

A Journey Beyond Seasonal Work: A Testament of Faith and Growth

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ABSTRACT

Seasonal Work provides individuals and families with the opportunity to strengthen their finances, expertise and networks. However, the weight of the pros and cons of such an endeavour is almost equal when candidates travelling abroad are not prepared and equipped for such a journey. Pacific Islanders such as Samoans are prone to factors such as culture shock, language barriers and lack of personal independence. This opinion piece provides an individual narrative of Tommy ('Thomas James Pula') Papali'i's personal experiences, challenges, and triumphs. The paper draws away from traditional academic opinion pieces by linking and integrating the author's perspectives with spiritual references to the Holy Bible.

PURPOSE BEYOND PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Seasonal work is more than just about providing financial support for our families back home; it is a personal journey of self-discovery. While it might seem like an individual pursuit, it is deeply connected to the collective well-being of our families. This journey is one of growth, where I have developed the qualities and skills necessary to lead my children and family. Every one of us follows a unique path, where every experience—be it success or failure—contributes to our growth. Failure, as I have learned, is not the opposite of success; it is an integral part of the process. True failure only occurs when we give up on our dreams and on the families we carry with us. At the outset, seasonal work provided the crucial financial support my family needed. It enabled us to meet essential needs—food, healthcare, cultural responsibilities—and allowed us to pay off debts.

DOUBTING THE JOURNEY

This opportunity came at a time when I needed it most, and for that, I am deeply grateful to God for opening this door. It was a blessing that offered stability and growth for many of us who took it. As I believe God often places us in uncomfortable situations as part of our journey toward improvement. This cycle of growth and challenge is continuous. Yet, I soon realised this experience was not just about financial gain. It was a profoundly challenging and transformative journey. While I was earning more money than I had ever made back home, the experience brought unexpected challenges—both in Australia and Samoa. The financial success, though

welcome, came with new worries and responsibilities. There were moments when I doubted whether this journey was worth the sacrifice, and I questioned if staying home might have been the wiser choice.

THE CHALLENGES AND THE RAINBOW AFTER THE FLOOD

As Proverbs 3:5 reminds us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” In moments of doubt, I thought I had all the answers, but when true hardship hit, I realised that genuine help could only come from God. During those difficult times, I turned to prayer. Though there were other ways I could have coped with the stress and fear, I chose to seek God. It was during my time in Australia that my faith became real to me, and I began to see God’s hand in the challenges I faced. Just on numerous types of challenges we faced and I speak on behalf of the men (My brothers) we worked together. I can tell that some of the challenges we faced were unbearable, and as men in Samoa, you know what I meant. How destructive it became, and what I saw in some of my *uso’s*¹ that went through the troubles that these men went through. I can only imagine what they are going through. A good example would be planting a seed in hopes of reaping its fruits to nurture families but for someone else to reap. This is only a small fraction of what I understand of what these men go through. I see the physical and mental pain they suffer but still continue to carry the shield and sword to provide for their families. For that, I salute and tip my hat to these men I call my brothers. This is only but a little percentage of the feelings these men experience. So, it is more of a heads-up for those who have already started this journey and are about to step into the unknown. For those going through pain, remember that there is always a rainbow after the flood.

CLEANSING OF OLD HABITS

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Faith is taking the first step even when you do not see the whole staircase.” This quote resonates with my experience. Despite my many imperfections, I can testify to God’s unfailing love. Throughout my three-year contract, I called on God in every moment of difficulty—and He always answered. Sometimes, His answers came through sermons, sometimes through Christian songs, and sometimes through the support of fellow believers. As Psalm 23:1-2 says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters.” Throughout much of my journey, I tried to control everything, even questioning God’s plan: “Why did you bring me to this foreign land only to burden me with trials?” The answer was not immediate, but slowly, I began to understand that these challenges were a form of cleansing. They forced me to let go of old habits, clarified my vision, and changed my perspective on life. It was a lesson in surrendering control to God. I found strength in Reinhold Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I

¹ Samoan term for ‘brother(s)’ in the context of this article.

cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” This journey has taught me the truth of this prayer.

MOVING PAST THE TYRANT

In my attempts to control every aspect of my life, I ended up acting like a tyrant over my own world. Desperation, as history shows, often leads to poor decisions. However, looking back, I see that every struggle had a purpose. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Each hardship was a step toward God’s greater plan for my life. To those who are about to embark on seasonal work, always remember that you are ambassadors of Samoa—representing your villages, your families, and your children. Carry this responsibility with pride and honour. Never lose sight of why you were chosen for this opportunity, and do not take it for granted. Many have lost their jobs or even their lives due to carelessness. Stay true to yourself and always stand up for what is right. Sometimes, doing the right thing requires immense courage. Always remember that things will never be easy, but you will improve.

MARCHING FORWARD AND PRESSING ON

A friend once suggested I check my mental health, as I might have been dealing with undiagnosed issues like OCD² or ADHD³. Reflecting on it now, perhaps I did show the symptoms, but still, I kept marching forward. After all, I am Samoan, and we press on. Other than mental issues encountered, there also were once in lifetime opportunities that I shared and one of those was becoming an Allocator for the ACC⁴ Feedlot Opal Creek. In basic terms, the person who runs and oversees the Operations in the Mill but, most importantly, takes care of cattle nutrition, ensuring that the right amount and right rations are allocated to the correct breed of cattle and at the right time of transition in terms of their diet. Meeting Dr. Matthew George, a leading expert in cattle nutrition and feedlot management, was a pivotal moment in my journey as an Allocator at the ACC Feedlot Opal Creek. With a Ph.D. in Animal Nutrition, Dr. George is renowned for his ability to design and optimise feeding strategies to enhance cattle performance. His words of encouragement during our first interaction left a lasting impact. After noticing my nervousness following my initial run, he said, “You did really well for someone who just started and came from a different field of work. Keep it up and believe in yourself, Tom.” Ironically, at the time, I had given a less-than-full effort, simply attempting to “wing it” because I initially resisted the idea of becoming an Allocator. The role seemed daunting, and I avoided it much like people avoided COVID-19. However, thanks to my managers' unwavering support and belief (Angus Lee and Cyril Makiputin), I gradually embraced the position. Their persistence inspired me to develop my skills,

² Obsessive-compulsive disorder

³ Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder

⁴ Australian Country Choice

and before long, I found myself managing the entire team confidently. What ultimately drove me to succeed in this role was the motivation to provide for my family and honour my faith in God.

REFLECTION ON THE JOURNEYS CONCLUSION

Looking back on this chapter of my life, I see that I asked for a journey, and God gave me one far greater than I ever anticipated. The challenges I faced were not in vain. They were moments of growth, learning, and faith—each one drawing me closer to God, the true architect of my journey. The experience transformed not only my professional capabilities but also my perspective on leadership and perseverance. I guess the true value lay in the very work I had been avoiding. Like Frank Sinatra said, “That’s Life” Now, as I sit in Fiji waiting for my next flight to Samoa, I reflect on the conclusion of this chapter and look forward to the next. ‘Malo le tau⁵’ to my brothers and sisters who have fought alongside me these past three years in Australia, striving for a better life for our families. On to the next chapter!

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Sam Hala

Taviga Taulagi
Travis Vini
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⁵ Samoan phrase acknowledging the group's achievement or triumph of the battle and challenges