**Our report card for 2024**

This is the last Sunday of 2024. Another year finished and a new one to start.

It is traditionally this time is a time to reflect on the past year and plan for the next year.

What went right, what did not go so well, what can we improve next year, what do we hope for.

And on New Years Eve people make resolutions about what they want to be like in the new year.

I have entitled this sermon “our report card for 2024”.

At the end of every school year, the kids come home with their report card on how well they did in the subjects they learned during the year.

Back when I was in Primary School, at the end of each year, you waited with bated breath as to whether you had done enough in that year to progress to the next level up. Some kids didn’t and had to repeat the year. Tough times then, no automatic going to the next level. We had to meet the grade or go back and do it again.

And the same in 5th form if you did not pass School C, you became a second-year 5th, repeating the year.

I do not think the school system is like that now. I think there is automatic progression regardless of achievement. You can get to High School now without learning to read or write.

Today we consider our own report card for 2024.

Back in March, the Leadership team got together in a retreat and sought the direction of God for this church for 2024. We wanted to know what God wanted us to be and do in this year. Not about changing the mission statement of the church, but to hear where God wanted us to focus our attention and resources within the mission statement that year to achieve his goals.

The word for 2024 that we heard back then was this:

Put God first, praying and expecting God to move, being ready and prepared, recognising that we are on a journey together. Instigated and modelled by the Elders, building and strengthening relationships within the church and with the community, encouraging individual giftings and abilities.

And we attempted to implement these directions throughout the year through preaching and our activities.

Now at the end of 2024, I wonder how well we did in those subjects and how our teacher would rate us.

The founder of the China Inland Mission Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak at a large church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as "our illustrious guest."

Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, "Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master." [[1]](#footnote-1)

I too am merely a servant of God. I am not the one whose opinion matters. I stand under the scrutiny of God. And so does the Leadership Team. And so does the church.

Did we honour our commitment to God and complete the tasks set out for us by him? Did we advance his Kingdom in the direction that he called us to do?

Consider the 8 headings of that vision statement:

Under the heading of “Putting God first”, I think of verses like Matthew 6:33, ESV *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you* and Proverbs 3:6, TLB *In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success*

Under the heading of praying and expecting God to move, I think of the verses from Isaiah 43:18-19 ESV *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

And I think of the Israelites in the desert watching and waiting for the pillar of cloud and fire to move, and of them following it.

Under the heading of being ready and prepared, I think of 1 Corinthians 16:13 *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.*

God operates outside the box we try and put him in. God will do what God will do, and we need to be ready to follow him, recognising that when we do so, there will be opposition from the devil who does not want us to follow God.

Under the heading of recognising that we are on a journey together, I think of 1 Peter 1:18-21 in The Message *Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God.*

We do not do this journey alone, but under the direction of God and with others alongside us.

Under the heading of matters being instigated and modelled by the Elders, I think of Paul’s words to the young leader Titus: Titus 2:7 *Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity*,

Under the heading of building and strengthening relationships within the church, I think of the “one another” verses, like 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

Under the heading of building and strengthening relationships with the community, I think of Matthew 5:16 *let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven*.

And under the heading of encouraging individual giftings and abilities. I think of 1 Peter 4:10-11 NIV *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms*.

We look back on 2024 and ask how well did we do in the eyes of our leader God? I think we did okay but wait for God to confirm that.

That evaluating of our performance is a hard thing for us as Christians to do. How do we celebrate any success yet at the same time remain humble. It is easy to identify where we failed but success is hard to claim.

Derek Prince in his book The Grace of Yielding speaks of us needing the Spirit of Christ within us. He describes that spirit as a meek spirit, a humble spirit, a gentle spirit, and definitely not arrogant, self-assertive or self-pleasing.[[2]](#footnote-2)

I don’t know about you but I find it very hard to sing my own praises.

There is a Maori whakatauki (proverb) which says “Kaore te kumara e korero mo tona ake reka” – the kumara does not talk of its sweetness. It is about humility

I once had a boss who was supposed to do my annual performance review, and he would tell me to write it and he would sign it. I found that hard to sing my own praises.

When I was in the Police and passed by Sergeant exams, originally you got the rank and placement due to seniority, then the world changed and you had to put in a CV and apply for advertised jobs, where you tried to convince the selection committee that you were the best candidate.

In a CV, you outline all your great attributes, you hunt out references from people who say how wonderful you are, you detail the training you have received, and the qualifications earned. The idea with a CV is to be truthful but also to show that you are the best thing since sliced bread and that you are by far the best candidate for the job.

I find that concept of blowing my own trumpet to be counter to God’s call to humility.

Colossians 3:12 *As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with [among other things] humility..*

The badge of authority is service, the mark of distinction is humility, and the right to rule is a power to obey. [[3]](#footnote-3)

1 Peter 5:5

*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."*

Humility [consists of] a recognition of our dependence on God and a willingness to submit ourselves to him, a realistic assessment of our own character and ability with a curbing of undue ambition… Pride, by contrast, is a refusal to recognize the sovereignty of God and an exaggerated assessment of our own worth (Stephen Dawes)[[4]](#footnote-4)

We need to balance this humility and not blowing our own trumpet with recognising and celebrating the work of God through us.

I turn to C S Lewis for some idea on how we achieve the level of humility that we should have as Christians:

“How do we gain the mind of Christ and humble ourselves? To put on the mind of Christ, we will need to make a firm decision to ponder, understand, and adopt Jesus’ way of thinking; his values and attitudes must become ours.”

Humility is having a realistic sense of who we are before God and others. We must not think too highly (or too lowly) of ourselves. Rather, we must be honest and realistic about who and what we are.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

So, given that, think on what report card God would give this church for the year ending.

Hopefully we hear the words “Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over the few things; I will make you in charge of many things.” (Matthew 25:23)

Next month, the Leadership team will go to God again and ask where he wants us to focus this year in building his kingdom and strengthening his bride.

We will wait with bated breath to hear whether we have done what we were asked to do and can therefore progress or whether we have to go back and do it again.

2 Chronicles 7:14 *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.’*

From my devotion this morning: May we eagerly anticipate tomorrow and all the disappointment, joy, agony and delight that it may bring, knowing that all our mistakes and wrongdoings are forgiven in God’s great mercy[[6]](#footnote-6)

And we will wait in excitement of anticipation of where he will tell us to focus our attention in 2025.

1. W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers*, 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Derek Prince *The Grace of Yielding* 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Samuel Chadwick *The Way To Pentecost* 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Murray Gow “Humility” *Reality* August/September 2000 19ff [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Pride\_and\_Humility\_Page5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jake Mailhot *Moment with God: a devotional* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)