

something witting in 1/1/2025 (English version)

I was supposed to write a year-end reflection yesterday, but I was too lazy. Still, I feel I should write something. So much has happened this year. Thinking back to who I was a year ago, 2024 has truly been a pivotal year.

At the end of 2023, I went to Singapore and began my full-on effort to apply for Ph.D. programs in the U.S. In Singapore, I lived alone, did research, prepared for the TOEFL, cold-emailed professors, wrote personal statements, gathered information, asked for help, joined a new church, made new friends, rejected someone's confession of love for the first time, and learned how to navigate relationships with the opposite sex. I wrote a Singapore exchange diary and learned to manage life independently. In many ways, this was a rehearsal for studying abroad and a critical turning point in my personal growth. From that point on, I was no longer a so-called elite who was actually lost—dragged by anxiety and surroundings. I began to truly walk the path I chose for myself.

At the beginning of 2024, I spent a long vacation at home. The house was small and dimly lit, but full of love. I studied Karpathy's deep learning tutorials and found that deep learning was no longer some lofty concept—it became something concrete, with principles I could understand and apply. I received interview invitations and admission offers. The application process taught me a lot. Looking back, I did poorly in interviews. I hadn't processed data from scratch or fine-tuned a model on my own, and even the research topic itself wasn't that significant. But with help from alumni, Michael, and Fu's recommendation letter, I made it through. During the USC interview, I felt good, and I followed that feeling to come here. I've felt joy and regret, but I thank God—I believe I'm walking the path He has prepared for me.

In late February, heavy snow fell in Taiyuan. In the middle of that snow, I saw Yating—my closest friend from my teenage years. She was still the same, but she had stayed in place. I wanted to reach out and hold her hand like we used to, but my hand never moved. I guessed, I hesitated, I restrained myself, and in the end, I wasn't willing anymore. I still hope everything is well for her.

The spring semester of my senior year had wonderful weather in Shanghai. It was the happiest term of my college life. I spent a lot of time with friends, read many books, attended a wonderful women's retreat, and experienced spiritual transformation. I also traveled to many places. Although life was slow, it was a time when I experienced the greatest personal growth. In that sense, the depth of leisure was truly meaningful.

Since winter break, I'd been chatting with M. After I returned from Singapore and gave him back his phone at the end of 2023, we began discussing deep topics. Before graduation in June, I gave him a gift and we met one last time. We sat by Siyuan Lake, talking from 6 p.m. until midnight. In July, he gave me three suitcases and a guidebook for studying abroad. Since then, our contact has faded. I still miss our conversations. Many times in the U.S., I've encountered situations he once described, and I think of him. He helped me during one of the most important times of my life and gave me beautiful hopes. Perhaps human emotions are neither simple nor complicated—both reason and emotion play a role. He was a gift from God.

In early March, I returned to Shanghai and started taking French classes with Fanfan and Shushu. Not long after, we began arguing around my birthday. I didn't end up learning French well, nor did I keep up with English. I don't want to dwell on why we argued—it was usually emotional outbursts over small things, made worse by how close we were. I researched MBTI, Jung's eight cognitive functions, and even Freud to understand it all. I was deeply hurt and desperate to understand why this happened. Slowly, I came to realize: I also had problems. I was proud, unwilling to give, and sometimes imagined the worst in others. I gave kindness and understanding to new friends, but was overly harsh with old ones.

In May, I processed data from scratch and ran a GNN model. I completed a deep learning project on protein interface classification and wrote my thesis in LaTeX. I felt the rewards of doing things seriously. At the beginning of June, I didn't apply for the Outstanding Graduate award, but the school still gave me a university-level honor. The new Party Secretary originally invited me to give a speech at graduation, but I was removed last minute. I didn't dwell on the reason—I knew I didn't belong there. At the end of June, my parents came to Shanghai to attend my graduation and visit my church. I love them, and they love me deeply.

In 2024, I read many books and watched many films. In January, I read *Woolf's Reading Notes*, where I saw a shadow of Shushu—sensitive and full of talent. *The Burnout Society* summarized my life and environment for the past 20 years. *1984's* biting satire and mechanical world, with its chilling analysis, made me shiver at the sound of certain red slogans. In March, I read *The Razor's Edge*. Larry moved me: "I want to know if there's a God. I want to know why evil exists. I want to know if my soul is immortal or perishes with death." Maugham's use of first-person narrative made me wonder—how do you write a moving novel? Be honest. Step out of the text. Lower the presence of the author. And most of all, have insight into human nature.

Sweeping Fallen Leaves Is Better Than Winter helped me understand how American society functions and how modern systems are built. I was touched by journalism, procedural justice, and wisdom in legal systems. In April, I read *The Screwtape Letters*, whose reminders I often revisit: "Of all things, the future and eternity are the most different. The future is the most uncertain in time and space. The past is frozen and will not move again. The present is lit by the light of eternity. Love lives in the present; fear, greed, lust, and ambition look to the future." I reread *Mere Christianity* and found bright answers to questions I once avoided. *The Agony of Eros* explained how narcissism, anxiety, depression, futile labor, and pure sensuality are all separated from love: "Real thought is elevated with love." Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* amazed me with its reasoning and logic. In May, I read Jung's *Psychological Types*, began studying his eight cognitive functions, and stopped labeling people. In *The End of the Affair*, I saw love and hate pushed to madness, such deep emotional and religious experience, and such precise language. In July, I read *The Meaning of Marriage*: "You must lose yourself to find yourself." In *How to Read a Book*, I saw the author's wisdom, and in *Surprised by Joy*, I saw a soul's reading life and inner world. In August, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* felt more like an academic masterpiece—deep, precise, and brilliant. It made me think: how will I spend my graduate years? Philosophy, theology, and science are all so beautiful. *Cancer Ward* is another incredible book—I only regret not finishing it.

In August, I came to the U.S. and went through a tough first semester—lots of homework, exams, and challenging courses. Thankfully, I had classmates to help each other. Learning and socializing in English led to many awkward moments and misunderstandings, but the light of human kindness and love never went out. I often felt ashamed when speaking with my advisor because of my poor English or lack of knowledge. But he and the group were incredibly kind, and I learned so much. I also began to enjoy American films and gradually fell in love with this place and the friendships here.

I really like Pastor Caleb from the Amazing Grace fellowship—his selfless service, compassion, and love always warm my heart. His grace toward others shows me what it means to serve God. Because of him, I no longer fear sacrifice or giving. I really like Madeleine—she has the beauty of a classical lady, the humor and energy of an American girl, and a heart that loves God and others. I often see so much beauty in her and hope to grow a closer friendship. I also appreciate others in the fellowship, each with their own charm. Most classmates are mature and kind, and relationships feel less tense and complicated than before. I often see the dark sides of people—even as first impressions—but I try to interact with them with grace and kindness. My attitude affects others. Everyone grows. I hope to influence people for the better and learn from them in return. In the new year, I hope to be more patient, especially with those close to me.

One day, I suddenly realized: the greatest blessing God has given me is the gospel itself—not wealth, fame, or worldly desires. I finally understood what it means to long for eternal life and love God. I no longer measure gain and loss by worldly standards. The more I study the Bible, the more amazed I am.

The first sermon I heard this year was about the prodigal son. But the point was not about the son's behavior. Whether he feasted with friends before returning home, or with his father after returning—the behavior was the same. What mattered was who he was with. The gospel is not a burden, but a gift from God. We receive it with joy and find happiness in the arms of our Father.