

## Crushed

by

Bryan Craig

***“Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath.” Revelation 14:17-18***

If you have been on The Journey, you have spent time studying John 15 and reading through Bruce Wilkinson's book, "Secrets of the Vine." It is a great discussion about this abiding relationship that God desires to have with each of us. Dr. Wilkinson talks about how, for believers, God will Discipline us if we are living in sin and not bearing fruit. He also talks about how, for some believers, God will Prune us to bear even more fruit, as He helps us get rid of distractions and hindrances in our walk with Him. Then, when fruit production is looking pretty healthy, Dr. Wilkinson says we begin to "Abide." Influencers believes the abiding has already begun, so we call this third phase, "Deepening."

Years ago, at a Promise Keepers conference, Dr. Wilkinson was speaking on this topic, right after his book had been published, and I had the privilege of hearing it from his lips. At the end of his talk, he did something unorthodox. He asked for every man who was in attendance who felt like they were bearing NO fruit for God to stand up. As soon as I thought to myself, "No one would admit that," hundreds, if not thousands, of men stood to their feet. Then, he asked those in the audience who were bearing some fruit, but thought they were in a season of Pruning to bear more fruit, to stand up. Another large group stood up.

I could have stood up during the second group, but something kept me from doing it. I knew I wasn't in the first group, for I saw God helping me bear fruit. I knew I wasn't fruitless. However, the way he worded the Pruning group caused me to wait. Then, it came time for him to recognize the third group. As I was about to rise to my feet, Dr. Wilkinson said, "This last group is a very special group. God is preparing you for a special ministry. I'm going to ask you to kneel rather than stand." As I fell to my knees, he asked the men around me to lay a hand upon me to pray for me. It was a very humbling moment. I felt like David being anointed by Samuel. Tears of joy and gratitude fell from my eyes, as I felt

God's hand upon me. I have no idea how many more in the arena were on their knees. It was as if it were only me and the Lord in the arena.

I didn't fully understand this 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of Abiding, but I felt an anointing, nevertheless. Then, several years later, I met Rocky Fleming and went on The Journey. Rocky spoke to a group of men from my church, and he referred to this abiding process. He called the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase, "Sifting". He referenced Luke 22:31, where Jesus tells Peter that Satan asked permission to sift him like wheat. Jesus goes on to say that He prayed for Peter that his faith may not fail, and He encouraged him to strengthen his brothers when he returned from the sifting. You know that Peter went on to lead the new church after Jesus departed. Rocky said that for those that God is preparing for a greater ministry, sifting was required. I wasn't sure what "sifting" was, but it didn't sound pleasant.

We have often commented that The Journey is open for everyone, but in our observation, not everyone is ready for The Journey. God wants to take a man into an abundant life, a life full of fruit. We talk about this "fruit" primarily being the "fruit of the Spirit", which describes the character of Christ. He is trying to grow us into a likeness of Himself. Could it be that He wants so much more? As you read the words above from Revelation, you will see more. It shows an angel gathering our fruit, those big clusters of grapes. In Secrets of the Vine, Dr. Wilkinson describes an abundant life in Christ having big, juicy clusters of grapes. In the verse from Revelation, a heavenly perspective, the angels take the fruit of the earth and place it into God's winepress. The grapes are about to be crushed! This reminds me of our Lord's destiny:

***"He was pierced for our transgressions, He was CRUSHED for our iniquities; the punishments that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed." Isaiah 53:5***

Jesus, our role model, was crushed. He talks about this at the end of John 15, the abiding chapter, when he tells his disciples, ***"Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay his life down for his friends." John 15:12-13.*** I believe Jesus was preparing them for the ultimate expression of abiding.

What do crushed grapes produce? Wine. Yes, it is wine which is a sign of joy and celebration, first recognized by Jesus as he turned water into wine at a wedding banquet. Then, at His last meal with His disciples, Jesus recognized the wine as the sign of the new covenant, His blood poured out for us. More than fruit, could it be that Jesus wants us to become like Wine? He wants our lives to be poured out freely to others so that we are a conduit of joy and a source of

healing and forgiveness to all we encounter. This is the ultimate expression of Abiding?

Jesus says, ***“Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father.” John 14:12***

However, we, like Jesus, have to be willing to pay the price. We have to be willing to be crushed. If we get rid of sin through Discipline, we will bear some fruit. If we allow God to Prune us, we will bear even more fruit. However, if we allow ourselves to be Crushed, we will give all our fruit and our lives to the Lord and become Wine. This is the life that is a living sacrifice, one that has died to the things of this world and longs to please the Lord. This is the life that brings sweetness into the lives of others and brings them into the Kingdom. This surrender and this death can be painful, but for the man who is called and is willing, great ministry is in store.

When Dr. Wilkinson had those men kneel in that arena, he was referring to men who were willing to forsake all to Abide. He didn't know it at the time, but he was referring to Journey guys. He didn't realize that God was about to call an army of men, named Influencers, who would be willing to go all the way for God, even if it meant being crushed. Dr. Wilkinson was right when He said God was calling the men to a very special ministry. God was calling me that day in that arena, and I believe He is calling you, as well.