

## Persevering Through Dry Seasons in Prayer

Feelings of devotion or consolation aren't a necessity, but a gift.

*UGOLINO BONISCAMBI, a 14th-century Italian friar, collected and recorded the acts and sayings of the early missionaries who had joined Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226) in his labors to renew the Church of his day. This excerpt comes from "The Sayings of Brother Giles." Giles, also of Assisi (Italy), was one of Francis's first missionary companions, and was known for his holiness, optimism, and deep insight into human nature.*

**B**rother Giles said: "The more grace a man has, the more the devil attacks him. But a man should not on that account stop being guided by grace, because the harder the battle, the greater will his crown be, if he wins."

Then a friar asked him: "What can I do to go willingly to prayer when I feel dry and lacking in devotion?"

He replied: "Suppose a king has two servants, one of whom is armed, but the other is unarmed, and they have to go to war. The one who is armed goes bravely to war, but the other who is unarmed says to his lord: 'My lord, as you see, I have no weapons. But because I love you I will go into battle even without weapons.'

"Now the king on seeing the faithfulness of that servant says to his attendants: 'Go and prepare armor to adorn this faithful servant of mine, and place on him the emblem of my own armor.' So too if someone goes into the battle of prayer as if without arms, because he feels dry and lacking devotion, God sees his faithfulness and places the emblem of His armor on him.

"With temptations [to give up on prayer] it is as sometimes happens to a farmer who sees a forest of trees and briars on a section of his land which he wants to cultivate and sow with grain, but he is exhausted with much labor and sweating and trouble before he can gather any grain there, and at times he is almost sorry he took that job on account of the work and worry it brings him. For, first, he sees the forest that has to be cleared of shrubs—but he sees no grain. Second, he works hard and cuts down the trees and extracts the roots of the trees—but he does not see the grain. Third, he breaks up the soil and prepares it—but he does not see the wheat for which he is working so much. Fourth, he plows the soil again. Fifth, he sows it. Sixth, he weeds it. Seventh, he reaps it. Eighth, he threshes it. And he works very hard at all those things. Ninth, he stores it away with great joy, almost forgetting all the labor because of the rich harvest that he finally obtains from it. And he endures many other labors besides these, and he blesses them all on account of the joy that the sight of the good harvest gives him."

### God doesn't owe us good feelings.

A friar said to him: "A man should feel very sorry when he cannot find in prayer the grace of [feeling] devotion [to God]."



by Ugolino Boniscambi

Brother Giles answered: "If the grindstone of a mill sometimes does not make good flour, the miller does not immediately smash it with a hammer, but he repairs that grindstone slowly and gradually, and afterward it makes good flour. Do likewise yourself, and reflect that you are not at all worthy to receive any [feelings of] consolation from God in prayer. For if someone had lived from the beginning of the world until now and were to live on until the end of the world, and every day while he prayed his eyes shed a dishful of tears, he would not be worthy then at the end of the world that God should give him even one single [feeling] of consolation."

### Temptation is often great while praying.

A friar once asked him: "Why does a man suffer more temptations when he is praying to God than at other times?"

The holy Brother Giles answered him: "When someone has a lawsuit against some opponent in the court of a prince, if that man goes to the prince to suggest that something be done against his opponent, the latter on hearing about it objects with all his power so that the decision should not be given in favor of the former. That is the way the devil acts against us. For if you spend time in conversations with others, you will often see that you do not feel many attacks of temptation. But if you go to pray to refresh your soul, then you will feel the burning arrows of the enemy against you. However, you should not give up prayer on that account, but you should stand firm. Because that is the way to our home above, and he who gives up prayer because of it is like a man who runs away from battle."

### Feelings in prayer are a gift.

Someone said to him: "I see many who seem to have the grace of [feelings of] devotion and tears as soon as they go to pray. But I can hardly feel anything while praying."

Brother Giles replied: "Labor faithfully and devoutly, because the grace that God does not give you at one time He may give you at another time. And what He does not give you another day or one week or month or year, He could give you another day or another week or month or year. Place your labor firmly in God, and God will place His grace in you as it may please Him. A metal worker making a knife strikes many blows on the iron out of which he is making the knife before the knife is finished. But finally the knife is finished with one blow." ♦

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