

MuSings from my Garden

*Discover the inner garden of your Soul,
and the God who lies within*

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Published by
MediaCom Education Inc
2/382 South Road
Richmond SA 5033
Australia

Phone 08 8371 1399
www.mediacomeducation.org.au

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First printed March 2021

ISBN 978-1-925722-43-7



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

To Alison Ballard, thank you!
Without you it would never have occurred
to me that this could be published.

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Introduction

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom" Aristotle

Anyone who knows me well, will know I am not a gardener. My garden has always been a place long neglected; a place I glance at as I rush past onto other activity. Many a time have I dashed through it with the passing thought that "I really must sort this out". But life gets in the way and other things take up my time. My garden has spent the best part of 10 years sitting there quietly, uncomplaining, putting up with only the occasional cursory weeding whenever I can't stand it any longer!

But over the space of a year or more, I began to feel a gentle change within me. My garden, began to call me. Quietly at first, and then with a tender urgency; whispering to me to come closer, to notice it, explore it and give it some love. In doing so, I felt it tell me, I would find both myself and God.



And so, I started to listen to this little voice within me, and found myself almost automatically re-arranging my life, gradually removing activities and obstacles that prevented me from spending time in my garden. Until, one day, I had carved out the space I needed to devote my energy to it. The journey had begun!

This material contains some thoughts and ponderings from this special time in my garden. Over the space of six months, I devoted as much time to my garden as I could, and allowed my mind to wander as I worked. Much of what I have written comes directly from times when I've buried my hands within the weeds, used a pickaxe to dig out the earth, or the many other activities I have undertaken in my yard. Some of these reflections came to mind when I was physically elsewhere, doing something else. But all was written during and inspired by this time when I cleared myself the space to be in my garden. In doing so I began to explore the depths of my Soul. I am grateful for family and life circumstances which allowed me to do this.

What is this material for?

My hope is that whether you are green-fingered or not, you will discover your own inner garden, the Soul, and the God who lies within it. For those who are 'true' gardeners in a way that I am not, may this encourage you to reflect as you work in your garden and discover more deeply your own inner world. For those who aren't able or inclined to physically delve into your garden, I hope you will nevertheless find some time away from the busyness of life to relax with the words and reflections contained here. I hope you find some food for thought in your own circumstances, wherever you may be.

The ultimate purpose of spending time like this is to help us see the deeply spiritual nature of our lives, and to recognise that life is a precious gift to be respected, cherished and enjoyed. And as we learn to live life more fully we begin to notice that interwoven

into every aspect of the ordinariness of life is something Greater. Working within the garden meditatively has been for me, one such example of how this can be done.

The material here is simply food for thought and an opportunity to ponder some of the deeper aspects of life; perhaps things that in our everyday busyness, we don't give ourselves the opportunity to really think about.

How to use this material

It is best, if you can, to find a quiet, comfortable place with enough time to give it your full attention. Perhaps you can spare half-an-hour, or maybe more. Whatever is realistic for you - but without distraction. Allow yourself the space to ponder and chew-over what comes to mind as you read the material.

Consider how often you are able to give yourself this 'me-time'. If you can do it daily, that's wonderful. If you're only able to give it time once a week, that's fine too. But if you can, do it at the same time each day or week. Perhaps first thing in the morning is best, before others in your family are up. Or, in the hour or so before the kids get home from school, or the evening after you are home from work. Do whatever suits your lifestyle. And try, if you can, to make it regular.

How do I go about reading it?

Each section of this material is broken up with small headings. How you deal with them is up to you, but I suggest that you take one at a time and ponder it slowly. One way that might be helpful for you is to read a passage out-loud. This might feel strange at first, particularly as most of us have been taught to read books silently to ourselves and to do so as quickly as we can. But reading out-loud helps us not only to read the words with our head, but also to speak the words with our lips, as well as hear them with our ears. This way we're more likely to remember and take in what we read.

Whether you decide to read it out-loud, or quietly to yourself, read it slowly, perhaps two or three times giving yourself space between each reading to ponder the words. As you read, notice any words or phrases that stick in your mind, or any feelings that might surface as you do so. If something particularly grabs you, stop reading, and allow yourself to sit quietly with what has come to mind for you, and think about it for a while. It is often really helpful to have a notebook or a journal with you so that you can jot down your thoughts and feelings.

The important thing to remember is to take your time and relax. It is not a race. If you find that reading just a few words or sentences at a time is enough to give you some thoughts to ponder, then that's fine.

You will notice that at the end of each section, there are some questions. There are no right or wrong answers. They are simply there to help you with your thought processes. If you find them helpful, then use them to inspire your thinking. If you don't, then leave them completely. Or you might find that just one of the questions grabs you. If so, go with that, and leave the rest. The process is entirely up to you.

You might find as you spend time in this way, that feelings and thoughts arise that you wish to share with someone else. Sometimes it is helpful to do this. Give some thought to who might be a wise and trusted person for you to chat to, should the need arise.

Enjoy it!

Time

"A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us." Henri Nouwen

Having made the decision to look after my garden, what immediately struck me is that everything takes time. In a world where we are so used to having our wants satisfied - if not immediately, then without having to wait very long - it has come as quite a shock to me that gardening means I have to wait for things! Not only must I wait for the right time to plant, but I have to wait for things to grow. Often I must wait for the rain to stop before I can get into the garden at all. And because so much of gardening means waiting, it also means I have to prepare and plan, and these are not things that come easily to me.

I want to be able to do it all now; for it all to be done as quickly as possible so that I can get on with the next thing! But instead I have to plan how to build a vegetable patch. What materials and tools to



use, and how to lay it out. Then I must take the time to physically build it. And when it is built, I need to prepare the soil and give it the necessary nutrients. All of this before I can even plant a seed, let alone wait for it all to grow before I can harvest and eat it! All very frustrating when you're someone used to just going to the shops and getting what I need straight away.

But this is probably one of the most valuable life lessons I will ever learn. Rarely does anything of real value happen quickly. Through our modern-day world of internet shopping and fast-food, learning the benefits of waiting before something comes to fruition at its proper time is something we have largely forgotten. What I am learning from my garden is that the fruit of the soil takes much effort and physical toil. Up until now this has been done by others I have never met. I have simply reaped the benefit of their sowing and nurturing work. Now is the time to do the work myself, and experience in just a small way what it means to work for a small proportion of what I eat and the effort that really goes into it.

- » In a society where we can have most of what we want immediately, how do you react when you have to wait for something?
- » Can you think of occasions in your life when having to wait for something to come to fruition has been beneficial? Why was the waiting so necessary?
- » Experiment with making yourself wait. Perhaps, the next time you would like a cup of coffee, make yourself wait for it. How do you feel when you don't allow yourself to have it immediately? When you do finally have it, how does it feel when you get what you want?
- » Have there been times in your life where, due to having undertaken a task that is usually done by someone else, you have developed a new appreciation of someone's hard-work?