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BRUCE
WILKINSON

Author of the *New York Times* #1 Bestseller *The Prayer of Jabez*
with DAVID KOPP

SECRETS
of the
VINE



Breaking Through to Abundance

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For disciples who have ever wondered if a life of extraordinary abundance just might be their birthright.



To my friend and writing partner David Kopp, and to our assisting editor, Heather Harpham Kopp—sincere thanks for the skill and caring you have brought to this book. Working with both of you is a joy.

To Don Jacobson and the entire Multnomah publishing team—I am so thankful to know you and work with you. May you rejoice as the fruit of your ministry reaches around the world for Christ.

P R E F A C E

Dear Reader,

Abundance—that beautiful overflow of true worth in a person’s life—is exactly what you and I were born for. No wonder we so deeply desire it! Yet millions of Christians settle for less because they misunderstand and resist God’s ways of bringing it about.

In *The Prayer of Jabez*, I showed readers how to ask for a life of abundant impact and significance for God. In *Secrets of the Vine*, I want to show you how God works in your life to answer that prayer—and what you can do to cooperate with Him to make it happen. You’ll be surprised to discover how much God *wants* abundance for you. And you’ll be relieved to know that you never need to misread His ways in your life again.

That’s why I invite you to read this little book with an open heart and great hope.

Sincerely,

Bruce Wilkinson



STORIES FROM
THE VINEYARD

Have you ever been with someone very close to you who is about to die, someone who loves you and wants to leave you with a final word?

“Come closer.” You lean close, straining to hear.

“I want to tell you something. I’ve waited until now...but I can’t wait any longer.”

You know that you’ll remember every word for the rest of your life.

Now imagine that the person who is about to speak is Jesus. How closely would you listen? How long and hard would you ponder your Lord’s last words to you?

In the pages to come, I invite you to encounter, perhaps for the first time, Jesus’ words in John 15—the heart of His final message to His disciples on the night He was betrayed. By dusk the following day, Jesus would be

stretched out on a cross, His body stripped and pierced, His life ebbing away.

Jesus knew the words He spoke that night would echo in His friends' memories for years.



These final words are so little understood today that I've called them "secrets."

In time, the truth of His "deathbed conversation" would lead them to a whole new way of thinking. These final words are so little understood today that I've called them "secrets," but I'm convinced that Jesus meant for their meaning to be clear. The time for parables and hidden meanings had passed. He wanted every follower for generations to come to know exactly how to live an overflowing life and understand what God would do to make it happen.

Watch how the Savior carefully and tenderly chooses the moment to speak.

THURSDAY NIGHT UPSTAIRS

If you've been a Christian for a while, you've probably heard a lot about the upper room—the scene of the climactic evening meal Jesus had with His disciples. You can

easily imagine, then, the men around the table reclining on pillows, their faces turned toward the Master. You can hear the muted conversation. You can smell the aroma of freshly baked bread and of roasted lamb and onions.

It is the night before Passover, the Jewish day to remember the nation's escape from slavery in Egypt. Hundreds of thousands have come to Jerusalem to celebrate, and this year more than ever the city is buzzing with rumors about Messiah. More than one prophet has predicted that on just such a day, Messiah will arrive to deliver Israel from all of her oppressors forever.

But these men reclining around the table know something the crowds outside don't. Messiah is already here. He is with them here in the room.

The disciples have spent three years with Him, and one by one they've come to the same conclusion: Jesus of Nazareth *is* Messiah—the One worth risking everything to follow. In fact, the disciples are so certain about how the events of Passover week will unfold that they have spent a good part of the journey from Galilee arguing about who will get which position of honor in the new kingdom.

Dinner begins.

Peter, pass the lamb.

Hey James, let's get to the temple early. I don't want to miss ten thousand angels teaching those Roman legions a lesson.

Psst, Matthew! I'd say our money woes are about to be history!

The disciples expect that these lamplit hours among friends in the upper room will carry on into the evening, poignant but peaceful, full of toasts to the good years to come. But things begin to unravel.

THE UNRAVELING

The apostle John recorded the exact moment the mood changed:

And supper being ended. . . Jesus. . . rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

(John 13:2–5)

Shocked, the men can only watch in shame as Messiah swabs grime from between their toes. Water plinks into the bowl. The disciples shift nervously, not daring to speak. Why would tomorrow's king behave like tonight's houseboy?

