

How to bloom in the desert 9

At the age of thirteen, I deceitfully hid her desert saga inside my textbook during class, trying to steal any precious reading time I could find. I was tempted to skip meals, but I didn't; and with a flashlight, I wanted to read underneath the covers late into the night. I simply could not stop devouring The Hiding Place. This early obsession was not a sign of an addiction to romance novels; this was the story of a true heroine. This was the story of a repeat desert bloomer.

Few observers of Corrie ten Boom's early years could have predicted that she was going to be such a glorious desert bloomer. She never married or had children. She and her older sister Betsie were still living at home well into their late forties, and she predictably followed her father into the family business. Corrie's dad owned a small jewelry shop in the Netherlands where he repaired watches and clocks, while his family lived above the store. But, what might not have been easy to recognize on the outside surface of her life was Corrie ten Boom had a thriving love for her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

While some biographer might be tempted to cruelly label Corrie and Betsie old maids, their vibrant faith kept them busy finding ways to flower for God's glory. First, their love for God compelled them to found a weekly Bible class for special needs children; and unintentionally, they met and blessed a tired group of lonely parents in the process. Then, Corrie and Betsie were inspired to start a second class for teenage girls in their neighborhood to learn Christian principles. Through these two different Bible studies, these two career women developed community and fellowship with their neighbors.

Then in 1940, the Nazi's invaded the Netherlands. Corrie and Betsie were ordered to stop their ministry to young people. Corrie could have wrung her hands and cried when she was forced to give up her ministries. Instead, during the spiritual desert of Nazi's occupation, Corrie ten Boom chose to bloom. This unassuming and middle-aged unmarried woman quickly embraced a new clandestine career. With an extensive network of neighbors she knew she could trust, Corrie became the mastermind behind a daring adventure to smuggle Jews out of Haarlem.

Their ancient home above the store was uniquely fashioned for such a twist in the plot. Over the generations the house had been remodeled and added on to, as the growing family needed more space. This unconventional architecture made it difficult to determine from the street how large the house was. Using the cabinets of old Grandfather clocks, the Dutch underground smuggled bricks and mortar into the jewelry store to build a small hiding place behind Corrie's closet that was undetectable, yet big enough for six people.

In two short years, Corrie's hiding place helped over 800 Jews escape the Nazi's reign of terror. Even though Corrie and Betsie were eventually arrested, they never lost a single Jewish person they hid within their home. After their arrest, Corrie and Betsie were sent to Ravensbruck, a Nazi's concentration camp, for their crimes against the Reich. As they were being imprisoned, Corrie was able to smuggle a small Bible into the camp in the folds of her skirt. Huddled at night, in a crowded barrack, filled with fearful women and biting fleas, Corrie and Betsie again chose to bloom as they courageously taught these captive women God's word in a new spiritual desert.

On December 16, 1944, Betsie died because of the harsh physical treatment she experienced at Ravensbruck. With her dying words, she prophesied to Corrie of the near future. "... (We) must tell them that there is no pit so deep that he is not deeper still. They will listen to us Corrie, because we have been here."

One week before all the women her age were sent to the gas chamber, Corrie was released from the camp because of a clerical error. With Betsie's words resounding deep in her spirit, Corrie knew how she wanted to flower next. It wasn't going to be easy without Betsie's help because they had always been a ministry team, but Corrie now knew how God was leading.

As the war came to an end, Corrie moved to create a rehabilitation center for the victims of the concentration camps. She designed a place where the physically, emotionally, and spiritually wounded could recover and be restored. At the same time, she started writing about the spiritual drought she experienced throughout the war. Her central message of recovery was to call victims of the concentration camps to forgive their abusers. Corrie believed our healing was directly tied to forgiving our enemies (Luke 11:2-4).

When her writings unveiled her desert saga to the world, at age 53, Corrie began a speaking ministry. Over the next 33 years, she would blossom again and again as she traveled to 60 countries sharing the life-giving message found in Jesus Christ alone. We see in Corrie ten Boom a woman who was able to consistently flower in scorched dirt.

Repeat arid bloomers like Corrie can continue flowering because they take in nutrition in the off-season. In every desert there are seasons flush with flowers and seasons when succulents are storing nutrients and water, so they can bud again. The off-season is just as important in the desert bloom cycle as the flowering season. Like the water-wise cacti, Corrie ten Boom faithfully collected living waters in her heart years before she was called to courageously lead 800 Jews to safety. Her long-held habit was to pray and read her Bible daily. She also, worshipped with other believers in her home church and devotedly loved her neighbors as herself.

If we are interested in flowering more than once, we will need to begin storing life-giving water now for the next bloom cycles. As we wait on God, much can be accomplished. We too can blossom in desolate times if, as people of integrity, we stock-up on the spiritual fuel necessary when no one is watching except God and the angels.

Repeat bloomers can continue budding in drought conditions because they joyfully anticipate in prayer the next bloom cycle. They know that even though a time of rest is needed between flowering, rest is only a temporary state. Even on Betsie's death bed, the vision for Corrie's next ministry was already taking shape. God had been speaking to Betsie and she knew the lessons they were learning in this desert were not just for themselves. Others were going to benefit from their shared wisdom. Together, while they were still in Ravensbruck, Corrie and Betsie began praying for these distant buds.

Finally, from Corrie ten Boom's drought, we learn repeat desert bloomers can keep flowering because they practice community. Corrie needed her friends and neighbors if she was going to fully blossom (Eph. 2:10). Without her service to her community, she would have never established the relationships of trust with her Bible students' parents. These safe friends allowed her to get rationing cards for food, find hiding places, and smuggle Jews out of Haarlem during the war. After the war, relationships still mattered to Corrie as she worked to restore wounded lives.

Like Corrie, we will only be able to flower in the desert if we practice community. God's desire is for us to live in dependence on him and each other. If we could blossom alone, we would get the glory instead of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-7).

Take a moment and consider your next bloom cycle.

1) What might change if you started practicing community?

I use the word "practice" because sometimes community is difficult to establish. We may need to practice for a time. Often, we are tempted to wait for an actual emergency before we truly desire fellowship. Unfortunately, safe friendships can be hard to find during a season of suffering. Remember that Corrie found community by serving her neighbors.

2) What future bloom cycle could you joyfully begin anticipating through prayer?

For more ideas about blooming in the desert read of Corrie ten Boom's triumph in her book, [The Hiding Place](#).