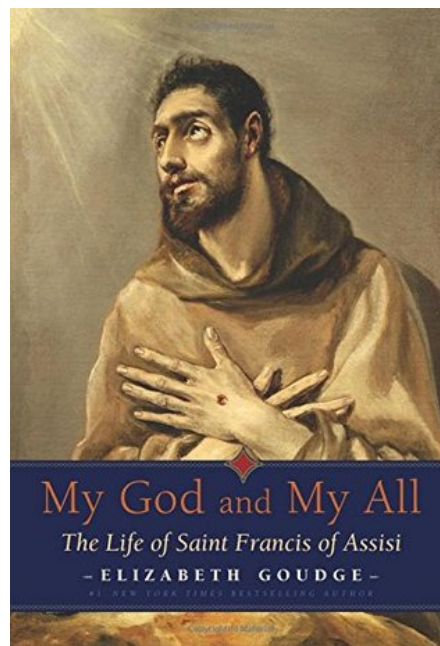




# My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi

*Elizabeth Goudge*

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**My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi** Elizabeth Goudge

**The captivating story** of the world's favorite saint is now retold for a modern audience by one of the great novelists of our time.

**Perhaps more than any other figure in Christian history since Jesus Christ**, Saint Francis of Assisi has captured our imagination, for his is a story of extreme self-sacrifice, of love to God and man. How could this wealthy, handsome youth cast away all the advantages that were his by birth and choose instead a career of poverty and humility? How could he attract members of all strata of society to his mission? And how, when his order became established throughout Europe, could he renounce great personal power and humbly continue his life's work?

**Here is Francis, from his twelfth-century boyhood** to his life as a missionary roaming the very boundaries of the known world. Here too are the men and women who followed him—Bernard de Quintavalle, the rich businessman; Peter Cathanii, the lawyer; Brother Giles, the farmer's son; Lady Clare; and so many others—all drawn together by the personal magnetism and humble faith of their leader, all re-created by bestselling novelist Elizabeth Goudge against a rich medieval canvas.

## My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi Details

Date : Published September 1st 2015 by Plough Publishing House (first published January 1st 1959)

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Author : Elizabeth Goudge

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## From Reader Review My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi for online ebook

### Dan Barnes says

See my review at <http://jdanbarnes.blogspot.com/2015/1...>

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### Gary says

A truly inspirational biography. I learned much from this book. I plan to reread this book yearly.

A full review to follow.

Note: I received this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

I have already purchased 2 more copies as gifts.

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### Mary says

(Goodreads giveaway review)

Let me preface this review with the note that I'm not Catholic.

If I were, I may have given this sweet little book five stars.

I read it as one might read a fairy tale based on real life, which is the tone in which it is written...except much more respectfully and affectionately approached. Historically, there aren't a lot of verifiable facts in the book as far as I could tell, but instead stories about Saint Francis that have been lovingly handed down through the generations as one would transmit oral history about an ancestor through a family; for that, I enjoyed it immensely.

I cannot recommend the book to a broad audience, but instead suggest it to those who have an interest and/or love for this particular faith. I read it mostly in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep, and it was a gently reassuring book that soothed my heart and mind to rest.

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### Tracey says

As always, a wonderful book by a lovely lady. Very well researched. I have found myself reading a lot about saints this year and have enjoyed all of them.

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### Joshua Lawson says

An engaging story, powerful and well-written. If you can look past the legends about Francis and the undue adulation that is often ascribed to him by admirers, you will see a real man who followed in the footsteps of his Lord as few ever have.

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## Angie Fehl says

Perhaps because I grew up in a largely Irish Catholic family, I've always had an academic fascination with the lives of saints. This continues today even though I am not a practicing Catholic. I still find the history of the time periods and the bios of these men and women fascinating. Saint Francis of Assisi is perhaps one of the most recognizable saints, being the patron saint of animals / the environment. Loads of my neighbors have a St Francis shaped statue or bird feeder in their garden. But I can't say I knew much about the man before the sainthood, so I was curious to check out this book (originally written in 1959) by Elizabeth Goudge. I'm familiar with Goudge's name because of her children's story *The Little White Horse*, which J.K. Rowling has said is one of her favorite books, so I was up for trying some of her adult work.

St. Francis of Assisi was born Giovanni Bernardone in 1182 into a family of Italian nobility. He was later nicknamed Francesco, which is how we today come to know him as Francis. By his teens, Francis' hometown was under much political and religious tension. War broke out, and Francis enlisted in the army, being taken into the cavalry unit. Prior to the war, Francis was known to have a very charismatic nature, lively and fun-loving, always craving the spotlight and the finer things in life. Though he was Mr. Popularity then, his mother was the first to call it -- "My son will be a man of God." Not that she was forcing him in that direction, she just somehow seemed to have a mother's intuition that that's the path he would choose.

