

PROCESS OF THE WINE PRESS

How is your life with God going? Are you going through the greatest mountain top experiences, the peak of excitement, thrill, joy and things happening, and God using you? Is everything you wanted to happen happening and God is answering your prayers, and people are being blessed? Or, are you in the wine press? "Well, what is that? I may be."

The wine press is a process that God takes you through starting at the very beginning of when you are walking with him. You know, new Christians get nearly every prayer they pray answered. It is just amazing. I am talking about Christians that say, "Man, I found Jesus." And they pray and this gets answered, and they pray and that gets answered, and it is just wonderful. And then after a while it is almost like the honeymoon is over and God is saying, "Okay, now we are going to get down to work on you so that I can make you a more useful vessel. I can take things out of you that are really going to hurt you." Now, you do not hear God saying that, but if you can listen and learn from this lesson, He does do that. He does say that. It is part of the process of making you into the image of Jesus. We all have spots and wrinkles. We all have failings. We all have things that we have to keep doing and doing and trying to get it right. And God is a faithful God. He loves you so much. He loves you just like you are.

You do not have to get cleaned up to come to Jesus. For one thing you can not do it and make it last. But, God takes you right where you are. He says, "I love you. I have a plan for you. Come, follow me, you are going to love it." And you do, but there is something you need to realize. God loves you just like you are, but He loves you too much to leave you there like you are. If you follow God, you are not going to live the rest of your life like you are now. I have gone through changes where my closest friends have said, "Betty, you are so different, what has happened?" And I say, "Well, the Lord got a hold of me, talked to me, and shaped me up. Told me things I needed to change." He did a great healing in my life in 1984, and I am not talking about a physical healing, I am talking about a tremendous emotional healing. I went through inner healing and deliverance and it changed my very life. Was that pleasant? No. Was it painful? Yes. Did I cry a lot? Yes. But you know I only had to cry that one more time over all that stuff, and then it was gone. It has been gone ever since. But I was in the process of the wine press.

What does the press feel like? It feels like everything is being squashed out of you. Or like my friend, Jerry, says, "You feel like you're being pulled through a keyhole backwards." Well, you do. Why does God have to do that? Why can He not use his mighty power and just instantly make you are like the opposite? Because that is just not how it works, not how He does it. You have to accept that. I promise you it will go on until the day of Jesus, it never quits. I just had God working on me last week, telling me, "You've got to quit doing this." I said, "Lord, I cannot quit if You do not change me." And so He is going to change me. I know He is. He has changed everything else.

When people come to God they may be full of pride or they may have low self-esteem.. If they are full of pride they have a cocky confidence and are full of themselves. Or they may struggle with low self-esteem. They focus on their weaknesses and do not think that they can do anything for God. Both have to be squished in the winepress. Both have to come out of you. Does God want to destroy you and make you something you are really not? Absolutely not. He loves you just like you are. He gave you your personality, whether you are one or the other. But he wants to take it and squeeze that stuff out of you. He wants to make you a beautiful wine, a beautiful fragrance to God and a beautiful fragrance to other people.

When people are full of pride they may say something like, "I am a self-made man. I did this all by myself and nobody helped me. I can do it all by myself." Maybe you can unless you get drastically ill, or you have a bad car wreck. Then how do you do it? When you do not do so great, there goes that self-confidence. You were skating on thin ice and did not even know it. Sometimes you can have a lot of self-sufficiency with the lone-ranger mentality. You think, "I do not want anybody to help me. I do not like people to help me."

Someone with low self-esteem would say, "Do I have confidence in myself? No. Do I think I can do great things for God? No." You can also be full of self-pity, negative emotions or the poor-me mentality. You

can have the pride of the worm mentality where you think, "I am just an old sinner saved by grace." No, you are not. If you are saved, you are the friend of God. You are friends with Jesus. He calls you friend. Do not talk like that, trying to sound like a good Christian. That is not good Christianity. It is the pride of the worm. "I am just nothing." Well that is not what God says, and you need to agree with what God says about you.

