Looking back at 2016 **[1]**

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As the year closes out, I look back to find some meaning and significance in the passage of another calendar year.

When I look at my social media timelines, I have noticed two distinct streams of posts: one from people decrying 2016 as a terrible year, and another reprimanding the former for being so negative and narrow-minded. I must confess that I fall into the former camp, and think that the latter side perhaps dismisses our experiences too lightly: some of our motivations are not as "superficial" as the celebrity mortality rate.

I'll remember the calendar year 2016 largely as a struggle. Earlier this year, I lost my father [2] while I was abroad. For much of the rest of the year, I faced other personal struggles and challenges. Taken as a whole, then, my memories of this year will be mostly stinging. Nothing is without beauty, though, and I see sustained efforts by others to remind those of us struggling of this. Therefore I want to take some time in this post, and reflect on some of the good and positive things of this year which I have experienced.

Reflections

I am thankful for family who are always available and always willing to help and assist. My family is far more stable than many others of which I am aware, and that is a blessing.

I am thankful for friends who open up their home to me—and others—and always welcome me in the warmest possible way. Their hospitality and wisdom are gifts to the world.

I am thankful for a Bible believing church. Even though it has its fair share of struggles, the people are sincere, and are willing to face hardships for the gospel.

I am thankful for people who have made, and continue to make, great personal sacrifices to do gospel work; missionaries who do lonely work and work for years without seeing any tangible fruit.

I am thankful for a friend who has had a particularly difficult year and struggles, but remains passionate and committed to the gospel and to Jesus. I weep over the difficulties, but the continued determination is an inspiration to many.

I am thankful for another friend who had to make an immensely difficult decision earlier this year in the face of great opposition. This decision has been well rewarded now, but there will still be a long and difficult path to walk.

I am thankful for a myriad of other friends who are always happy to see me; who humble me with

their friendliness and generosity.

I am thankful for friends who *did* have a good year, and are healthier and happier than before. Some people got married or engaged, others became parents, others became home owners, others made transitions in their careers. These are all good blessings and should be enjoyed.

I am thankful for friends moving back to their home cities and countries after a long time away.

I am thankful for seeing people after many months or years and it feeling like only a short time has passed. I wish that I could see them more often, but an enduring friendship is heartening.

I am thankful that things progressed well with my career this year.

I am thankful for an innumerable number of small mercies which sustain me every day and week-to-week. If I had to try and recount them, I would never be able to move on to another task.

I am thankful to the readers of this blog who send me encouraging and heartening messages. It means more to me than they might realise.

I am thankful for my Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah, who keeps and sustains me. It is well with my soul.

See You in 2017

God willing, I'll be back early in the new year with a new series which I have been planning for a long time, and about which I am very excited (and a little nervous). The series will look at the Bible, and how we should relate to this book.

Take care and stay safe. Shalom alicheim.

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