While enlisted, he and some other soldiers were taken as POWs. He was finally released years later at the age of 22, but his once vibrant self had clearly taken a hit. Not only was he sent home gravely ill from the conditions he was made to live in but he had also witnessed some of his friends tortured, even sometimes killed. Suddenly the bright, shiny things of the world didn't seem so important. Illness, which he survived, and war experience had notably humbled Francis. Where before his germaphobic nature would have him steer clear of his city's homeless, now he sought them out and asked how he could help.

That being said, his transformation from being material-driven to the selfless saint we know today was not overnight. Throughout much of his 20s, he still struggled with letting go of his desire to pursue material luxuries. When it came to his hang-ups with the sick and homeless, he still struggled with his strong aversion to being exposed to foul odors or dirtiness, but ended up forcing himself through a sort of immersion therapy to get him past it. He would swap clothes with beggars to panhandle on the street, much to the shame of his wealthy family; he would kiss the hands of lepers and was even known to once eat out of the same bowl as a leper with bleeding hands. At one point he even lived in a cave for a month. Anything he could think of to more deeply humble himself before his God, he would do. I always find inspiration in reading that even saints had their moments of weakness, those moments of not so noble behavior. It's comforting to be reminded that at the end of the day the best of us are only human. :-)

Francis' father Pietro was stunned and ashamed by his son's behavior. Pietro explained that it's perfectly acceptable and even commendable to be charitable with one's wealth, but to actually be one of the homeless unnecessarily... Pietro found that disgusting. He tried to break Francis of the behavior by locking him in a dungeon, chaining him to the walls underneath the family home for days, sure that the isolation would break Francis of this insane behavior (as Pietro saw it, that is.) Unfortunately for Pietro, his punishment only seemed to strength Francis' resolve. Francis' mother waited until Pietro left the home on business to release Francis, essentially telling him to go with God. Shortly thereafter, Francis made the final step of completely renouncing his family's wealth. Almost immediately after deciding this, Francis found a renewed joy for life

as well as rediscovering his sense of humor. There were still tough days, days of extreme highs and lows -- days where he faced mocking, persecution, and stoning from the townspeople -- but now he was driven by a sense of purpose. Here again, I found inspiration for my own tough days!

Francis' followers began to grow, men seeking his sense of peace, purpose and overall centered spirit. While Francis welcomed them to join him in his journey of spiritual growth and service, he insisted that no one among them put him on a pedestal. Everyone there was to be there, on equal footing, to do God's work. It was by this point in Goudge's book that I started to see some similarities between the life of Francis and that of Siddhartha Buddha. It wasn't only how neither wanted to be put on a pedestal, but also how both seemed to struggle with the feeling of never being humbled enough before their God. An attitude that echoed throughout the actions of Francis' followers as well. They were constantly giving away what few possessions they had, begging to be made even more impoverished to show their sincerity to their mission. There was always something they felt they could give up or a sin, however minor it would seem to us now, that they felt they could atone for.

I especially felt for the story of Sister Clare, the first woman to be taken into Francis' inner circle. She later developed the Sisterhood of the Poor Clares. Sister Clare was also born into a noble family, but upon hearing about the work of Francis, knew she wanted to dedicate herself to working with him. She wanted to serve God the same way the Franciscan brothers did, but even when her motive was something as selfless as dedicating her life to serving her community, she was still blocked in some ways simply because she was a woman. She was made to be of service as an "enclosed nun", meaning she was not allowed on the same kinds of pilgrimages the Franciscan brothers would take. While it wasn't exactly the life she had in mind, she idolized Francis and was dedicated to him and his cause her entire life.

Back to Francis, this book doesn't get much into his tie to animals (at least not until we get to chapter 12 of 20), though today we know him as the patron saint of critters. It does describe him having a love of nature in general, but I'm still curious as to what set him aside from anyone else having a love of animals, that he was chosen as the saint to rep them. This book also enlightened me on the years Francis spent in the Crusades, something I had never heard about before. As it turns out, he spent a good chunk of time involved in the Crusades, even taking time out to pilgrimage to Jerusalem during one Christmas season. What bummed me out was reading how he returned to his order to find the two guys he left in charge trying to make major rule changes for the whole house. This caused a rift in the house, some wanting to go with the new rules, some remaining fiercely loyal to Francis and what he had built from the ground up. Francis had become severely ill on his journey back and was, in fact, too weakened to deal with this BS on his own. He petitioned the Vatican for some help and thankfully got some papal representation to mediate the situation.

Biographies can sometimes have a tendency to run a little dry, so I was thankful that Goudge took the "write it like a novel" approach to this work. She's not making anything up but the pace flows nicely in the style that a good novel would. The majority of this biography was actually a four star read for me, but after about 3/4 of the way in, there were some parts that did start to drag a wee bit. Still a solid bio though, I thought.

