

Grateful

Thanking God for the Fleas: When Gratitude Feels Impossible

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom recounts her arrest and imprisonment with her sister, Betsie, after risking their lives to hide Jews during World War II.

Corrie and Betsie found themselves crammed into filthy, overcrowded barracks — a place so miserable it teemed with fleas. As they clung to the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Betsie urged Corrie to remember: "God commands us to give thanks in all circumstances, not just when life is bearable." Together, they gave thanks that they were still side by side, while so many others had been ripped from their loved ones. They praised God that their Bible had slipped through inspections, hidden from searching hands. But when Betsie insisted they also thank God for the fleas, Corrie balked. Fleas? Surely that was too much to ask. Surely God could not expect gratitude for something so disgusting, so unbearable.

Yet in time, the truth came to light: it was the very presence of those hated fleas that kept the guards at bay. The infestation repelled the guards, sparing the women from the brutality and violation they would have otherwise suffered. Because of them, they could pray, study Scripture, and encourage one another in peace. What Corrie had seen as a curse had been, all along, an unexpected shield — a mercy hidden in suffering. When Corrie realized this, she bowed her head and thanked God for those fleas. God had a purpose higher than she could see when she was in the barracks and was protecting her all along.

Many times, thankfulness comes easily to us when things are going according to plan and life is comfortable, but in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 it says, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

It is God's will that we give thanks in all circumstances, not just when things are easy and life is going smoothly. You might find yourself asking, how is it even possible to give thanks when grief, financial struggle, or mistreatment weigh heavy on my heart? God's Word calls us to give thanks not for these things but to give thanks in these things that we endure, trusting that God has a greater purpose in it all. Romans 8:28 reminds us that for those who love God, *"all things work together for good,"* even when we can't yet see the purpose in our pain.

This is not an invitation to hide our pain or ignore the weight of our suffering. It is a call to place our hope in our great God and trust in His goodness, regardless of how dark the clouds may loom overhead.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"God is too good to be unkind, and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart."* When we don't understand and start to grow weary of the struggles of this life, we can trust in the unchanging character of God.

Grateful

Thanking God for the Fleas: When Gratitude Feels Impossible

The next time you feel overwhelmed by despair, struggling to even lift your head, here are three steps you can take:

1. **Rejoice Always** – Reflect on God's past faithfulness. Remember Christ's sacrifice on the cross, where He bore God's wrath out of love for you. Rejoice that you are His child, and He will never leave you. Rejoice, too, in the eternal home He is preparing for you. (Psalm 77:11-12, Psalm 103:2)
2. **Pray Without Ceasing** – Bring every worry, fear, and sorrow to God in prayer. He invites you to cast all your cares on Him because He loves you deeply. (1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 11:28-30)
3. **Give Thanks in All Circumstances** – Giving thanks in hardship may feel impossible, but it is a powerful act of trust. Gratitude lifts our eyes from our troubles to God's goodness. There have been many scientific studies that show that practicing gratitude can positively shift our brain chemistry and elevate our mood. So, the next time you're burdened and overwhelmed, try setting a timer for 5 minutes and intentionally thank God, either aloud or in writing, for the blessings in your life. Focusing on His goodness will not only renew your perspective but will begin to lift your spirit as well. (Psalm 107:1, Colossians 3:15)

As 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, *"this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you."* Sometimes, God's will can seem elusive, but His Word is clear: He desires that we give thanks in all circumstances. When we choose gratitude, we align ourselves with His will, even when it's difficult.

Just as Betsie and Corrie Ten Boom discovered that God is good even amid suffering and were able to give thanks, we can do the same. We can in gratitude trust that God is with us, even in our hardest moments, and is working for our good and for His glory!

1. **How does Corrie's experience in *The Hiding Place* challenge your perspective on thankfulness, especially in difficult circumstances?**
2. **Read Hebrews 12:28. What does this verse teach us about the connection between gratitude and worship? How can remembering the unshakable kingdom we've received in Christ give us an eternal perspective—and stir thankfulness—even when life feels uncertain or unstable?**
3. **What personal struggles or hardships are you facing right now where it feels impossible to give thanks? How can you begin to shift your focus toward gratitude?**



Delilah grew up in New York and met her husband while attending Bible College in Missouri. They married in April 2013 and completed an internship at their church immediately after, where she honed her administrative skills. As a pastor's wife, she has worked alongside her husband in ministry, focusing on church planting, youth ministry, and discipleship. Delilah also has nearly a year of short-term missions experience across ten countries, primarily in Asia. In her free time, she loves exploring the outdoors with her husband, taking every opportunity to hike, paddleboard, and kayak. She is deeply committed to missions and advancing the Gospel! Delilah serves as CVM's Missions Mobilization Assistant. Email: dpugsley@cvm.org