

TRAMP
FOR THE
LORD

Corrie ten Boom
with

Jamie Buckingham



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Foreword

My wife, Jackie, and I met *Tante* (Aunt) Corrie and her pretty, blond secretary, Ellen de Kroon, at the airport in Melbourne, Florida. Ellen had called the night before saying they were flying in, but that Corrie had been having some severe heart pains. At eighty years of age, that's serious business.

We met the plane and whisked them to our house which is just minutes from the airport. "I'm very tired," Tante Corrie said. "I like to rest a while."

Moments later she was stretched out on our daughter's lavender bedspread. I opened the window so the soft, tropical breeze could blow in from the lake behind the house. Gently closing the door, I cautioned the children to speak in whispers, and tiptoed into the kitchen to join Jackie and Ellen.

Ellen had brought us some Gouda cheese and we sliced it, reminiscing over my first meal in Corrie's house in Holland. Ellen couldn't wait to tell Jackie about the expression on my face when Corrie informed me I had a choice of two dishes for lunch: raw mullet dipped in onion, or smoked eel.

Talking softly and munching on cheese and crackers, I glanced up to see Tante Corrie coming down the hall, her eyes sparkling. "Aren't you going to rest?" I asked.

“Oh, I have already a good sleep,” she answered in her thick, Dutch accent. “Ten minutes is all you need when God gives the sleep.”

It is this remarkable power of recuperation which has allowed Tante Corrie, at more than eighty years of age, to tramp the world for the Lord. I saw that same power at work in her life a year later in Pittsburgh. We were both on the program for a Bible conference at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. She had spoken three times that day to a congregation made up of everybody from bearded Jesus People to university professors. I was out late that night, and when I returned to the dormitory, I saw Ellen running down the hall. “Tante Corrie is having a heart attack,” she said.

I raced to Corrie’s room. She was stretched out on her bed, her face gray from the pain. “God has told me my time is not yet up,” she whispered. “I have sent for a minister to pray that I may be healed.”

Moments later, as the young minister arrived and laid his hands on her, I saw her features relax and the color return to her cheeks. “Thank You, Lord,” she said softly, “for taking away the pain.” Then, signifying she was ready for us to leave, she said, “I go to sleep now.”

The next morning at eight o’clock she was behind the pulpit speaking to a thousand persons in the great auditorium—as though nothing extraordinary had happened.

I am convinced that the secret of Tante Corrie’s great recuperative power, as well as the secret of her popularity as a speaker, lies in her childlikeness. As a little girl believes her Daddy can do anything, so Corrie ten Boom trusts in God—even more. She is living proof of what happens when a woman—when any person—is filled with the Holy Spirit.

JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

*I will teach you, and guide you in the way you should go.
I will keep you under my eye.*

Psalm 32:8, NEB

Introduction

The World Is My Classroom

The school of life offers some difficult courses, but it is in the difficult class that one learns the most—especially when your teacher is the Lord Jesus Himself.

The hardest lessons for me were in a cell with four walls. The cell in the prison at Scheveningen, Holland was six paces in length, two paces in breadth, with a door that could be opened only from the outside. Later there were four barbed-wire fences, charged with electricity, enclosing a concentration camp in Germany. The gates were manned by guards with loaded machine guns. It was there in Ravensbruck that more than ninety-six thousand women died.

After that time in prison, the entire world became my classroom. Since World War II, I have traveled around it twice, speaking in more than sixty countries on all continents. During these three decades I have become familiar with airports, bus stations and passport offices. Under me have been wheels of every description: wheels of automobiles, trains, jinrikshas, horse-drawn wagons and

the landing gear of airplanes. Wheels, wheels, wheels! Even the wheels of wheelchairs.

I have enjoyed the hospitality in a great number of homes and have slept in many times more than a thousand beds. Sometimes I have slept in comfortable beds with foam rubber mattresses in the United States, and sometimes on straw mats on dirt floors in India. There have been clean rooms and dirty rooms.

