

What's the final score for 2014?

Matthew Huish
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As we enter the final week of this year, we might be setting new goals for the New Year. I use the word goals rather than resolutions because goals are measurable, whereas resolutions tend to last a month at best and are barely remembered later in the year. (Unless you are a particularly goal-oriented person and your resolutions set in January are still being pursued in September.) I'm in the process of reflecting about the goals I'd like to set for 2015, but in this post I'd actually like to share about my goals for 2014. Did I accomplish what I resolved to achieve 51 weeks ago?

Well, what did I resolve to accomplish in 2014? I started the year with 3 clear goals:

1. Pass my MA in pastoral theology.
2. Eradicate the warts on my hands.
3. Post a blog once a week.

So, how did I do?

Firstly, I'm happy to report that I successfully passed my MA with merit. I was particularly pleased that I earned a distinction grade for my dissertation about lineage. (Earlier this year I delivered a 60-minute presentation summarising some of my research, the video of which can be watched online.) I have to admit I did struggle to motivate myself through this final year of my studies. The full-time course would only have taken a year, but as a part-time student I stretched it over 3 years. (Although some of my classmates submitted their dissertation in the 2nd year, many others did the same as me and utilised a 3rd year exclusively for the research and writing.) What made this 3rd year different to the previous 2 years was that I had no weekly lecture to force me to go into my college library. With so many other commitments, there were moments of doubt:

"I've learnt so much from the last 2 years," I thought to myself. "Do I really need to complete this course just to get a piece of paper proving I've earned the qualification?"



I suppose my pride would be a little dented if I didn't complete the course. But my decision to complete the course was mostly motivated by my desire to a) make my mum happy b) make God happy. These studies were for a higher purpose than just my own self enjoyment or self betterment, valuable as those two aims may otherwise be. I wanted to dedicate these studies to God, to utilise this opportunity to study the existing theological, philosophical, psychological and sociological literatures in order to better understand the Divine Principle and communicate it in language than can be understood by academics of other fields. So I threw myself into my dissertation, spending many hours in the Heythrop College library. (Did I mention that I had a phobia of libraries when I started my MA? Yep, I hated libraries, and had to overcome myself quickly at the start of the programme.) Having accumulated a handsome bibliography of references, I had to organise my thoughts and the thoughts of others into a coherent argument. Thankfully my wife had the sense to instruct me to escape from home and seek refuge in my parents house for a week where I could focus on writing without being distracted by my children or other responsibilities. So I spent 5 days in June with my head down completing my dissertation. With that done, I then spent a day writing a much shorter essay that I should have submitted the previous year but failed to, having missed the deadline.



There was an incredible sense of achievement in electronically submitting the dissertation and essay via the College website and feeling like I'd finally crossed the finishing line of an academic marathon. I then had to wait until October to find out the results of this race. The 4 months of cruel anticipation were worrying at times, but I tried to simply forget about the results until they would be published. Finally, an email landed in my inbox on Friday 17th October with a link to the published results. Before opening the link, I offered a full bow to a picture of True Parents and said a short prayer, offering whatever the result would be to God. Standing in the middle of my living room with my wife standing next to me, I nervously opened the link on my Smartphone and scanned the anonymous list of student numbers looking for my own. My number leapt out almost immediately and in a split second I glanced across to see the word MERIT. The overwhelming emotion in that moment was relief – relief that I hadn't failed! – and gratitude. I felt grateful that I had the ability and the opportunity to write academically respectable work.

My graduation ceremony took place only a few weeks ago. My mother, wife and son were able to attend the ceremony and I was happy to see many of the friends I had made during the 3 years graduation with me. Will I pursue further academic study? I'd be lying if I said I had no desire to do so, but I think for the time being I'll focus on my family, career and community commitments. I'll continue studying in an informal fashion, but further formal academic study will have to wait.

My **second** goal of the year was to eradicate the warts that had plagued my hands over the last few years. In case you hadn't had the chance to see how afflicted I had become, this was not a case of 2 or 3 warts; there were literally dozens. Some warts grew so large that they merged with each other, to the extent that I was struggling to number their total precisely. Both hands were affected, especially fingers and knuckles. It was not pretty.



This isn't my hand, but mine were just as bad

Not only were they quite unsightly, but they were also contagious, so it was in the interest of the public good, as well as my own aesthetics, that drove me to conquer this problem this year. It's not like I haven't been trying. Over the years I had attempted a number of topical methods to remove them. I repeated many of these methods during the first half of this year and, although I spent a small fortune purchasing a variety of treatments, the warts remained. Often I'd manage to reduce the size of some of them, only for the warts to grow back in size, sometimes larger than before. Also new warts continued to pop up. It was quite a

distressing outbreak. Despite my best efforts, the problem seemed to get worse during the year, rather than better. It seemed a bit hopeless.



Then, a good friend of my family, Mrs. Lina Herzer, suggested that I tackle the problem not from the outside but from the inside, and recommended a nutrient supplement from her native Canada called Nutria. I had been on the receiving end of all sorts of fanciful suggestions, some involving the moon and mud, others involving threads under doors, and I was getting to the stage where I'd be willing to try anything. So I welcomed Lina's suggestion and was grateful that she ordered me a bottle of supplement capsules. The worse that could happen is that they could have no effect, right?

To my great surprise, just after a few days of using the supplement, I noticed an immediate shrinking of the warts on my left hand. Indeed, virtually all the left-hand warts had shrunk and disappeared within a matter of weeks. The warts on my right hand appeared to be more stubborn, but after roughly 2 months of daily use, the right-hand warts are also now retreating. I still have a few warts remaining, but at least I can count them now. (There are 3, and it looks like they're all approaching the end of their terms.) So I feel quite confident to tick off the box of this goal.

My **third** goal of the year was to blog once a week. Unfortunately, I must confess that I've failed to fulfil this goal. Especially considering my studies, I was willing to let myself off for a few weeks while I was completing my studies, but even then I would have liked to post at least 30 blogs during the year. Currently I've posted just over a dozen stories, which is not much more than the average of the previous years. Nevertheless, the blog hasn't entirely died out, so I can feel satisfied that I've maintained consistency rather than falling into ambivalence regarding this project.



Next year I will set another goal regarding my blogging. I will aim for 52 posts during the year ahead, but I'll also give myself a minimum goal of 36, which would be 3 per month. I do enjoy blogging, although I spend a considerable length of time perfecting each post before publishing. I'm curious what it is that readers of my blog enjoy. Please leave a comment to tell me the strengths and weaknesses of my posts. What would you like me to blog about in the year ahead? Are there any topics that you'd like me to reflect on in my blog? Or if you have any general suggestions about how to be a better blogger, based on other successful blogs, I'd be

grateful for the input.

I might post another blog entry to report my other goals for the year. I wish you a safe and joyful conclusion to 2014 and I wish you all the best in the next year. I also encourage you to set some personal or community goals to keep your focus throughout the year ahead, so that by this time next year you'll be able to measure how successfully you've been and give intentional value to the year ahead.

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