, I had hoped I would somehow get the opportunity even when it hadn't yet been discussed). I recall actually writing much of the message one evening in West Yellowstone, MT. The memorial service was Saturday, July 31, in Lincoln. One surprise was that relatives I hadn't ever seen, and hardly knew of, were in attendance.

The rest of the year to date has been pretty normal – which is a good thing. I got to see the Cubs play in Chicago on Labor Day – and they won! I also got three opportunities during 2010 to preach at Grace Reformed Church – twice at Fort St. and once at Gretna. This is one of my passions and I appreciate each opportunity I get. In early November I went to Tennessee for a weekend to take part in the PCA Global Missions Conference. It was great to connect with people all across the world and see what God is doing.

So as 2010 draws to a close, it was in many ways an unexpected year, and a challenging year. But it's also another year of looking back and seeing that many reminders that God is faithful and makes no mistakes, and so, with this in mind, can look forward to 2011!

Merry Christmas!

- Joel



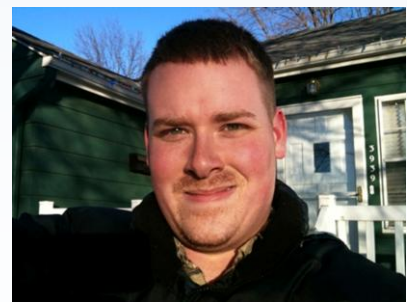
Yellowstone



Family after the memorial service



Go Cubs Go!



December 2010