One bathroom in Hollywood had a view of exotic plants and flowers from the sunken Roman bathtub; while a bathroom in Borneo was simply a mud hut equipped with nothing but a barrel of cold water. Once, while staying with a group of young Jewish girls in Israel, I had to climb over a mountain of building materials and walk through a junk-filled field to make my way to a tiny outhouse, which was nothing more than a hole in the ground. Such a place would have been impossible to find at night.

Always in my travels, even now that I am in my ninth decade of life, I have carried in my hand and in my heart the Bible—the very Word of Life which is almost bursting with Good News. And there has been plenty for everyone. I often feel as the disciples must have felt as they fed more than five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. The secret was that they had received it from the blessed hand of the Master. There was abundance for all and twelve basketfuls of fragments left over.

There has been plenty for the dying ones in the concentration camps—plenty for the thousands gathered in universities, in town halls and in churches all over the world. Sometimes I have spoken to a few men in prison who stood behind bars and listened hungrily. Once to a group of six missionaries in Japan who offered me hospitality during a twenty-eight-hour rainstorm in which more than a thousand persons perished around us. Groups of hundreds and crowds of thousands have listened under pandals (a wide roof protecting the congregation from the hot sun) in India and in theaters in South America. I have spoken to tens of thousands at one time in the giant stadiums of America and retreated to the

mountains of North Carolina to spend time with a small group of girls in a summer camp.

“God so loved the world . . .” (John 3:16) Jesus said. And that is why I keep going, even into my eightieth years, because we’ve a story to tell to the nations, a story of love and light.

God has plans—not problems—for our lives. Before she died in the concentration camp in Ravensbruck, my sister Betsie said to me, “Corrie, your whole life has been a training for the work you are doing here in prison—and for the work you will do afterward.”

The life of a Christian is an education for higher service. No athlete complains when the training is hard. He thinks of the game, or the race. As the apostle Paul wrote:

In my opinion, whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God’s purpose it has been so limited—yet it has been given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!

It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realized our full sonship in him. (Rom. 8:18–23, PHILLIPS)

Looking back across the years of my life, I can see the working of a divine pattern which is the way of God with His children. When I was in a prison camp in Holland during the war, I often prayed, “Lord, never let the enemy put me in a German concentration camp.” God answered no to that prayer. Yet in the German camp, with all its horror, I found many prisoners who had never

heard of Jesus Christ. If God had not used my sister Betsie and me to bring them to Him, they would never have heard of Him. Many died, or were killed, but many died with the Name of Jesus on their lips. They were well worth all our suffering. Faith is like radar which sees through the fog—the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.

My life is but a weaving, between my God and me,
I do not choose the colors, He worketh steadily,
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I the under side.
Not till the loom is silent, and shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful in the skillful Weaver's hand,
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.
(Anonymous)

Although the threads of my life have often seemed knotted, I know, by faith, that on the other side of the embroidery there is a crown. As I have walked the world—a tramp for the Lord—I have learned a few lessons in God's great classroom. Even as I share these things with those of you who read this book, I pray the Holy Spirit will reveal something of the divine pattern in God's plan for you also.

CORRIE TEN BOOM
Baarn, Holland

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into [difficult times],
Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

James 1:2-3

1

A Strange Place to Hope

Rank upon rank we stood that hot September morning in 1944, more than a thousand women lining the railroad siding, one unspoken thought among us: *Not Germany!*

Beside me my sister Betsie swayed. I was fifty-two, Betsie fifty-nine. These seven months in a prison and concentration camp since we had been caught concealing Jews in our home had been harder on her. But prisoners though we were, at least till now we had remained in Holland. And now when liberation must come any day, where were they taking us?

Behind us guards were shouting, prodding us with their guns. Instinctively my hand went to the string around my neck. From it, hanging down my back between my shoulder blades, was the small cloth bag that held our Bible, that forbidden Book which had not only sustained Betsie and me throughout these months, but given us strength to share with our fellow prisoners. So far we had kept it hidden. But if we should go to Germany . . . We had heard tales of the prison inspections there.

