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# FOLKS Like Us

DEMAS

“My Biggest Obstacle to Spiritual Growth”

Timeless truths from our ancient past,  
for a journey with God in the modern era.

**Fran Sciacca**



## “Folks Like Us” — an introduction

Over the years I’ve written and published a number of Bible studies that collectively have sold well over a half-million copies. They were forged, most of them, in the furnaces of pain, doubt, and loneliness. Maybe that’s why they were well-used, they touched people where they hurt most.

Recently, my publisher decided that they no longer wanted to handle the books that contained these 60 or so individual studies. So, I’ve decided to make them available to any who might benefit from them. At no cost.

I have always believed that because God thought it best to become human in the Incarnation, that perhaps “incarnational truth” was His preferred method of revealing Himself and His purposes to us. I suppose that’s where the basic genre of these studies originated. I wanted to provide believers with Bible studies rooted in our ancestral past. The lives of men and women, who it turns out, are “folks just like us” in so many ways.

So, please take your time and work slowly through as many of these studies as you care to do... there’s a lot of them! And may God use the combination of the struggles and insights of your *ancient* brothers and sisters, combined with those of mine, your modern brother, to help you in your spiritual journey. That is the goal of this project.

Warmly in The Lamb,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fran Sciacca". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fran Sciacca  
Birmingham, AL

# DEMÁS

## “My Biggest Obstacle to Spiritual Growth”

**A**BIDING PRINCIPLE – On the pathway that leads to Christlikeness, perhaps our biggest obstacle is the very thing that God seeks to "put to death" in the process—our *own* sinful nature.

*"The human heart, even the redeemed heart, has an allergy to God."*

—Richard Lovelace

**T**he apostle Paul rarely traveled alone. He wisely used his itinerant, often chaotic lifestyle as a grand classroom without walls. Those who accompanied him were exposed to every facet of missionary life in the first century. A few of his fortunate companions experienced firsthand the thrill of hearing Paul address philosophers on Mars Hill. Others saw him severely beaten and flogged after healing a suffering slave girl. Later, they heard him singing hymns in the jails of Philippi. His “fellow workers” heard him preach, watched him work, and saw him write. Names like Titus, Timothy, Luke, Silas, and Tychicus appear with familiarity in his letters. "Paul and his companions" is a rich phrase in the pages of the New Testament. And his intentions were consistent: to model the Christian life before the eyes of those beside him with the goal of seeing them give *their* lives to the same gospel.

Most of the names associated with Paul did move on to successful ministry. At least one, however, stands like a lone, stark scarecrow in the pages of God's Word. The decision this man made serves as a warning to any who want God to transform them to be more like Jesus. That man's name is Demas. For at least six years he traveled with Paul. He even stood faithfully by his side during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome. Demas knew that hardship, persecution, and difficulty await all who choose to follow God. He also was well acquainted with God's supernatural power and enabling grace to stand strong when called to suffer. But Demas seemed to have greatly underestimated one of the most potent enemies of God. For this reason, we should have a sober awareness with the outcome of this man's life; for there is a measure of "Demas" in each of us.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Romans 7

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### STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. What portrait of his relationship with Luke and Demas does Paul paint in the following passages?
  - a. Philemon 24 –
  - b. Colossians 4:14 –
  - c. 2 Timothy 4:10-11 –

2. Read Matthew 27:46 and 2 Timothy 4:10,16. The Greek word used to describe the desertion of Demas and friends, and Jesus' cry from the cross when He felt forsaken by the Father is the *same*. Using the experience of Jesus as insight, summarize Paul's statement about Demas.
  
3. The word translated "*this present age*" or "*this life*" in Matthew 13:22 and Ephesians 1:21 is the same word that is translated "*world*" in 2 Timothy 4:10. These other verses shed light on the dark side of Demas. What was he actually "in love" with?
  
4. Read Romans 7:18 and James 1:13-15. From what you can see in these two passages, was "the world" the major problem facing Demas? Explain.
  
