

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.

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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

GIDEON

“Does God Love Cracked Pots?”

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

GIDEON

“Does God Love Cracked Pots?”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – On the path toward Christlikeness, our weaknesses may be more useful to God than our strengths. What *we* dislike and want to alter or disguise often turns out to be the very part of us that God will use to bring glory to Himself.

“God created the world out of nothing, and so long as we are nothing, He can make something out of us.”
—Martin Luther

During the window of time between the death of Joshua and the rise of Israel's first king, Saul, God's people weathered a tumultuous period of sin and apostasy. For several hundred years, God held the nation together by twelve individuals, collectively known as "the judges." Out of this distinct dozen, a judge named Gideon became a hero and legend because of his masterful military accomplishments. He was a man of great valor.

However, a more significant quality in Gideon's life is often overlooked because it's not a characteristic that is much esteemed in the modern world. In fact, we'd assign it to the category of undesirable traits. Gideon had an acute awareness of his family's *insignificance* in Israel. He also assessed and admitted his own personal weaknesses as issues he couldn't change. Yet Gideon was clearly God's man to lead the nation into battle. As our heavenly Father tirelessly works to conform us to the image of His Son, we will discover that, like Gideon, sometimes the things we want to hide about ourselves may be more useful to God than our talents and strengths.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Judges 6-7

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. What conclusions can you draw about Gideon's faith from the following passages?
 - a. Judges 6:12-13 –
 - b. Judges 6:14-15 –
 - c. Judges 6:16-17 –
 - d. Judges 6:36-40 –
2. What evidence emerges from the passages on the following page to prove that God is not disappointed with Gideon's difficulty in trusting Him?

- a. Judges 6:17-22 –
 - b. Judges 6:36-40 –
 - c. Judges 7:9-15 –
3. Read Judges 7:2-7. What does God ask Gideon to do in light of his confession that his clan was "weak" and that he was "least." What do you think might be going on in Gideon's mind and why? What impact do you think reducing the size of Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 had on his sense of competency for this task?
 4. Look at Isaiah 42:8 and Isaiah 48:10-11. What do you discover about *God's* requirements regarding the "success" of His servants?
 - a. Do you see God upholding this principle in Gideon's life and ministry (Judges 6:16; 7:2)? Explain.
 5. The apostle Paul clearly understood God's passion for His own glory. But he also perceived something much more profound regarding *our* relative weakness in the face of *God's* power and splendor. Read Paul's description of himself in 2 Corinthians 12:2-10 and answer the following questions.
 - a. How did God graciously deal with Paul's tendency to boast about his spiritual life?
 - b. Looking on, would you consider God's solution a strength or a weakness in Paul's life? Explain your answer.
 - c. What was God's answer and explanation to Paul when he asked that this be removed from his life?

- d. Explain what you think God was “saying” in His comment to Paul in verse 9 (note that the word "weakness" here refers more accurately to what is *lacking* than what is present).
 - e. Who received the greater benefit from this arrangement, God or Paul? Explain your answer.
6. In light of Paul's comments in 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 and 4:10-11, what can you discern about *his* thoughts about personal weaknesses and the things that revealed them to the world?
7. The "power" that God spoke of in 2 Corinthians 4:7 reveals itself in different forms in the following verses. Summarize what this power produces in each instance:
- a. Luke 4:14 –
 - b. Luke 9:1 –
 - c. Acts 1:8 –
 - d. Acts 6:8 –
 - e. Romans 1:16 –
 - f. Romans 15:13 –
 - g. Ephesians 3:16-19 –
 - h. Ephesians 3:20 –
 - i. Colossians 1:10-12 –

8. What insight do you see in Isaiah 57:15 that clarifies *why* weakness (rather than strength and self-confidence) is necessary for this power to be manifested in us?

LOOKING BACK...

When it comes to spiritual progress and growth, our natural tendency is to usurp glory from God. It may be quiet and confined, or it may be boisterous and obvious; either way, we seem drawn to the spotlight when it comes to spirituality. For some of us, the audience may be limited to the face in the mirror. But God knows *all of us* well enough to know that we prefer to take credit for what He's done. In Gideon's case, God simply stacked the odds so high that—combined with Gideon's own hesitancy—it became an inescapable conclusion that the hand of God had secured the military victory.

With us, however, God often resorts to more natural things: personal weaknesses and incompetencies that we work hard to hide or eliminate. We pour over online searches, read books, attend seminars, and seek professional and medical counsel in our effort to weed out weaknesses. But God hasn't changed. He will not give His glory to another. Rather than seeking to hide or rid ourselves of certain non-sinful tendencies or physical characteristics we might not like, perhaps we should ask God to let His power rest upon us *in spite of* them. In fact, as these "thorns" propel us to depend on God the way Paul did, we may actually learn to perceive them as God's "tools" in our spiritual progress.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Each of the following passages describes a faithful believer who was called to a specific service. List the person's name, the perceived "weakness" that person believed would prevent him or her from being useful to God, and God's response.

	Name	Weakness	God's Response
Exodus 4:10-11 –			
Jeremiah 1:6-9 –			
Daniel 10:16-18 –			
Amos 7:14-15 –			
2 Corinthians 3:5 –			

2. Jeremiah 9:23-24 is an excellent exposé of the various grounds we find for "boasting." Substitute words to put them in modern terms, and list how they appear in our world and in our lives today. Give specific and personal examples, if you can.

3. What do 1 Corinthians 1:25-29 and Luke 16:15 teach about the difference between *God's* perspective and ours on the topic of perceived strengths and weaknesses?

4. Paul provides some very sound counsel on this subject in Romans 12:3. Read the verse several times and then answer the questions below.
 - a. List some areas of your life where you tend to "think of yourself more highly" than you should. (Be honest—this might exist in only your thought life.)

 - b. List some areas of your life where you think "lowly" of yourself; areas where you feel inadequate or weak compared to other people.

5. From both lists, which ones do you think God can use most in your life to make you more like Jesus? List them and give an explanation, based on what you've learned in this chapter.

6. Use the chart below to do a "self-audit" on how you feel and behave in your life:
 yes no I am honestly grateful for my weaknesses.
 yes no I honestly hate my weaknesses and want to eliminate them.
 yes no I prefer my strengths and seek to improve them.
 yes no I talk about my weaknesses in a derogatory manner.
 yes no I am confident about my strengths.
 yes no I frequently experience the power of God in my life.
 yes no I frequently feel powerless and useless to God.

7. Look over your answers above and review your work in this study. Summarize *what you've learned* about each of the following areas:
 - a. My prior convictions about weaknesses in general.

 - b. My prior convictions about *your own* weaknesses in particular.

- c. My prior convictions about the power of God.
 - d. God's perspective on personal weaknesses.
 - e. Where weaknesses fit into God's transforming purposes for my life
8. Is there anything that you've been "working on" in your life that God may want you to instead accept and even thank Him for? If so, write it out in a prayer of repentance and faith that God will mature your perspective. Then cease to strive!
9. Is there an activity or ministry that the Lord may want you to do that you've let others do because you didn't feel you had the strength or talents? Ask God to lead you. You may want to ask a friend if he or she perceives areas of usefulness in your life that you've previously ignored. Then act on that advice.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- "Cracked pots" can give glory to God - 2 Corinthians 4:7
- Weakness as a conduit of power - 2 Corinthians 12:9