A long line of empty boxcars was rolling slowly past. Now they clanged to a halt and a gaping freight door loomed in front of us. I helped Betsie over the steep side. The dark boxcar grew quickly crowded. We were pressed against the wall. It was a small European freight car; thirty or forty people jammed it. And still the guards drove women in, pushing, jabbing with their guns. It was only when eighty women were packed inside that the heavy door slid shut and we heard the iron bolts driven into place outside.

Women were sobbing and many fainted, although in the tightly wedged crowd they remained upright. The sun beat down on the motionless train; the temperature in the packed car rose. It was hours before the train gave a sudden lurch and began to move. Almost at once it stopped again, then again crawled forward. The rest of that day and all night long it was the same—stopping, starting, slamming, jerking. Once through a slit in the side of the car I saw trainmen carrying a length of twisted rail. Maybe the tracks ahead were destroyed. Maybe we would still be in Holland when the liberation came.

But at dawn we rolled through the Dutch border town of Emmerich. We were in Germany.

For two more incredible days and two more nights we were carried deeper and deeper into the land of our fears. Worse than the crush of bodies and the filth, was the thirst. Two or three times when the train was stopped the door was slid open a few inches and a pail of water passed in. But we had become animals, incapable of plan. Those near the door got it all.

At last, on the morning of the third day, the door was hauled open its full width. Only a handful of very young soldiers was there to order us out and march us off. No more were needed. We could scarcely walk, let alone resist. From the crest of a small hill, we saw the end of our journey—a vast gray barracks city surrounded by double concrete walls.

“Ravensbruck!”

Like a whispered curse, the word passed back through the line.

This was the notorious women's death camp itself, the very symbol to Dutch hearts of all that was evil. As we stumbled down the hill, I felt the little Bible bumping on my back. As long as we had that, I thought, we could face even hell itself. But how could we conceal it through the inspection I knew lay ahead?

It was the middle of the night when Betsie and I reached the processing barracks. And there, under the harsh ceiling lights, we saw a dismaying sight. As each woman reached the head of the line she had to strip off every scrap of clothes, throw them all onto a pile guarded by soldiers, and walk naked past the scrutiny of a dozen guards into the shower room. Coming out of the shower room she wore only a thin regulation prison dress and a pair of shoes.

Our Bible! How could we take it past so many watchful eyes?

"Oh, Betsie!" I began—and then stopped at the sight of her pain-whitened face. As a guard strode by, I begged him in German to show us the toilets. He jerked his head in the direction of the shower room. "Use the drain holes!" he snapped.

Timidly Betsie and I stepped out of line and walked forward to the huge room with its row on row of overhead spigots. It was empty, waiting for the next batch of fifty naked and shivering women.

A few minutes later we would return here stripped of everything we possessed. And then we saw them, stacked in a corner, a pile of old wooden benches crawling with cockroaches, but to us the furniture of heaven itself.

In an instant I had slipped the little bag over my head and, along with my woolen underwear, had stuffed it behind the benches.

And so it was that when we were herded into that room ten minutes later, we were not poor, but rich—rich in the care of Him who was God even of Ravensbruck.

Of course when I put on the flimsy prison dress, the Bible bulged beneath it. But that was His business, not mine. At the exit, guards were feeling every prisoner, front, back and sides. I prayed, "Oh, Lord, send your angels to surround us." But then I remem-

bered that angels are spirits and you can see through them. What I needed was an angel to shield me so the guards could not see me. "Lord," I prayed again, "make your angels untransparent." How unorthodox you can pray when you are in great need! But God did not mind. He did it.

The woman ahead of me was searched. Behind me, Betsie was searched. They did not touch or even look at me. It was as though I was blocked out of their sight.

Outside the building was a second ordeal, another line of guards examining each prisoner again. I slowed down as I reached them, but the captain shoved me roughly by the shoulder. "Move along! You're holding up the line."

