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Dear Pastor Roger,

I mentioned before that I wanted to give more regular updates as the launch of the church approaches. In this update, I'd like to bring you up to speed on four changes in our family:

Jason and Jennifer Janz

My Brother Goes Home

In July of 1994, my brother, Jeremy Janz, was hit by a truck while riding his bike. For the last fourteen years, he has lived in a persistent vegetative state. On July 10th, he went home to be with the Lord. His memorial service was held this past week at Providence. I have included what I read at the memorial service as a record of what God has taught me through this.

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Fourteen Reasons for Fourteen Years

After Jeremy's accident, I wrote a Gospel tract entitled "Why?" that answered the basic questions that the average person has when they undergo trials. Now, fourteen years later, I find myself asking the same question, but in a different way. I was satisfied with the answers from God fourteen years ago, but why did God keep him around for fourteen years? Some people would say he was a drain on society and had a terrible quality of life. And at weary times, you are susceptible to all such temptations. In fact, I can say for the family this morning that in a way, a weight has been lifted. A fourteen-year weight. However, if we don't answer that question, we are gathered here today as fools, trying to find meaning in a wasteland.

But God has the answer and we are pressed to find them today. Why did God keep him alive in that condition for fourteen years? When you have a friend on the verge of death for fourteen years, you think about this day a lot and what you would say. I would like to share with you fourteen reasons for fourteen years.

1. Fourteen years changes the contemporary idea of quality of life. The idea that quality of life is to be defined solely by the individual rather than the community is from the devil. American individualism has robbed this nation of many benefits. Countless stories could be told of the untold blessings of Down Syndrome, handicapped, special needs, and yes, PVS patients and the way they made people ponder what true quality of life is - a life that displays the wonders of God. And all life is valuable.

2. Fourteen years was the time needed to teach us the ways of God. The Psalmist said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes." Some things are only learned in affliction. Visiting Jeremy was often like looking in a mirror. His life message was convicting. You were confronted with your life, your lack of love, your priorities, your dedication, your care for the hurting, and the nature of your service. I cannot explain it, but many of you know of what I speak. Many times, I left his bedside and followed Job's example in chapter 42 and repented of the idolatry in my life. One of his friends said, "There was a time when I struggled with what appeared to the senselessness of it all. But the reality of the goodness of God and then the experience of the work of God in lives through Jeremy's suffering has resonated with the truths of Scripture. It is real -- This is what the world needs to see -- a real God transforming real lives in the most intense of situations."

3. Fourteen years screams at the suffering of their need of patience. James admonishes us to let patience have its maturing work. Job was held up as an example of patience and saw at the end of his long journey, a merciful and compassionate God. When a trial grows in length, the value of it deepens like fine wine. Clichés no longer sustain you. Shoulders to cry on vanish. Christ demands that we do what is supernatural, to abide under the burden while he perfects us.

4. Fourteen years provoked thousands of Christians to improve their prayer lives. When the trial happened, thousands prayed. Over the years, thousands more have interceded. One note I received from a college classmate of his said that her mom prayed for him every day for fourteen years. That's fourteen years of communication with God. Fourteen years of pleading with him to work. Fourteen years of him saying "No." Fourteen years of Him increasing and his creatures decreasing. I observed this first-hand as my boys made him their prayer project from the time they learned to speak. Yesterday, as we closed the casket, they wept. Boys, thank you for praying for him all these years. Sometimes, God says no and we can know that this is best. I was reminded of David who prayed and fasted for his child to live. Perhaps God would show mercy. He didn't to David and he didn't to us. He had better plans.

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5. Fourteen years uplifts the sovereignty of God. In our wisdom, we wonder "Why fourteen? Why not 4 or 24?" Yet, we can rest, not in our autonomy, but in God's great, ultimate plan. He tells us that Jer's days were numbered before he was born so he went home on the perfect day. So, if I asked God why not 4 or 24, he may respond the way he did to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed"? "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?" God knows why it was fourteen years and that is enough. Sovereignty is a soft pillow.

6. Fourteen years prolonged his earthly ministry. Jeremy's legacy runs deep with many who remember his boundless energy, but he ministered to more through his tragedy than he ever did through his so-called "public" ministry. That was simply setting the stage for God to show something far deeper, far more marvelous. Over the past fourteen years, hundreds of people asked ultimate questions as they cared for him. Whether on his dozens of trips to ER, his transfer to multiple facilities, or his regular caregivers, he forced people to consider God's hand in the world. One of his college professors emailed me yesterday with apt words. "As I see it, Jeremy has been full time in the ministry for the last 14 years. It was not the ministry he would have chosen or any of us would have chosen for him. But he gave up the right to choose how God would use him sometime along the way and I know he wanted what God wanted for him. He is a great example for all of us."

7. Fourteen years has forced all involved to rely on divine strength. The physical demands of caring for Jeremy fell on his care-givers and primarily my parents. And I want to publicly thank them for tirelessly caring for him, fighting for him, and staying by his side until the end. In our weakness, we were forced to rely on a strength that was not our own. We can say that we were able to do this through Christ who strengthened us.

8. Fourteen years gave many people a new ministry of ministering the comfort of Christ. II Corinthians 1:3-5 tells us that we get to take the ministry of a comforting Christ to our own hearts and use that to minister Christ to other hurting hearts. Our phones ring when brain-injured people enter emergency rooms. And we go. It's a stewardship. It's a gift. It's a joy.