There are also a lot of character issues that have to be dealt with. Maybe you are really stingy. Maybe you have problems with lust. Maybe you have problems with profanity. You may do great with a clean mouth until you get in trouble, or you get angry, and then out it comes. Maybe it is some sin you keep getting caught up in, and there you are again. God finally begins to just tighten that. I have heard it said that, "God's grace is so big and wide and great. There is grace for us and we need to have grace for other people. But God also causes that little circle of grace to get smaller and smaller, until finally He says, "I told you not to do that and I mean it." BAM! Does God really do that? Oh, yes.

Have you ever felt like what is says in Lamentations 3, "I am one who has seen the affliction that come from the rod of the Lord's anger. He has led me into darkness shutting out all light. He has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long." Well, that is that process of the winepress. That is what it feels like. You may feel like, "God, I do not know where You are. I thought I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. It has all blown up in my face. Everybody is mad at me." A lot of times the winepress involves people you work with, people you are in ministry with, but it is still God, because he uses people. He uses situations. I want you to remember something. You are very special. For someone to take this much time making you into a better person, you must be a very special person. No matter what your call is. No matter where you live.

Wine is nothing more than a bunch of grapes that have been squished. Have you ever seen that "I Love Lucy" show where she and Ethel are in the winepress? They are barefoot and are tromping out those grapes. That is one of the top Lucy shows of all the Lucy shows. It is so funny. Do you feel like that has happened to you right now? It does not feel funny, does it? It looks funny on Lucy, but does not feel funny when you are the grape. But it will continue, I am telling you, until the day you die because Jesus is going to come back for a bride without spot or wrinkles.

How do you cooperate with God? Listen to this verse that they are showing you on the screen right now in John 12. Jesus says, "Listen carefully,"(this is out of the Message Bible. "Listen carefully, unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground dead to the world, it is never more than any grain of wheat. But if it is buried," (And that is the winepress) "It sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way anyone who holds onto life just as it is, destroys that life, but if you let it go, reckless in your love." (And that's love for God) "You will have it forever and it will be real and eternal."

Dying and going through that winepress can be so very difficult. It can last so long. Things can happen that you thought, "This is not how God told me it was going to happen. This is not the way it was supposed to be." But how you respond determines what happens next. I know somebody that came to me for counseling, who watches this show. This person wanted a certain thing to happen. He was so sure it was God's will, but it was really his own will. It did not happen and it just about wiped out his faith. He called me upset. I said, "Well, you know what? Now we are going to see what kind of faith you have really got. Everybody can have faith when God is answering their prayers and everything is going great, but let's see what kind of faith you have now. Now, when it is so hard and it seems so dark and discouraging. What is coming out of your mouth now." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Are you praising God anyway? Are you saying, Lord, I do not understand? I do not know why, but I love you. I praise you. I know you are good, and you only do good things, and you only have my benefit, my life is what you want. I know that Lord. I trust you." You have to have that kind of faith, Folks. Faith is what you have is when everything else is not working. That is when you find out what kind of faith you have, and that winepress pulls that kind of faith out of you. So you might say, "I sure have messed it up." Okay, God is going to give you a lot of chances. Just be sure you do it right this time. When it is the hardest, pray the most.

I heard that the measure of spirituality in a person is how fast it takes them to say, "Praise the Lord." How long? Can they do it fast? Does it take days? Does it take weeks? Does it take minutes, to say praise the Lord anyway? And in that winepress you feel like your face and body are being pushed until you say, "Oh God, will it ever quit, will it ever go away, but I praise You anyway." You have to be like that. That is what

He is listening for, and He is watching as He presses you like that to see if you will change. Do not be stubborn. Do not be rebellious, yield.

