

# Inspired to forgive



by Barry Robinson

**M**ost people have someone who is an inspiration in their lives—maybe it is a parent, or a teacher, or some charismatic character from the pages of history. One person who has inspired me is Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie was born into a Christian family in Amsterdam in 1892.

When the Netherlands was invaded by the Nazis in 1940, the Christian beliefs of Corrie's family led them to protect Jews and members of the Dutch resistance and, after hiding them within their house, they passed them on to the underground network. It has been estimated that Corrie was involved in saving the lives of 800 people.

Sadly, in February 1944, her family was betrayed, arrested, and taken to prison. From there she and her sister Betsie were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where women prisoners were either used as forced labour or executed. Here the health of Betsie deteriorated, and she died on 16 December 1944. Just fifteen days later, due to a clerical error, Corrie was released. The following week all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers. After a painful journey back to the Netherlands, she was reunited with the surviving members of her family and opened her home to those in need.

In 1947, Corrie had an incredible experience. She went back to

Germany and spoke about God's forgiveness at a church in Munich. She said: "When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever". After her talk, a man approached her and said: "A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" Corrie immediately recognised him as one of her captors and her blood ran cold. He said: "You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk. I was a guard there, but since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein, will you forgive me?"

Corrie recounted that this was one of the most challenging things she had ever been asked to do. Her sister had died in that place, and now an SS officer complicit in her death was standing before her asking for her forgiveness. She who had just been preaching about forgiveness now had the most difficult task of all—to forgive. This is how Corrie describes what happened next:

I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives... [is]...that we [also] forgive those who have injured us... And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And

so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust out my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then. But even then, I realised it was not my love. I had tried and did not have the power. It was the power of [God].

Reading that account, I had to ask myself: "Would I have forgiven this man if I was in Corrie's position?" In a world where there is so much pain, hurt and misery, I've learned that unforgiveness consigns me to that destructive cycle, but forgiveness enables me to be released from that downward spiral. Corrie's life-story has inspired me to realise, that with God's help, I can break free and forgive others.

If there is someone in your life that has hurt you, why not take some time to investigate the same God who helped Corrie forgive?—it might just be the most liberating thing you could do.

This article was inspired by *Tramp for the Lord* by Corrie ten Boom with Jamie Buckingham, a bestseller since its original publication in 1972.