

Thank you for your interest in the “*Folks Like Us*” Bible studies by Fran Sciacca. Whether you’re using them for your own spiritual growth and journey, or as a resource for your small group, Sunday school, or homeschool program, you’ll soon discover why these studies originally sold over 600,000 copies in their print editions. The recent decision by the publisher to discontinue print editions and to return the publishing rights back to Fran has given him the freedom to make the nearly 70 individual character studies available to you...at no cost.

Before you make copies and use the studies...

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- **[DONATIONS]** – Although there is no charge for the studies, feel free to make a non-deductible donation to help offset the annual cost of web-hosting, etc. at: [paypal.me/handsofthur](https://www.paypal.me/handsofthur)
- **[QUESTIONS/COMMENTS]** – Email them to: information@fransciacca.com

Other great resources on fransciacca.com

Now that you’ve begun to explore the Bible study resources developed by Fran Sciacca, you will almost certainly benefit from the other things that he has made available:

- **“*The Road to Shalom*” podcast** – thought-provoking and thoroughly biblical, Fran explores what the Bible calls “shalom,”—the way things are *supposed* to be in God’s Kingdom, why they’re not, and how to restore them. All three seasons are available on the website.
- ***Biblical literacy courses*** – Three, 13-week Bible courses covering the entire Bible. Includes individual course books, audio, and optional animated slide supplements. Course books and animated slide supplements may be purchased on the web store.
- **“*What’s Wrong With the World?*”** – A 14-part video series exploring the questions, “*What is the gospel, and does it really matter?*” and “*What is a disciple, and what does one look like?*” Each episode includes a small group handout as well as supplemental leader’s notes. You may take the series for a “test drive” and purchase the series.
- **“*Knot or Noose? - Recovering the Mystery of Marriage*”** – A 9-part video series for singles, engaged, or married couples exploring marriage from a radical perspective. Instead of trying to figure out how to get God into marriage, this series will guide you into how to place marriage into the center of the larger redemptive plan of God. This conference has been presented live throughout the U.S. in a multitude of different settings. Each episode includes everything needed for a small group. You may take the series for a “test drive” and order the series.



FOLKS Like Us

ESTHER

“Seeing your life as a means and not an end.”

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

ESTHER

“Seeing our life as a means and not an end.”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The lives of committed believers are inseparably wedded to the purposes of God. This means we must be alert for the spiritual opportunities that lie just beneath the surface of our circumstances. Our lives are a means for God's work, not an end in themselves.

“Life is a mission. Every other definition of life is false, and leads all who accept it astray.” — Giuseppe Mazzini

In fulfillment of Jeremiah's warnings, Jerusalem was destroyed and most of its inhabitants carried off to Babylon early in the 6th century B.C. During their seventy-year exile, the Jews heard countless stories of political intrigue and suspense as nations flourished and fell. They watched the Persians overthrow their captors, the Babylonians. The Jews were undoubtedly astonished and overjoyed when Cyrus, the Persian king, issued an edict allowing them to return to Jerusalem to begin the arduous task of rebuilding their lives, beginning with the center of their nation: the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Book of Esther tells a story that takes place between the accounts of two migrations of Jews back to Jerusalem, which are recorded in the Book of Ezra. In it, a young Jewish beauty finds her own world reeling in the capital city of Susa, Persia. One day she's an orphan, the next she's queen of the most powerful empire on the planet! It has all the classic elements of a fairy-tale script—except one: this is real!

Esther learns that for those who love and serve the God of the Bible, there are no coincidences—only choices.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Read the Book of Esther in one sitting (if possible)

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. What can you discern about Esther from Esther 2:10,15,20?

How might a character quality such as this be of great significance in the life of someone who loves God?

2. The entire book of Esther pivots on the last half of what Mordecai's said in 4:14. What exactly is he getting at here?

If Mordecai was correct, what was God's purpose in what happened in 2:8-17? Explain.

3. Mordecai wanted Esther not to confuse the means with the end when it comes to life's circumstances. Why is this such good timeless counsel?

4. Look at the five groups of Scripture passages below. In the space beneath each of them, write out what God really wanted to *accomplish* (the "end") and how He went about it (the "means").

| The Means | The End |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Genesis 37:12-13, 23,28 | Genesis 41:39-41; 42:1-2 |
| 1 Samuel 17:17-19 | 1 Samuel 17:26; 17:40 - 18:2 |
| Luke 2:1-5 | Matthew 2:1-6 |
| John 4:4-7 | John 4:28-30, 39-42 |
| Acts 6:1-5 | Acts 6:12-15; 7:54 - 8:1 |

5. Reflect on these five accounts of God's means and ends from question 4. What truth for your *own* life can you distill regarding you as an individual and the overall plans of God?

6. Some critics believe that the Book of Esther should not be in the Bible because God is *never* once named in the book, even though there are nearly 200 references to the King of Persia! Look at Psalm 77:19. How do you see the truth of that verse illustrated repeatedly in the Book of Esther?

7. In the Old Testament, one of the words translated "ways" means "a journey, a path, a way of life." What are two truths about God's "ways" that you can see from the two verses below?

Isaiah 55:8-9 and Psalm 103:7

8. Take some time right now and reflect on your "station" in life as it relates to status, job, geographical location, financial profile, "network," etc. Do you think you *where* you are as a result of God "putting" you there for a reason, or because He has merely let you have your own way? Explain.

Of what value or service would you say you are to Him right where you are?

Have there been any instances in the past that were opportunities for *you* to be an "Esther" that you either missed or ignored? Explain.

Have there been any instances in the past that were opportunities for you to be an "Esther" that you saw as opportunities and responded? Explain.

Are there any instances right now that are opportunities for you to be an "Esther"? Explain.

9. Have you thought of who and where you are, and what you do, as either an "end" or a "means"? If an end, explain what that end is. If only a means, what would you say the end then is?
10. Do you need to reaffirm your availability to God's purposes, or ask Him for insight to "see" His footprints in the path of your present journey? Perhaps you need to ask His forgiveness for confusing the "means" and "end" of your life's circumstances. Thoughtfully write out a prayer expressing your present desires in this whole area, date the prayer, and put it in your Bible as a reminder.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- God's "program" versus mine – Isaiah 55:8-9
- My perspective versus others' perspectives – Genesis 50:18-20

OPTIONAL

Think back over your life. How many specific situations can you think of where it is now possible to see God's "footprints" all along the way. Take one of those situations and contact another person who was involved. Express to that person your gratitude to God for what He did during that time.