



## Gratefulness by Tom Hallas

For two weeks prior to writing the original letter, their daughter had agonised over her increased awareness of having taken her parents for granted for so many years of her childhood and young adult life. The attitude that the world, and her parents owed her something had prevailed, contributing to the despair in the hearts of her parents.

Now a simple, sincere, succinct statement of gratefulness had brought deep satisfaction to an aging parent.

A renewed capacity for kindness and generosity was released. A greater desire to be involved in their daughter's life was discovered. A longing to know what good thing had happened is now recognised as an increased hunger for the same. What kind of reunion will there be when they meet face to face again? A new expression of spontaneous warmth, affection, and tender touch, will be enjoyed.

These are just the benefits to the parents who have embraced the expressions of gratefulness as being genuine. What are the results in the life and character of the one who has been the agent of expressed gratefulness? In the book of Romans, chapter one, Paul writes a letter reflecting on the phenomenon and the consequences of the human journey away from God.

The first step away is described in verse 21 as the rejection of God's authority. The second step away is ungratefulness. Paul goes on to give a list of inward downward-spiraling steps that eventually lead to perversion and the destruction of the image of God that is a part of our humanity. Paul describes a tragic end for individuals or communities that reach the last step of that inward, downward spiral. God abandons them to themselves. The King James Version says, "God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do the things that are not convenient."

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says,

"Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quits bothering them, and lets them run loose."



What a terrible condition to be in—one where God ceases to knock on the door of our consciences, abandoning us to our own vain imaginations. I would say it this way: Ungratefulness is the second stepping stone to total disaster.

But that's the bad news.

The good news is: gratefulness is the second step to discovering the will of God and a lifetime of blessing. The Maoris have a proverb that says that they walk into their future looking backwards. Tongans, similarly, do not have an adequate word to translate the English concept of future, as they also find their future from their past.

I often wondered why the Maori Marae was built on the uprights of totem poles. These totem poles give a pictorial history of all the clans that make up the tribe related to a particular progenitor, whose face is at the apex of the fascia boards at the joint of the apex of the roof of the Marae. The boards depict the outstretched arms of the progenitor, welcoming visitors into the bowels of the community that he has fathered.

Here we see the whole story of the tribe illustrated in the carvings on the totem poles, holding up the rafters and with them forming the ribs encasing the torso in which is the heart and soul of the community. The apex of the roof supporting the top of the rafters is one single log – like the backbone of the community's whole history, at the front end of which is the caricatured carving of the face of the paramount chief who fathered the whole tribe. He stretches out his arms through the front fascia boards to receive and welcome visitors, strangers, and others into the care and continuing journey of the whole community - past, present and future.

The welcome message says, "Join us—in our journey into the future, we are the hope of our ancestors, and they are our reason for who we are. We know where we are going because of knowing from where we have come:

Gratefulness is a human characteristic that cannot be linked to the future. Hope does that for us. For one to cultivate gratefulness there has to have been a history – a journey.

Gratefulness, in its true sense in the human experience, must be directed to someone or some body of persons. One could be grateful to a horse or a dog, but it only finds its fulfillment in the human experience when expressed to



other persons objective to oneself who have been responsible for bringing good or benefit to one's life.

In reflecting on the past, some people have such a vision of pain and despair that they find it impossible to be thankful for anything.

These people need a healing touch from God.

How tragic though, when one who has been the recipient of great grace and blessing and good counts it all as less than nothing. The Scripture says that these people become vain in their imaginations, their foolish hearts become darkened, professing themselves to be wise they become fools. The reverse is also true.

Gratefulness produces wisdom. It opens us up to discover the will of God by enlightening our minds to see the direction and principles that are part of His sovereign hand on our past journey. If the only place that we have as a resource for gratefulness is from that which has yet to happen, then how blind can we be?

Do for yourself an act of kindness during this coming festive season. Think about something for which you can be truly grateful. If you cannot, ask the Lord to open your eyes – to heal you – to discover the hindering point of pain and let Him take it away. Now express or confess that gratefulness to appropriate people and, finally, give something of yourself away to a needy cause or person.

Let God lead you through gratefulness into His will.

"Darling, your father and I did do without, in order to be able to give you and your sisters the best of what was available. The best schools, the best opportunities, etc. And, yes, we did have expectations that were unfulfilled. We had hoped that you, particularly, would have had more interest in an academic future. In some ways we have been disappointed but when we get a letter, such as we have just received from you, it suddenly makes all the disappointments so insignificant and the years of sacrifice worthwhile. Thank you for your expressed gratefulness. We love you, we are proud of you."

*Reprinted with permission from YWAM's Marine Reach "Pacific Report," December 2002.*