People often think something is the devil, when it really is God. I am talking about God putting a kind of pressure on you, allowing things to happen that force you to change. It forces you to have to look at yourself. And it is God; it is not the devil. He has to do that because you will not look at it any other way. And so, when you are looking at life and you're thinking, "Okay, is this God? Is this me? Is this the devil?" You need to ask, "God, is this the devil or is this you?" He will let you know. He may lead you to Lamentations 3. When you read through it you may think, "I could never say that stuff to God." Well, you think it! And this man just said it, and God allowed it to be written in the Bible. He just thought God had done everything possible to block his way, to stop him, to keep things from happening. You know, if you look at the picture of the grapes and the winepress, it looks all right then. But later on, when it starts working as the process of the winepress, it does not look pretty at all. That is the way God is. Sometimes when new things are happening, you have to get to the place where you say, the Lord is good to those that depend on Him, to those who search for Him.

Another thing the winepress does is cause you to search for God. What were you full of when you came to Jesus? What are you full of now? You may be the most committed Christian or you may be one that if we sat down and had a conversation, you would be telling me, "Well, the Lord has been doing this in my life." I could ask you if He has been doing good things. "Oh goodness, praise God, yes, He has." Then I would say, "Some of this bad stuff has been squashing you has it not?" "Yes."

Do you praise God? You know I do because I want to change. I want to go from glory to glory. I want to enter into the most intimate relationship with Jesus that I can possibly have. You do not get there by being full of yourself. Let me ask you something, how badly do you really want to go on with Jesus? One time we were in church and they had this Christian praise song, "Send the Fire, Lord, Send the Fire." I started laughing because everybody was jumping around, hopping, dancing and singing send the fire, Lord. And I started laughing and thought, "Wow, dancing around asking God to send the fire, and then when the fire comes, all we do is scream." And that they were asking for it. Well, you've got to ask for it. You ought to want to be different, because you see what you could have. You want it to happen. And you have to be willing to go through the process, because there is a process. Do not let anyone tell you that being a Christian is easy, or it is just for weaklings. Listen, it is for hardy people. If you do the real deal, it is for very hardy people. Many people fall by the wayside because they cannot do it or they will not do it. You do not want to be like that. You do not want to be one of those people, because God has delights in store for you. You will be so glad that you held on in faith.

Grapes that are going into the winepress are being turned into fine wine. The grapes represent you full of yourself and all of these things that need to change. Just remember the winepress is what squeezes the bad stuff out of you. It is what makes you sweet. So, do not resent it. In fact in Hebrews 12:6 it says, "The ones that the Lord loves, He chastens." If you are not being chastened, and you are not being corrected, you might better ask yourself, "Do I belong to God or not? Does he love me or not?"

I heard Norman Vincent Peale, one of the most positive men in the world, say, "God gives us problems to solve in the world, and some of them are not so pleasant. He said, "One time I went through a time in my life when I thought, golly, I do not have any problems, it is great." And then I thought, "Lord, what is the matter, do you not trust me anymore? Do you not think I can handle stuff?" So, it is only by His grace and mercy that He reveals this stuff in us, because He wants to make you poured out wine; beautiful, wonderful, delightful wine. The wine of the Holy Spirit. You know it is a new wine, and yet we all say, "Well, the old one is better. I was used to it, at least I knew what would happen there, I could deal with it." God says, "No, I have new wine, and you are going to love it." And yes, at first it is not what you like, a little painful sometimes, but you are going to love it. And sure enough, you do. And then you look back and you say, "Thank you, God. Thank you for doing all of that in me. I would never want to go back to who I was." I would not even want to go back to who I was two years ago. I like what God is doing in my life. Is it all pleasant? No, but I like the finished product.

Sometimes you look at where you are and where you want to go; and you think, "I cannot really see anything that needs to change." Then God comes to you with the winepress of motive. "What is your motive for standing up in front of all of those people? Betty, why do you do that? Do you do it for me? Do you do it because you care so much, because you want to help?" Yes, I do. Have I had times when God

has had to talk to me and say, "No, back down Betty, back down." Yes I have, I really have. Not a lot, thank God, but I have had some.