The couple small issues I had with the writing: 1) It doesn't always feel like it flows in a perfectly chronological order. For instance, sometimes she would mention a person up to their death, but then try to go back and mention something else they did a few years before but write it in a way as if she hadn't just talked about their passing, almost like she remembered that she forgot and tried to slip it in there anyway. That got confusing in parts. 2) The other thing that created confusion for me was how Goudge would use the female pronouns "she" or "her" for damn near everything -- women, cities, structures. To the point where I constantly found myself flipping back and forth thinking "wait, who are we talking about now?" only to soon decipher that she was talking about a building. I understand using the pronoun here and there for things like boats, vehicles, etc. but here it felt frequent enough to give me a headache trying to keep it straight.

FTC Disclaimer: Handlebar Publishing kindly sent me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

The opinions above are entirely my own.

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## Julius McCarter says

Elizabeth Goudge's biography, *My God and My All: The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* is a classic now brought back to life by Plough Publishing. Goudge, of course, is most remembered as an English novelist and children's writer. Her *Little White Horse* was among my favorite stories as a little boy. So I was excited to see this biography of St. Francis come back into print.

It takes a novelist's imagination to accomplish what Goudge gave us in *My God and My All*: She scours the academic writing and the primary sources, and brings a living, breathing saint to life -- someone whose revolutions, according to this book, saved the Church. And I think she's right.

Francis is among the saints -- those who are the "true makers" of our humanity, as Goudge puts it in the early pages of the book. "By emptying themselves, by getting rid of self altogether, they become the channels of God's creative power and by Him, thru them, we are made." She brings Francis' goodness -- which is to say God's grace -- to the forefront of the story on every page. "Looking at him we see what it means to be a Christian, and what it costs. His story is not only endearing; it is terrifying."

It's "terrifying", though, precisely because *My God and My All* paints the picture of a real man, whose work was among the first to care for lepers. His ordinary life is a life totally devoted to God, one in which he gave everything to God -- including the riches of his early life -- and in living in absolute poverty found a richness that can only be found in God's grace.

So Francis is a challenge to us. That's what makes this story so "terrifying".

Make no doubt about it, *My God and My All* is not a book you walk away from without being brought face-to-face with the question that Jesus asked of Francis: "Will you mend my Church?"

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I received a free copy of this book from Plough Publishing in exchange for my honest review here.

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## Amanda Himes says

Inspiring account of a man who denied himself and daily took up his cross to follow Christ. My favorite stories from St. Francis' life: the savage and half-starved wolf he talked into leaving the townspeople alone, whose skeleton is buried in a cathedral in Italy; the widow Frangipani aka Brother Giacomina, whom Francis allowed to come in behind the hedge (normally reserved only for the brothers of his order) when he was dying to receive the wool shroud and almond cake she had made for him; also Francis' boldness in going to witness to the Muslim commander during a cease-fire in the Crusade battle for Damietta, in Egypt, who was so impressed that he gave Francis a free pass to see the pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land--usually Christians had to pay to see these. The story of Francis sharing a meal with a leper, whose blood intermingled with the food they were eating, is gag-worthy and impressive in equal measure. St. Francis' countless nights of little

sleep and much prayer are the cornerstones of his life's work, though, more than his healings, preaching, or even stigmata.

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### **Carmen Hinkey says**

amazing on so many levels. Beautifully written, but then I'm a Goudge fan, and completely convicting at the same time.

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### **Joan says**

This is a classic biography of St. Francis of Assisi, originally published over fifty years ago. Like many, I had heard of the man but knew little about him. I liked Goudge's account of his life. Her research was extensive as she writes like we are there. Francis thought that one could not be a true follower of Christ without in some way living in poverty. It was interesting to read of his odd (to us) behavior of giving away everything. He talked to a wolf and convinced it to live in harmony with the town he was ready to attack. He shared the gospel with the sultan when on a crusade. His was an interesting life but also an inspiration. You can see my complete review at <http://bit.ly/1PHSDFL>. I received a complimentary copy of this book through Handlebar for the purpose of an independent and honest review.

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### **Dee says**

I read this book originally when I was in high school in the 1960's. It is so well written that as a teenager, I was very inspired with St. Francis. I read it at least twice if not three times in those years. Then as an adult, teaching religious education, I went looking for it again. Elizabeth Goudge is a great novelist, but when she wrote this non-fiction biography, she said it was a work of love.

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### **Lucy Casey says**

I had many preconceived notions about St Francis of Assisi, but this book changed them all. Now I feel like I know him intimately. I highly recommend this book!

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### **Ellen Christian says**

A book was provided for my review.

My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi is written as a story by the novelist Elizabeth Goudge who was a New York Times best selling author. Sometimes religious history books can be a bit dry and difficult to follow – at least that has been my experience. My God and My All: The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi is anything but. Elizabeth Goudge knows how to tell a story that's easy to follow and interesting.

Like a story, the author tells Saint Francis' life as though she were there. She created this story based on her own research, and if you want, you can continue your reading about his life by looking at the list at the end of the book. I love that Elizabeth Goudge wrote this so your average person could learn more about Saint Francis. If you're looking for facts for a paper, I would definitely recommend you continue with the referenced readings for more information.

I'd definitely recommend this for anyone who wants more of an insight into Saint Francis' life.

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