So Betsie and I came to our barracks at Ravensbruck. Before long we were holding clandestine Bible study groups for an ever-growing group of believers, and Barracks 28 became known throughout the camp as "the crazy place, where they hope."

Yes, hoped, in spite of all that human madness could do. We had learned that a stronger power had the final word, even here.

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*You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea, and Samaria.*

Acts 1:8, NEB

2

Witnesses unto Me

It was a week after Betsie had died in Ravensbruck that I took my place in the ranks of women prisoners standing together in the icy cold of the early morning.

“66730!”

“That is my number,” I said weakly as we took our places for roll call.

“Ten Boom, Cornelia.”

That is my name, I thought. How strange that they would call me by name when they always addressed us by number!

“Come forward.”

We were falling in line for the roll call. Ten in a line, every one hundredth woman, one step forward. My friends looked at me sadly.

What does it mean? I asked inwardly. *Punishment . . . freedom . . . the gas chamber . . . sent to another concentration camp?*

There was but one thought that comforted me. *What a joy that Betsie is in heaven. No matter what terrible things now happen, she*

will not have to bear it.

The guard, a young German girl, shouted at me. "Number 66730!"

I stepped forward, stood at attention and repeated the necessary words. "*Schutzhaftling ten Boom, Cornelia, meldet sich.*"

"Stand on Number 1 on the roll call."

I went to the place to the far right, where I could overlook the entire square of the bleak camp. Standing in the crowd, I could not feel the draft, but now, standing in the bitter cold, the wind whipped through my ragged prison dress. Another girl, young and frightened, was sent to stand beside me. Roll call took three hours, and we were almost frozen. She saw how cold I was and rubbed my spine when the guards were not looking.

"Why must I stand here?" I asked through chattering teeth.

Her answer was barely audible as it came from her blue lips. "Death sentence."

I turned back to the Lord. *Perhaps I'll see you soon face to face, like Betsie does now, Lord. Let it not be too cruel a killing. Not gas, Lord, nor hanging. I prefer shooting. It is so quick. You see something, you hear something, and it is finished.*

I looked back at the young girl beside me. *Lord, this is perhaps the last chance I will have to bring someone to You before I arrive in heaven. Use me, Lord. Give me all the love and wisdom I need.*

"What is your name?" I asked her softly, glancing always to see if the guards were looking.

"Tiny."

"I am Corrie," I whispered. "How long have you been here?"

"Two years."

"Did you ever read the Bible?"

"No, I never did."

"Do you believe God exists?"

"I do. I wish I knew more about Him. Do you know Him?"

"I do. Jesus, His Son, came to this world to carry our punishment. He died on the cross, but He rose from the dead and has

promised to be with us always. My sister died here. She suffered so much. I too have suffered. But Jesus is always with us. He did a miracle in taking away all my hatred and bitterness for my enemies. Jesus is willing to bring into our hearts God's love through His Holy Spirit."

Tiny listened. For almost three hours we talked while the guards completed the roll call. It was a miracle, for I had a chance to explain many things about Jesus. The prisoners behind us listened too. I felt happy. Perhaps this was my last chance in life, but what joy!

I continued. "Jesus wants to live in your heart. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock,' He says. 'If anyone opens the door, I'll come in.' Will you open the door of your heart and let Him come in and change you?"

"I will," she said.

"Then talk to Him. Tell Him whatever you think. Now you have a Friend who never leaves you alone."

The siren sounded and the guards shouted at the prisoners. "Get to work!"

Thousands of women prisoners were running to their places where they had to march to their work. Tiny disappeared from sight. Only I was left standing in my place where I had been ordered not to move. I still did not know what fate awaited me.

I did know, however, that the God who never slumbers nor sleeps was now with Tiny. And Tiny knew it too. Neither of us knew at that time how important that was going to be to her in the next few days. But above the din of the concentration camp, I thought I heard the singing of the angels.

Then I heard my name called. Was it death? Oh, thank God, no. It was life. I was being released. I later learned it was through an administrative blunder, but even then I knew it was not the end of an era—it was just the beginning. Ahead of me was the world.