He can only take you higher by the process of the winepress. Are you listening? You see God shows you what He wants to do with you. Then He shows you to you. And then He shows Himself to you. It can take a long time or it can happen in a pretty short time. It depends on how cooperative you are. But not always, even when you are cooperative it may not happen fast. One time I was crying because we were going through something and I just thought, "This is never going to end. Why does it not end? I am tired of it. Just tired, and here it comes again." I was crying and I heard the Lord say to me, "I am not moved by your tears, Betty." I do not think He meant I am not compassionate. I did not think that at all. I knew what He was saying, "I know what I am doing Betty, and it is going to happen the way I want it to happen, when it needs to happen, and it is a process that is changing you. So, your tears are not going to make me move faster." And sure enough, there was something in me. It was not a big sin or anything like that, but it was a motive, it was an attitude, it was a heart thought. It was so ingrained in me that it took a long, long, long time to get it out of me. My tears at the situations that were taking it out of me did not affect God. However, I love being different. I am free.

You know God wants to dwell in you in a great way. He wants to dwell in you so much that when people get around you, they like what they see. They do not know what it is, but they like it and they want to be around it. (Look at this picture. Wouldn't you like that, look at those grapes being crushed by those feet, and that wine being poured out. The wine being poured out is what they see. They see that Spirit of God being poured out of you, and He can not dwell in a house that is not prepared.) You have to be prepared.

The Bible says in Luke 2:52 that even Jesus had to grow in wisdom; Jesus, the Son of God, the person who created the world, who has been here since the beginning had to grow in wisdom. He was the Son of God before He ever came to earth. And yet, He came to earth as a man. He went through the winepress. We know about the winepress of the cross. We know about the winepress of the garden of Gethsemane, but He had a winepress from the time He started out as a human. It says, "He had to grow in wisdom." How do you get wisdom? You can get wisdom from listening to wise people, but most of us get our wisdom from going through stuff, don't we? Learning, "I am not going to do that again!" In Hebrews 2:23 it says, "Since He Himself had gone through suffering and testing, He is able to help us when we are tested." It says He learned. He learned, so that means a lesson.

Perhaps God is testing you right now. Perhaps He is putting you in that winepress. Perhaps He is watching things. You want to pass that test. Look at Hebrews 12:2, it is such a wonderful scripture. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" Did you ever think about Jesus, not only authors your faith, but He finishes up your faith? That is the winepress. "Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross." It does not say He had a party about the cross, or that He passed it off in a light manner. No, you and I both know better than that. He said, "God, if there is any other way You can do it, please do it." He endured it.

Sometimes when you are in that winepress you must just endure what you are going through until it is over. He despised the shame of it. Maybe you are going through something that is squashing out of you the stuff that needs to go out, but there is a lot of shame associated with it. He despised that shame (despising and ignoring the shame), but He did it and now He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Where is Jesus right now? There He is, at the right hand of God.

People have to grow in wisdom. They have to grow in enduring shame sometimes. They have to grow in enduring what they are going through, their cross so to speak, if they are to pass the test. There eventually comes that day when you are a fine wine, a beautiful wine, a beautiful testimony of Jesus.

God says in Isaiah 43:9, "Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder the things of the past. Behold I do something new. Now it will spring forth. Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a way in the wilderness – a roadway. I will make rivers in the desert." You cannot get so lost in the country that God does not know where you are.

Have you ever asked Jesus into your heart and to take over your life? Do it right now. Jesus, come in. I believe you are God. I believe.

Quiet Time Questions

1. What is meant by "the wine press?"
2. What is the beginning of the process?
3. What does the wine press feel like?
4. Why does He need to change us?
5. How does He bring about the wine press in our lives?
6. How do you get through the wine press process?
7. When is the process over?
8. What are the benefits of going through the wine press?

To watch the video on THE PROCESS OF THE WINEPRESS, Pillar One, Basic Discipleship go to:
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