

‘Thank God for the Fleas’

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom recounts the hardships of imprisonment in Ravensbrück, one of Nazi Germany’s most brutal concentration camps.

She describes not only the obvious cruelties of life in the camp, like the torturous labor, the starvation diet and physical brutality of the guards, but even the small annoyances that, when added to the others, loomed as large as the Nazi flags that flew over their barracks. Things like the incessant itching and sores caused by the biting fleas and flies that infested their beds.

Together with her sister Betsie, Corrie was able to smuggle in a small pocket Bible that they used in leading the ladies of their barracks in daily devotions. One day, as they read from 1 Thessalonians, they came upon the verse, “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



The following conversation ensued between the two sisters:

“That’s it, Corrie! That’s His answer. ‘Give thanks in all circumstances!’ That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!”

I stared at her, then around me at the dark, foul-aired room.

“Such as?” I said.

“Such as being assigned here together.”

I bit my lip. “Oh, yes, Lord Jesus!”

“Such as what you’re holding in your hands.”

I looked down at the Bible. “Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages.”

(more)

“Yes,” said Betsie. “Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we’re packed so close, that many more will hear!” She looked at me expectantly. “Corrie!” she prodded.

“Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed, suffocating crowds.”

“Thank You,” Betsie went on serenely, “for the fleas and for ...”

The fleas! This was too much. “Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”

As time went by, word spread among the camp about guards sneaking into barracks to molest the female prisoners and impromptu raids to search for contraband and such. Yet Betsie and Corrie noticed that their barracks were largely spared such ghastly intrusions.

One day, Betsie overheard one of the supervisors saying why she would not enter their barracks.

Betsie could not keep the triumph from her voice: “Because of the fleas! That’s what she said, ‘That place is crawling with fleas!’”

Side by side, in the sanctuary of God’s fleas, Betsie and I ministered the Word of God uninterrupted to all in the room!

What a powerful story of God’s love and oversight of our lives.

When adversity comes our way, when we question what is happening to us and why, be assured that God loves you and He may be working to protect you, discipline you or preparing you for something yet to come in your life. He always has a plan for us.

In the book of Genesis, Joseph, who was sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt and rose to become the second most powerful man, next to Pharaoh, later forgave them and told them: *But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive* (Genesis 50:20 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter