



Can fleas be from God?

Giving Thanks for Discomfort

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

—1 Thessalonians 5:18

Ravensbrück was not a place anyone *wanted* to be. Each day it was the scene of cruel suffering, sickness, and death. Located 50 miles north of Berlin, Germany, it had been established as a prison camp for women in 1938 by members of Hitler's army.

Corrie and Betsie ten Boom, along with their eighty-year-old father and two other family members, had been arrested for the crime of hiding Jews from the Nazi soldiers. In 1944 Corrie and Betsie were unloaded with thousands of other women at Ravensbrück. Yet not even the horrific conditions of the camp or the threats of punishment could stop these women from loving the persecuted Jewish people. At the risk of death, they tended the sick and injured, careful to avoid being seen by the prison guards, and secretly led times of Scripture reading and prayer.

Then the two sisters were moved to Barracks 28 where the living conditions were as bad as any in the camp. The plumbing was backed up, keeping a sickening stench in the air. The beds were actually long rows of crude wooden platforms stacked three high. What little straw covered the beds was dirty and scratchy; of course, there were no sheets, blankets, or pillows.

After being directed to their places, Corrie and Betsie crawled over the smelly straw and lay down to rest. Then ...

"Fleas!" Corrie cried. "Betsie, the place is swarming with them!"

Scrambling off the platform Corrie wailed, "Betsie, how can we live in such a place?"

Betsie was already praying, "Show us. Show us how, Lord."

Suddenly Betsie exclaimed, "Corrie, He's given us the answer! Before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning, read that part again!"

Carefully Corrie drew the Bible from its pouch so that no guard would see. It was in First Thessalonians. "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another . . ."

"Betsie, how can we live in such a place?"



Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus—

“That’s it, Corrie!” said Betsie, “That’s His answer. Give thanks in all circumstances, for every single thing in this barracks!”

“Such as?” Corrie said.

“Such as being assigned here together, and such as what you’re holding in your hands,” said Betsie.

Corrie looked down at the Bible. “Yes, thank you, Lord.”

Betsie continued, “Thank you, Lord, that we’re packed so close with so many, that many more will hear about You! And thank you for the fleas.”

This was too much. “Betsie, there is no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.”

“It doesn’t say in pleasant circumstances,” Betsie replied. “Fleas are a part of this place where God has put us.”

And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.

Weeks later, however, God gave Corrie the answer to her question about fleas. While standing in the food line at the end of the day, Betsie said with delight,

“That’s His answer: Give thanks in all circumstances, for every single thing in this barracks!”

“You know, we’ve never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room. Well—I’ve found out. This afternoon some women asked for a supervisor to come settle a dispute and she refused. Even the guards would not come in. You know why? Because of the fleas! They said, ‘That place is crawling with fleas!’”¹

God allowed a difficult circumstance for Corrie and Betsie so that His Word could be read to any woman who wanted to listen. In any other barracks it would have been very difficult to read the forbidden Bible without being discovered by the guards. God provided protection by way of fleas.

Are we grateful for the daily comforts we enjoy—comforts that these women prisoners did not have? Do we give thanks for even the nuisances that God allows in our lives? We may never learn the reason, as Betsie and Corrie did, but we can know that God is always caring for us no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

