

GRATEFUL FOR THE FLEAS
First in a Sermon Series: “Secrets of the Blessed Life”
February 2, 2014 Communion –2 Corinthians 12: 1-10
The Church of the Covenant

Can we find God’s grace in the middle of our most desperate hour? Can we see God sending a ray of hope into our darkest day? Do we believe that when we are weakest it is then God may be strongest in our life? Can we find meaning and gratitude in even the things that seem bothersome and a trial? If so, then we have discovered one of the SECRETS OF THE BLESSED LIFE. I am preaching on this subject matter over the next few weeks –when we are in Christ and Jesus lives in us through faith then what are secrets to achieve blessedness, a sense of blessing even and perhaps especially in times of trial and travail in life. Do you want to discover the SECRETS OF THE BLESSED LIFE today????

Corrie Ten Boom in her wonderful book, *“The Hiding Place”*, has a section where she expresses her gratitude for the fleas that infested her bed in the concentration camp in which she was held by the Nazis. First, we must understand that she was imprisoned by the Nazis because her family had chosen to hide and shield a Jewish family from being rounded up and placed in a concentration camp. Corrie was suffering, not because she had done anything wrong, but precisely because she and her family had done the *right* thing. And she and her family ironically wound up in the same place that she was endeavoring to protect the Jewish family from going. The Jewish family wound up in a concentration camp and her own family wound up in a concentration camp. Surely, she had every right to be bitter about this; surely she could have shaken her fist at God. Surely no one could condemn her were she to remonstrate against the Lord –“Lord, why have you allowed this to happen?” “Lord, what did we do to deserve this?” But instead she chose to live out of her faith and not out of her negative circumstances. Almost her entire family was murdered by the Nazis. Her home was taken away. Her security was taken away. Her health, threatened; her parents were taken away. Her family, murdered, and her life forever scarred by the brutality and inhumanity of the little slice of hell that was a concentration camp. She could have been sucked down into the morass of desperation and hopelessness and despair. But instead she chose to look around her for the grace that God is always sending into our lives and especially on those worst case, terrible, seemingly irredeemable days. She chose to open her eyes to a spiritual reality that is always surrounding us. She chose to believe in the goodness of God as revealed always in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. She chose to live out of her faith and not her negative circumstances. She had discovered in that awful concentration camp a SECRET OF THE BLESSED LIFE...

Hear her description in her own words. She writes: *“Barracks 8 was in the quarantine compound. Next to us..were located the punishment barracks. From there, all day long, and often into the night came the sounds of hell itself. They were not the sounds of anger, or of any human emotion, but of a cruelty altogether detached, blows landing in regular rhythm, screams keeping pace. It grew harder and harder. ...there was too much misery, too much seemingly pointless suffering. Every day something else failed to make sense, something else grew too heavy. (they) were horrified by the fact that their reeking, straw bed platforms swarmed with fleas. How could they live in such a place? It was Betsie (her sister) who discovered God’s answer. “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances...” That’s what we can do, Corrie. We can give thanks to God for everything about this new barracks. They thanked God for the fact they were together. They thanked God they had a Bible. They even thanked God for the horrible crowds of prisoners...that more could hear the Word of God. And then Betsie thanked God for the fleas. The fleas! This was too much. “Betsie, there is no way even God can make me grateful for the fleas!” “Give thanks in all circumstances”...(the Bible) doesn’t say “in pleasant circumstances”. And so we stood between tiers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was*

sure Betsie was wrong. It turned out Betsie was not wrong, the fleas were a nuisance, but a blessing after all. The women were able to have a great deal of freedom with their Bible studies, never bothered by Nazi prison guards...they discovered it was the fleas that kept those guards out. Through those fleas God protected the women from abuse and harassment. Dozens of desperate women were kept free to hear the comforting, hope-giving Word of God...Through those fleas...

The Word of God says: *“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in ALL circumstances...”* (Philippians 4: 4) It is a secret of the BLESSED LIFE. But it is also to watch for God to send GRACE into whatever situation you are in. The Apostle Paul in our scripture lesson is harassed by a *“thorn in the flesh”*. What it is we do not need to know. But the Apostle has prayed about it, over and over and again, and has sought the Lord to remove this thorn. *“Take this cup from me”*, prays our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the Garden. *“Take this thorn from me”*, prays the Apostle. In both instances God does not answer the prayer of the Apostle or the prayer of His own Son as they request. Rather, God answers it another way. And Paul is taken up and shown a vision of heaven. And the Lord speaks to the Apostle. We know this because there are quotation marks around the quote and the Apostle is not quoting himself, he is quoting the Lord. And what does the Lord say to the beloved Apostle. He says this: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12: 9) I will send you grace into your life, Paul, but sometimes you may have to look VERY HARD for it. God says --My grace is sufficient. It is enough. It will accomplish my purposes in your life, Paul. It will answer your prayer better than you could ever hope. You are praying that the fleas of life go away. I will show you, Paul, that the thorns are part of my answer to your prayer. I will teach you to look carefully for the smallest things into which I will pour my grace. I will teach you the SECRETS OF THE BLESSED LIFE. I will teach you to become grateful for your thorn in the flesh. I will teach you to be blessed by the fleas. I will teach you to be grateful for the smallest bit of grace I place right at the very center of your life and heart. Because this is the promise of God –through that grace poured out through our weakness He, God, will perfect His power in and through us. It was God’s power that He poured out through the weakness of the cross that He has saved the world, all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is God’s power that He pours out through our weakness that gives us grace to see even the fleas of life as means of God’s grace and power.

One SECRET of the BLESSED LIFE is that *“God’s grace is sufficient”* for everything, in every way, on every day, in any and all circumstances. And God will pour HIS power through our weakness if we but REJOICE and PRAY CONSTANTLY and GIVE THANKS in all circumstances. Paul became grateful for the thorn in his flesh. And Jesus Christ became grateful for the cross. And Corrie Ten Boom became grateful for the fleas. Lord, make us grateful for the fleas we face in life. For as the Apostle concludes, *“when I am weak then I am strong.”* (2 Corinthians 12: 10) And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*