9. Fourteen years allowed him to preach the Gospel longer. From the beginning, a Gospel tract was written on his life that was used to give the Gospel to lost sinners. At the end, on the night before he saw Jesus, one of his care-givers knelt by his bedside and accepted the Lord into her life. Paul testified to this in Philippians when he said of his persecution, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."

10. Fourteen years gave us a glimpse of what it means to be part of the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. No human being suffered the way he did. John MacArthur says it well, "The deepest moments of spiritual fellowship with the living Christ are at times of intense suffering; suffering drives believers to Him. They find in Him a merciful High Priest, a faithful friend who feels their pain, and a sympathetic companion who faced all the trials and temptations that they face (Heb. 4:15). He is thus uniquely qualified to help them in their weaknesses and infirmities (Heb. 2:17)." I can say that I better understand Christ and his cross because of fourteen years of suffering.

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11. Fourteen years allowed us to see the works of God. God used Jeremy's trial to transform lives. People were saved, lives were transformed, and believers were sanctified. Why was the man born blind? Because of sin? No, so that the works of God could be displayed in his life.

12. Fourteen years proved Satan wrong. I can visualize the day when Satan walked into God's throne room and said, "Do the Janz's fear God for nothing? Do those who know and love this boy simply believe in a feel-good God?" I can see God granting his permission. I fast-forward to sitting in the Salt Lake Hospital with family and friends who were reeling. But let fourteen years prove that this trial did not derail the saints of God. Let Satan be silent. Let it be known that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. So, fourteen years proved him wrong. For fourteen years.

13. Fourteen years made us long for heaven. Perhaps one of the more draining experiences of these years took me by surprise. It was the dreams. Nobody told me about the dreams. But more times than I could keep track of, I would walk into a hospital room to a coherent brother and I would catch him up on all that had taken place only to wake up and realize that it was a farce. The new grief got old fast. I began to long for heaven where we could converse about life during these fourteen years. I want him to know my children, my wife. God tells us that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glories of heaven. In a sermon by Jonathan Edwards in 1733 he said, "God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. - To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean. - Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives, to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for, or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?"

14. Fourteen years showed us that our satisfaction should be in Christ. "The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!" Psalm 21:26. God forbid if we ever lose sight of our true satisfaction. It is Jesus. Our Creator. Our Redeemer. Our Sustainer. Our Hope.

Moving to the Neighborhood

Many of you have prayed with us for a year to sell our home. On July 7th, we sold our home and on July 8th, we bought our new one. God gave us a house less than a mile from the meeting place of our church. He gave us a house with enough room to entertain large groups, host small groups, provide space for four boys to bounce around, and room for me to have a home office. The house is a 1901 Denver Square that has been updated quite a bit. God is so good.

We are in a bit of a rough neighborhood. A Denver policeman who patrols our neighborhood told us that we moved smack dab into the middle of the Crips gang territory. Their gang symbol has been graffitied on our garage door. I would appreciate your prayers for safety. Two days ago, we heard a loud gunshot three doors down from our house. It jolted us. So, we have an alarm system on the home to provide some security. In spite of all that, we are at peace knowing we are right where God wants us to be.

The Biggest Losers

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After traveling to 23 states this year, Jen and I both realized we needed to get back in shape. Eating out and living a sedentary life had taken its toll. So, starting this spring, we endeavored to work on eating healthy and working out. Together we lost 37 pounds!!!

I despise working out. So, to get myself in gear, I entered a triathlon. James Beil, a member of our core team, trained with me and raced with me. I really did it just to get the t-shirt and to be able to tell everyone that I was a triathlete. Wouldn't you know it? We checked in for the race and all the t-shirts were gone!!!

I believe that physical fitness is important for us as ministers of God. I think we can say that we are physically, locationally, spiritually, and emotionally ready to start this new work. However, in spite of our preparation, we are dependent upon the grace of God to do the work and to strengthen us for the task.

The Boys Start School!

The decision about schooling for our children has been one of the more difficult decisions for us this year. Jen and I are both graduates of Christian school and we appreciate the training we received there. We always planned on keeping our kids in Christian school. However, this past year, we homeschooled the children partly due to our travel schedule and partly due to financial limitations. By the end of the year, we knew that homeschooling was not for us.

That left us with two options: to find a Christian school in the city or to put them in public school. We could not find a good Christian school and by default, we were left with the decision to put them into public school. We wrestled over this for a long time until we finally agreed that we felt this was the right decision.

Today was their first day and they enjoyed it. Paton started Kindergarten, Champlin started 2nd grade, and Hudson started 4th grade. They are the only white children in their classes and so we look forward to making many new relationships with African-American, American Indian, Hispanic, and Asian families. Our purpose will be to show and share the love of Christ with this new mission field. Jen signed up to be a classroom volunteer and I signed up to be on the Collaborative School Council which determines policies and procedures for the school. We look forward to what God has in store.

This morning it hit me pretty hard. Our life is completely different. But all the major transitions are now complete. We have a core group and a meeting place for our new church. We have a new home. We have a new school. We have 800 new relationships with prayer partners all over the nation. What an exciting and frightening journey it has been. Keep praying for us.