It gets worse. “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me,” Jesus announces (v. 21). The stunned men look around the circle. Then comes the clincher. Jesus tells Peter that before sunup, he will deny his Lord three times. An awful realization begins to dawn: Their whole mission is doomed.

Of course, Jesus has been trying to tell them for months that His appointment in Jerusalem is with a cross, not a throne. But His warnings have been mixed with predictions that Messiah is about to return in power and glory, and the disciples have heard what they wanted to hear.

But tonight Jesus strips away their last hopes. “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more,” He says, “but you will see Me.” That rules out any public triumph.

Jesus presses on. The final blow sounds like a concession statement: “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.” That can mean only one thing: Jesus is *not* the ruler; He will *not* be King.

Now I see pain written all over the disciples’ faces. Listen with me to Jesus’ words. Out of context they seem serene, almost hopeful. But in the crisis of this room, each phrase mirrors the emotional devastation of His men. Listen to His words...then watch their faces:

Little children. . . They're feeling small and weak.

I have loved you. . . They're staring at Him in disbelief, mistrust, and fear.

Let not your heart be troubled. . . They're sinking in anxiety and dread.

I will not leave you orphans. . .

They're slumping before Him like abandoned children, defenseless in a hostile world.



*They're staring at
Him in disbelief,
mistrust, and fear.*

The evening in the upper room ends. The questions end. Into the silence, Jesus says, "Arise, let us go from here" (John 14:31).

LIGHT IN THE VINEYARD

Eleven dejected men follow Jesus down the stairs and out into the cool night air. Some of the disciples carry lamps or burning torches to light the way. Perhaps Jesus tells them where He is heading—to a garden on the Mount of Olives where they often spent time. Perhaps they already know. But I believe that as their footsteps echo through the narrow streets, not a word is spoken.

The disciples follow Jesus down the hill, through the

winding streets of Jerusalem. Avoiding the temple mount and its noisy, celebrating crowds, Jesus turns right and leads them out of the city. Then they turn sharply left to follow the Kidron Valley up toward their destination.

Along the terraces that follow the curve of the valley, they pass through ancient vineyards. They walk in single file between rows of neatly tended grapes, plants that have been bearing fruit for generations. To the left above them tower the city walls and the ramparts of the temple. Ahead and to the right rises the Mount of Olives, where Gethsemane and betrayal await.

Here Jesus stops. Hemmed in by rows of vines, the disciples gather around. Lamps and torches sputter in the night air and flicker in their eyes.

Jesus reaches for a grape branch. Showing signs of new spring growth, its woody stem lies across His hand in the golden light. Now He begins. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser" (15:1).

In the next few minutes Jesus talks quietly about branches and grapes and how a vinedresser cares for his prize vineyard. It certainly isn't what His disciples expect to hear. But this is the moment Jesus chooses to reveal their surprising destiny.

THE CURTAINS OF HEAVEN

Too many Christians I've met are standing in the shadows of that vineyard. Like the disciples, they have discovered that following Jesus has turned out far differently than expected. They feel confused and disillusioned—maybe even betrayed by God.

Do you? If so, listen carefully—I believe that a major reason for your spiritual crisis may be that you have not heard and understood Jesus' words in the vineyard.



*Lamps and torches sputter
in the night air and
flicker in their eyes.*

For decades of my life as a Christian, I didn't understand, either. And because I didn't, I fell out of fellowship. I struggled against God. I settled for a spiritual experience often characterized by disappointment, doubt, and even anger. Looking back, I see that I was still thinking about a God who would help me win on my own terms. I had failed to lean close and listen.

But over the years, I was drawn back again and again into that lamplit circle, and what I finally heard there has brought freedom and joy into my life. Now I understand

what God wants from me—a fruitful harvest for Him. And now I can see how He has been at work all along in my life to bring that about.

Will you take to heart what Jesus said in those crucial, final moments? Every word matters. Jesus wants to pull back the curtains of heaven for you just as He did for His disciples.

You see, Jesus was thinking of you, too, that night. I'm sure of it. In cautious Thomas and reckless Peter, in guileless Nathaniel and scheming James, He saw and loved you, too. And I believe He has lovingly directed you to this little book just as purposefully as He led His closest friends into that vineyard.

The secrets of the vine that I will show you in the chapters to come are our Father's amazing plan to keep His children flourishing—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In fact, we could call them family secrets because they're really only meaningful to disciples like you who have followed your Lord all the way here...past the celebration, outside the city walls, straight into the dark.

