

COME
BACK
TO MY
GARDEN

BEN MATHEWSON

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Come Back To My Garden
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Any words in brackets added to scripture quotations are the author’s additions for emphasis or clarity.

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PREFACE

I write this book with a sense of urgency, yet with awareness that much of what I write is profoundly simple. It is in this simplicity that I have had to search for the Lord, wondering, and wondering again, if such simplicity is required at this time.

I have felt for a long time that the Christian church needs a God-driven reformation of its identity, and I know that many share these thoughts. However, the words, the doctrines, and the methods that accompany this desire for change differ so radically that it is often hard to know where God is at work, and where people are trying to take control. I have therefore found it challenging to bring these thoughts together, because they don't seem to match the loud voices in Christianity at this time.

What I write is also not new. They are ancient truths that the scriptures already proclaim to us, yet it feels new, because often these are not the truths that are taught or demonstrated by our church practice. At the very least, when the Lord started to teach me about these aspects of His kingdom, they were new for me.

So as you start to read this book do not be fooled by the simplicity, the initial familiarity, or the brevity of what is written,

for each Day is a seed that can restore the garden of the Lord to your soul.

Ben Mathewson, Author

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to assume that our religious activities have taken us to a place where we can be assured of our salvation and confident in our readiness to encounter the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, it is only through the lens of the scriptures and an honest posture of prayerfully asking the Lord to examine us, that we are able to discover if the condition of our soul is in line with the truth we have received.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

Unfortunately, we are often unwilling to enter into such a vulnerable place of God-driven examination, so we continue to work the coal mines of our religion convinced that we are mining for diamonds. We persevere at what we know, reassuring ourselves that we are walking in the steps of those who have gone before us, or emboldened by the thought that we might be pioneering a new path.

However, here is the uncomfortable truth: It is possible to be

a minister of God and not know Jesus Christ, to be a follower of Jesus Christ and not enter the kingdom of God. Jesus teaches us that we can be blind to the condition of our faith and convinced that we are walking with Him, when He does not count us as His own.

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:21-23)

These words of Jesus are an important warning, as they are relevant for every person who believes they are a follower of Jesus Christ. It is tempting to simply reassure ourselves that this scripture does not apply to our life, when we should rather engage with God on this destabilising truth and submit to His examination of our heart.

To pray, “search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts” does not seem like the beginning of an appealing or desirable encounter with Jesus. However, it is better to test a house in fair weather, than for a storm to arrive and to find out it is too late.

Recently I tented with my family near the base of New Zealand’s highest mountain, Aoraki. It was beautiful, clear, wind still weather, which allowed us to enjoy a day of exploring. However, that night, as we went to sleep, the wind began to pick up with small gusts buffeting our tent. We quickly checked the weather forecast and decided to relocate early the next morning.

Unfortunately, we were too late. During the night a howling gale woke us up with intense gusts pounding our tent. It was a very strange and disconcerting experience. There would be total

silence and stillness, and then you would hear a whirring in the distance. The whirring would increase to a groaning, then a howling and suddenly, like a punch square to the stomach, the gust would flatten the tent before returning to silence.

We tried to hold the tent up. I was at the back holding one pole, my wife was in the middle, and our two kids were holding the front poles. As we heard the wind coming we braced ourselves, using our backs and hands to stop the tent collapsing. This worked for a time, but the gusts were increasing in frequency and intensity, so that at 1am evacuation became our only option. We began an arduous, pitch-black evacuation, and by 3am we were spending an uncomfortable night together in the car.

During the evacuation, it was impossible not to notice the other tents—tents that had found a place behind protective trees, tents that were small strong mountain tents, all erect with their occupants sleeping through the storm. The lessons of this nighttime family evacuation did not evade us, and in many respects it felt like we had just experienced our own modern-day parable.

Ten families were camping at the base of the Mountain of the Lord, five were wise and five were foolish. The foolish ones came with large, spacious tents and placed them in full view of the Mountain above them. The wise, however, arrived with small, rigid tents and tucked them in behind the trees and the rocks. During the nighttime the storm came, the wind picked up and started to blow and pound against those tents. Those who had been wise in their preparation remained in their tents as the wind raged, yet their tents did not bend or break. Those who had been foolish rushed outside, desperately trying to hold their flimsy tents together as the storm threw them to the ground. Left with no other choices, the foolish families rapidly evacuated from the Mountain of the Lord, now very aware of what they lacked.

As we explore God's scriptures, His promises, and His truths in the coming chapters, the hope is that each Day becomes an opportunity for personal God-driven examination—a chance to

test your faith in the Lord, so that you are confident that you are standing firmly on the Rock before the storm comes.

As you read each Day, if it convicts you, provokes you, or concerns you—turn to the Lord.

Search me...test me...lead me... (Psalm 139:23-24)

May your conversation with Jesus
Be filled with silence,
As you ask Him to search you.

May your prayers to the Lord
Be salted with humility,
As you ask Him to test you.

May your petition to God
Be built with submission,
As you ask Him to lead you.