

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

EZRA

“Loving The Window of God’s Word”

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

EZRA

“Loving The Window of God’s Word”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – People who are unfamiliar with the Word of God will eventually be unfamiliar with God Himself. To know God intimately we need to be familiar with what He has said about Himself.

“Scripture is like a pair of spectacles which dispels the darkness and gives us a clear view of God.”
–John Calvin

During the fifth century before Christ, three leading thinkers of history were making their mark: Buddha was living in India, Confucius in China, and Socrates in Greece. Most people are familiar with these names. But during that same time, there lived in Babylon a rather insignificant Jewish scholar who left a very significant legacy and example. His name was Ezra, the son of Seraiah.

After seventy years of exile in Babylon, God was finally allowing those who wanted to from among His people, to return to Jerusalem to begin the enormous task of rebuilding their devastated homeland and lives. Ezra was among the second of three migrations of Jews to do so. But when he arrived, he found that the first group had rebuilt the Temple, but that the *spiritual* lives of the people were in a state of disarray. Ezra's familiarity with and commitment to the Hebrew scriptures had crafted him to be the perfect agent of revival and spiritual reform. He demonstrates forever that what the world desperately needs is *not* new thinkers. It needs people to pay attention to the thoughts and words of God they already have.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Read the entire book of Ezra in a single sitting. Then read chapters 7-10 a second time.

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. What is the phrase used to describe God's dealings with Ezra in 7:6 and 7:9? In your own words, what do you think this most likely means?
2. Ezra 7:9-10 is an excellent summary of the resume of Ezra's life and character. Do you see a necessary connection between verses nine and ten? Explain.
3. The phrase "devoted himself" (NIV) in 7:10 can be also be translated, "set his heart on...." It means to establish, make firm, or set up something. What were the three things that Ezra had "set his heart" to *do* regarding the Word of God?

4. Look up the verses below, and write out a brief statement from each about what it has to say regarding the *benefit* of being familiar with God's Word.
 - a. Romans 15:4 –
 - b. Acts 17:11 –
 - c. Psalm 119:45 (see John 8:32) –
 - d. Psalm 119:11 –
 - e. Psalm 119:98 –
 - f. Matthew 4:1-4 –
 - g. Hebrews 4:12 –
 - h. Deuteronomy 32:46-47 –
5. Look up Jeremiah 15:16 and Luke 24:32. These verses speak of the attitude of true believers toward Scripture. Would you say these verses are an accurate description of your *own* heart right now? Explain.
6. According to Jeremiah 9:23-24, what should be our central *goal* be, in seeking to become more familiar with God's Word?
 - a. There are some motives for *not* reading the Bible that are very unflattering. E. Paul Hovey said, "*Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself but because it contradicts them.*" The Bible is an expression of God's perspective and His will. How do you think should His will relate to your choices?

7. J. I. Packer made a powerful statement about the place of Scripture in our daily lives, *"Disregard the study of God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life, blindfolded as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you."* In what ways can you see where God has guided your life and decisions as a result of His Word?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- The imperative of knowing God's Word – Psalm 119:9,11
- The purpose of knowing God's Word – John 5:39-40

OPTIONAL

All 176 verses of Psalm 119 are about God's Word. They are arranged in 8-verse segments. Read one segment a day for 22 days, and keep a journal about what strikes you regarding what God has to say about His Word.