



Family Time with God Great Stories Series—Week 1

Ravensbrook, Germany 1944

(During World War II Corrie and Betsie Ten Boom were arrested by the Germans for helping people the Nazis were hurting. Both sisters were strong Christians.)

Corrie and Betsie Ten Boom, prisoners 66729 and 66730, were led into Barracks 28, past rows of worktables and into a large dormitory room filled with great square tiers stacked three high. Here they would sleep, squeezed among hundreds of other inmates at the concentration camp.

Fighting claustrophobia, Corrie and Betsie squirmed into an upper deck and found their assigned places on the reeking straw. Suddenly Corrie jerked up, striking her head on a cross-slat. Something had pinched her leg. The two sisters scrambled off the tier and dropped down in a narrow aisle. Moving to a patch of light they saw them—fleas! “The place is swarming with them!” Corrie groaned. “Betsie, how can we live in such a place?”

The insects were the last straw for Corrie. She and her sister had been starved and humiliated. They’d endured filth, cold and back-breaking labor. They’d witnessed unforgettable cruelties. And now to be infested with fleas...Corrie wondered how she could go on.

Betsie had an answer. She’d read it in the Bible that morning—in First Thessalonians, where Paul urged believers to “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God...”

Betsie suggested they thank God for every single thing about their new barracks. Corrie stared around at the dark, foul-smelling room and couldn’t generate much gratitude. Betsie thought of two things to thank God for. They’d been assigned to this place together and they’d managed to hang on to their Bible. Corrie murmured assent.

Clutching the Bible, Betsie prayed, “Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages. Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we’re packed so close, thank You that many more will hear!” Corrie grudgingly murmured assent.

Betsie continued serenely: “Thank You for the fleas and for...”

This was too much for Corrie. “Betsie,” she interrupted, “there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”

But Betsie insisted, “‘Give thanks in *all* circumstances.’ It doesn’t say, ‘In pleasant circumstances.’ Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.”

There in the narrow aisle Corrie bit her lip and thanked God for the fleas.

Corrie and Betsie did find many women in Barrack 28 eager to hear from those pages. Each evening after receiving a cup of turnip soup they’d make their way to the rear of the dormitory

where a bare light bulb cast a yellow circle on the wall, and they would read from the Bible. Soon a large group of women were gathering to listen.

The Ten Booms always read from the Scriptures. They translated their Dutch verses into German, and then eager listeners packed together on the tiers would pass the precious words back in French, Polish, Russian, Czech. To some it seemed a small preview to Heaven.

Night after night the meetings grew larger and yet no guard ever came near. So many wanted to join that the sisters started a second service after roll call. Guards patrolled everywhere at the camp; half-a-dozen always paced about in the center room of the barracks, yet for some reason none ever entered this dormitory. The women couldn't understand it.

One day Betsie discovered exactly why they could enjoy their island of religious freedom. There was a mixup about sock sizes in her knitting group. They'd asked the supervisor to come and settle it. But she refused to step through the door into the room. None of the guards would either. They said, "That place is crawling with fleas!"*



Giving Thanks

God wants us to have thankful hearts and to give thanks in everything, not just when things turn out good or when they go the way we want. Because of who God is and what God can do, we can give thanks in every situation, no matter what. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

(CONCLUDING NOTE: Betsie Ten Boom continued living for Jesus in some of the harshest conditions imaginable until she died of illness in the Nazi concentration camp. She is said to have died with an angelic smile on her face. Corrie, her sister, was released because of a clerical error one week before all the women prisoners were executed. Concerning her miraculous release she said, "God does not have problems. Only plans." She became a very powerful Christian influence and speaker concerning the grace of God and her experiences during World War II. She continued to serve the Lord until her death in 1983 at the age of 91. To learn more about Corrie and her faith, visit www.tenboom.org.)

*Steven R. Mosley, *God a Biography*, (Phoenix: Questar Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 189-191.