Life in a Bottle of Wine **[1]**

Submitted by Wessel on Sunday, 10 October 2021 - 19:04



Read time: 8 minutes
It is a cliché for a student at the University of Stellenbosch—which is nestled in the centre of a world famous wine region—to fall in with a group of friends who are (or become) wine connoisseurs. There is nothing better than taking off a Friday afternoon and sampling quality wine on an African summer's day on different estates. *Vinum bonum lætificat cor hominis*. And so I, in the company of more knowledgeable friends, went from someone who knew how to distinguish between red and white wine, to knowing what I liked and how to select a wine for others to enjoy. Even now, as I am writing this at home, I am a literal five minute drive away from a prestigious wine estate. If you want to be a sommelier, then there are facts about wine that you need to know. But if you are a plebian consumer, then the experience of drinking wine is subjective: a good bottle of wine is one that you enjoy. The best wine is a bottle that you, and everyone who is in your company at that moment, enjoys. Over the years, I accumulated a small collection of wines I really enjoyed. As these bottles have sat in darkness, patiently maturing, I found in them a heartbreaking and liberating secret to life.

One often hears that wine gets better with age. A good red wine, certainly, will mature in five or more years. The goodness that was teased out when you first sampled it in its youth will only get better, if you have the patience and commitment to keep it for that long. But no wine will improve, or even keep, indefinitely. No matter the quality, eventually it will peak, and then the ravages of time will take its toll on that bottle of wine. The same as it does to anything.

I have in my collections wines which were meant, not only to be a tasty treat sometime in the future, but to also recall good times with friends, sunny winter days or refreshing summer afternoons; even to be a snapshot of my life, like a sensory photograph. They were supposed to be a *momento vitæ* for someone who tends to dwell on loneliness, sadness and grief.

It can only be the youthful ignorance of someone in their early and mid twenties to think that one could capture goodness in a bottle and store it indefinitely on a shelf. There is a profound sadness about these bottles of wine which have been in my home for so many years like good house mates: as they peak in maturity, I am forced to dispense with them, lest they waste away. Rather than keeping them around to remember their associations, they must serve their purpose as a drink, and not necessarily at a time of my choosing[1]. All things to which we try to cling—whether a bottle of wine, a family heirloom of wood or a keepsake of metal—will, with the march of time, wear away and perish. Even if they outlast our lives, they will never hold the same meaning for whoever comes after. If we hope to freeze, even if just for a moment, our mortality in such things, they will betray us.

> For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:
>
> a time to be born,
> and a time to die;

> a time to plant,
> and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
> a time to kill,
> and a time to heal;
> a time to break down,
> and a time to build up;
> a time to weep,
> and a time to laugh;
> a time to mourn,
> and a time to dance;
> a time to cast away stones,
> and a time to gather stones together;
> a time to embrace,
> and a time to refrain from embracing;
> a time to seek,
> and a time to lose;
> a time to keep,
> and a time to cast away;
> a time to tear,
> and a time to sew;
> a time to keep silence,
> and a time to speak;
> a time to love,
> and a time to hate;
> a time for war,
> and a time for peace.
>
> Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

The Bible, of course, mentions wine quite a bit. Apart from its symbolic and practical references in the New Testament, in the Old Testament wine is often referenced in connection with blessing. For example, in Deuteronomy 11:13–14:

> It shall happen, if you shall listen diligently to my commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.
>
> Deuteronomy 11:13–14

The Israelites, if they were faithful to God, could enjoy the good things from the soil (grain, wine and oil), because they could be assured of God’s abundant blessings the following year.

We know that God’s creation is good (even if tainted). It also pleases Him to bless those who are faithful to Him. Having this in mind, can give us a whole new perspective. The Preacher continues on from the passage quoted above:

> What profit has he who works in that in which he labours? I have seen the burden which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can’t find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live. Also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labour, is the gift of God. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; and God has done it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has been long ago, and that which is to be has

> been long ago. God seeks again that which is passed away.
>
> Ecclesiastes 3:9–15

We are to eat, drink, enjoy and share what we have *now*, because it is a blessing from God. This is how we enjoy His good creation and gifts to us. We do not, like some say, "*eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die*". We do so because we enjoy good blessings which have been given to us. And if we pass away tomorrow, we suffer no loss, because we will be united with God, who will restore all things so that, one day, we can again enjoy the fruits of the earth (Revelation 21:5). That is to say, we are freed from our existential angst and mourning; we have God's promises to which to look forward (Revelation 21:4).

If our wine racks were to run empty, or our family photo albums succumb to moth, flame or hard drive failure, or relationships fade away, then we praise God for the good from which all those things came and remember them fondly without being blind to the present and the future. We do not have to lament what we no longer have, because God will renew and restore; whether in this life or the next.

- 1. I am writing this during lockdown and with an infant in the house: both factors which are not conducive to hospitality in order to share these wines with friends and aficionados.

Categories:

- Encouragements [2]

Tags:

- wine [3]
- memories [4]
- regret [5]
- past [6]
- future [7]
- present [8]
- eternity [9]
- ecclesiastes [10]

Source URL: https://siyach.org/node/1236

Links
[1] https://siyach.org/node/1236
[2] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/34
[3] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/1059
[4] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/1060
[5] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/178
[6] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/1061
[7] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/348
[8] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/1062
[9] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/1063
[10] https://siyach.org/taxonomy/term/426