5. In your own words, summarize what the following passages tell you about your sinful nature:
  - a. Jeremiah 13:23 –
  
  - b. Jeremiah 17:9 –
  
  - c. Romans 7:15 –
  
  - d. Romans 7:17 –
  
  - e. Romans 8:6-7
  
  - f. Romans 8:8 –
  
  - g. Romans 8:13 –
  
  - h. Galatians 5:17 –

i. Galatians 6:8 –

j. James 4:1 –

k. 1 Peter 2:11 –

6. From these same verses, what can you conclude about your *natural* disposition to cooperate with God in His desire to conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ?
7. Look up Colossians 3:5-10. The first verb Paul uses here ("*put to death*") is a very strong word that includes both aggressive action *and* a sense of urgency. It could reasonably be translated, "*utterly slay at once!*" Compare Paul's command to the Colossians with the statement Jesus made about dealing with sin in Matthew 5:29-30. What insight do these two passages provide regarding your spiritual progress?
8. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul utilizes more warfare language to instruct us about our spiritual growth. What further insights can you gain from these verses?

There's some encouragement in these verses as well. What do you see in them that is encouraging?

9. Look at the following passages for other word pictures Paul uses to portray the process of spiritual growth in our lives. Isolate the metaphor and briefly explain how each paints the image of a "struggle."
- a. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 –
- b. Galatians 5:7 –
- c. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 –

10. Briefly summarize what you've discovered about the relationship between what God wants to do regarding your spiritual transformation and growth, and the condition of your own heart.

## LOOKING BACK...

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The apostle Paul paints a portrait of the process of spiritual transformation that hardly personifies the peaceful life of a shepherd. Instead, he depicts our growth and life as believers as a relentless battle or long-distance race—replete with both foes and warcraft. And the clear message about this combat includes the fact that it is lifelong, intense, and vital. God Himself is intimately involved, and His goal is that each of His children increasingly resembles His Son. Perhaps the most sobering but inescapable truth about this warfare is that our worst "enemy" is our own sin nature! An abiding residue of Adam exists in each one of us. It tempts us continually, seeking to push back and undo what God has done. And it prevents us from making any further progress toward Christlikeness. Understanding that this is real, is critical.

If we mistakenly see our redemption as totally finished in this life, we face two fearful possibilities: One is to underestimate the power of our sinful nature. The other is to wander the way of Demas on the low road of dead-end pursuits. We must know the nature of the battle, but more importantly, we must understand and embrace God's strategy, one that will enable us to be "more than conquerors."

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. In Philippians 3:10-20, Paul explores and explains the subject of *his own* transformation. Read it carefully several times, and then answer the following questions.
  - a. What is Paul's passion (vs. 10) –
  - b. How does Paul define this spiritual transformation in verses 12 and 14?
  - c. Does it appear that a "partnership" exists between you and God in all this? Explain.
  - d. A popular excuse when it comes to dealing with things in our lives is to say "I'm working on it." Do you see Paul "working on" his sin in this passage? Explain your answer.
  - e. What does Paul say is the mark of a *mature* Christian in this passage? What do you think he means by that?

- f. Do you see any connection in this passage between *you* pursuing Christlikeness and *God* revealing sin to you? Explain.
2. God provides some very clear insights in Hebrews 12:1-3 concerning spiritual progress, to help keep us from going the way of Demas. What is God's solution? What do you think it would look like for you to personally live this out?
3. When the people in the following passages gained a clearer vision of God, what did it do to their understanding of *themselves*?
- a. Job 42:1-6 –
- b. Isaiah 6:1-5 –
- c. Revelation 1:9-17 –
4. Why do you think it's so vital that we have a clear and accurate understanding of God for who He is, as we seek to grow to be more like Christ?
5. According to John 17:17, what appears to be one of God's primary tools of growth into Christlikeness?

How is your *answer* to question 5 related to your answer to question 4?

6. There are some additional principle about spiritual transformation in Romans 8:12-13. What do you see there?
7. When you think of your own spiritual progress in the past, has your approach been to "work on" sin in your life, or to "press on" to be more like Jesus? Explain.



8. Colossians 3:5-17 contains a classic description of the war we wage with our sinful nature. Paul uses a metaphor of putting on or taking off clothes in regard to our “old” nature and our “new” nature as believers. List the sins of the flesh under the heading "Face in the Mirror." Under the column "Son of God," devise a word or phrase that is the *opposite* of what you have in the left column (don't feel limited to the passage for your wording in the right column).

“Face in the Mirror”

“Son of God”

9. Prayerfully study *both sides* of your list, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you an aspect of your life where your sin nature needs to be "clothed" with Christlikeness. Then, write a brief prayer of repentance and hopeful trust that Jesus will enable you to become more like Him in this area.

### **SCRIPTURE MEMORY** (optional)

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- The condition of my heart- Jeremiah 17:9
- The fight and its goal- Philippians 3:12