

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

HANNAH

“Coping with criticism.”

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,



Fran Sciacca
Birmingham, AL

HANNAH

“Coping with criticism.”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The best way to deal with the verbal abuse and harsh criticism of others is to talk about it...with God.

“Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down.” — Ulrike Ruffert

It is sometimes difficult to say which hurts more: physical or verbal abuse. At least when someone hits you, your *body* responds by bleeding, swelling, or bruising. There is some evidence so that others can see that you've truly been hurt. But the damage words leave provides no obvious indication of injury. In fact, the real damage done by harsh words often shows up long after they were actually said.

This painful process is accentuated when the verbal assaults are regular and continual. It is overwhelming indeed to have to face someone day after day who makes it their life duty to be verbally harsh, critical, and exasperating.

Such was the case with Hannah, the barren wife of a man named Elkanah. Unfortunately for Hannah, Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who happened to be as fertile as the Jordan Valley! It would have been bad enough for Hannah to have to share her husband in a home where the sound of children's voices was a steady reminder of her own childlessness. But poor Hannah also had to put up with constant harassment from "her rival." Peninnah "provoked her till she wept and would not eat." Instead of her home being a place of dignity and solace, Hannah's was one of torment and humiliation.

Yet, her godly way of handling the constant verbal onslaught stands forever in the pages of scripture as a sterling reminder that knowing God can make all the difference in the face of life's criticism and humiliation.

KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. How serious would you say Hannah's hurt was? Support your response from the passage.
2. What evidence can you find in this story that points to the fact that Peninnah's actions and words were intentional and malicious?

3. In what ways do you think her husband actually added to Hannah's pain rather than alleviating it (1 Samuel 1:4-8)?

4. When we are wounded by the words of others, our greatest temptation is to talk about our hurt or malign the reputation of the one inflicting it. What does Hannah do? Why is this so significant?

5. How can you best explain 1 Samuel 1:18, considering that nothing tangible has changed and Hannah will be returning to the same home with the same people and problems?

6. Look at Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Omitting her references to childbirth, find several statements that refer to God's character and ultimate justice. List them in the charts below.

STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD

VERSES

STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF GOD	VERSES

STATEMENTS ABOUT ULTIMATE JUSTICE

VERSES

STATEMENTS ABOUT ULTIMATE JUSTICE	VERSES

LEARNING FROM HANNAH...

Any person whose condition is described with the words "bitterness of soul," "misery," and "great anguish and grief" is not experiencing just a bad day on the job! Hannah was wounded and crushed by the continual harassment of people in her own home. Her husband added insult to injury by not restraining the woman who attacked her daily. Elkanah

offered Hannah gifts and sought to take her mind off her pain rather than talking to her openly and sensitively about it.

The only solace Hannah found was in the presence of the Lord, pouring out her complaint to Him in the temple. And even there she was falsely accused by Eli the priest of being drunk!

While it is true that Hannah desperately wanted a son and begged God for one, it is also true that when she left to return to Ramah, she had no assurance of an answer from God, only the blessing of Eli, which was little more than a perfunctory benediction.

Hannah's comfort and encouragement came from "*pouring out [her] soul to the LORD...out of [her] great anguish and grief.*" It was by spending time in God's presence that she regained the strength to face Peninnah. And in so doing, Hannah not only had the strength to face the next day, she set the course for those of us today who find ourselves in similar circumstances of inner pain.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS...

1. In general, would you say the way *you* talk to others is characterized by criticism or sarcasm, or by healing and encouragement? Explain.
2. Who is the "Peninnah" in *your* life right now? (Perhaps you are the person most critical of yourself.) How does your response to this person compare with Hannah's?

What can you think of that needs to change? What needs to continue, and perhaps even increase?

3. Perhaps you are acting like a "Peninnah" to someone else. If so, write out, as best you can, how you should treat this "Hannah" in your life. Describe what needs to change, and what you could do as a first step.

What needs to change:

What your first step will be:

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- Dealing with criticism – 1Peter2:23
- Speaking constructively – Ephesians 4:29