

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

JOHN THE BAPTIZER
“More of Him...Less of Me.”

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

JOHN THE BAPTIZER

“More of Him...Less of Me.”

ABIDING PRINCIPLE – Sanctification involves the renovation of my heart. Rather than pursuing my own personal comfort and peace, I find myself desiring what my Lord sought: the passion and pleasure of glorifying God the Father in and through my life.

“For every sanctified man, being a self-denying and a God-advancing man, his God is his center.”
—Simon Ash

The Scriptures reveal that Jesus was intensely private. He did not expose much of His own heart to people, even those who walked by His side each day. But if we are to cooperate with God in being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, we must receive insight about the inner passions that animated His outer world. Otherwise we will find ourselves "working out our own salvation" for mere behavioral mimicry rather than personal transformation. We also will discover that we may be laboring for all the right things for all the wrong reasons.

Fortunately, God providentially preserved an extended opportunity for us to journey into the most intimate sphere of Jesus' life—His prayers. The majority of the recorded prayers of Jesus are public prayers for others, while His private prayers are merely noted in passing. However, the Gospel of John provides an exception—in fact, nearly one quarter of it (chapters 13 through 17) contains material that does not appear in any form in the other three Gospels.

This hallowed section of Scripture contains the longest and most intimate prayer of the Son of God to His Father. And nestled in this prayer is the very thing we seek: insight into what occupied the centermost part of the heart of the eternal Son of God.

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 17:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Twice in the first five verses of John 17, Jesus prays for Himself. What does He ask God to do? (Note: To *glorify* means to "honor," "extol," "magnify," or "draw attention to the splendor of something.")
Verse 1 –

Verse 5 –
2. In verses 1 and 4, Jesus quietly but clearly reveals the driving motivation of His heart. What is it?

3. How comprehensive was this passion? Read the following passages and summarize what each tells us about Jesus and His desire to glorify His Father.

John 4:31-34 –

John 8:28-29 –

John 12:46-50 –

4. Jesus, who was "God in a body," had a clear compulsion to do His Father's will and bring Him glory. But what about those mere people who were His disciples and apostles? Did they possess the same passion? What do the following verses reveal about...

a. John the Baptizer? (John 3:26-30) (Note: The force of the verbs in verse 30 implies a lifestyle, not isolated behavior.)

b. Paul? (Philippians 2:21-22) –

c. James? (James 4:13-15) –

d. Peter? (1 Peter 4:10-14) –

5. Paul summarized what this meant for him in a series of statements he made to the Corinthian Christians about how his own perspective changed once he became a believer. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:5-15 again.
 - a. What had become the new driving force in Paul's life (verse 9)?
 - b. How did he connect this to his understanding of what it meant to be saved (verse 15)?
6. What does 2 Corinthians 3:18 reveal about the relationship between becoming more like Jesus (sanctification) and the glory of God? (Note: The word translated *reflect* in the NIV can also be translated "beholding as in a mirror.")
7. Look back over your answers. Write a summary of what you've discovered regarding the relationship between your life as a follower of Jesus and God's glory.

LOOKING BACK...

Bringing honor and glory to God should be the driving force and central passion of each person who possesses a genuine relationship with God through Christ. Drawing people's gaze away from ourselves and onto Him should be our one common passion. It inspired John the Baptist and the disciples. It is the inescapable message we learn from the life of Jesus. And we are to be continually becoming *like Him*.

Unfortunately, for many Christians today, an unfortunate substitution has occurred. Passion for the glory of God has been replaced by a preoccupation with our own personal peace and happiness. God has slowly been moved from the center to the circumference. And it should come as no surprise *who* took His place!

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

8. Each of the passages on the following page deals directly or indirectly with seeking God's glory as the driving passion of the believer. Read each reference and fill in the chart. Under the "Subject" heading, write a one or two-word description of the area of your life that is addressed in the passage. Under the "My Happiness" heading, write what you think it would look like to have your own sense of personal happiness and comfort at the center of your thinking. Finally, under the "God's Glory" heading, write what it means to have God's glory at the center of your thinking in this area. (Be thorough and honest")

| Subject | My Happiness | God's Glory |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Luke 12:15-21 | | |
| John 12:42-43; Galatians 1:10 | | |
| 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 | | |
| 1 Corinthians 10:31 | | |
| 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 | | |
| 1 Thessalonian 5:18 | | |
| 1 Peter 2:19-20 | | |

9. Prayerfully look back over what you wrote for John 3:26-30 in question 4 on page 5, and compare your answer with your responses in the chart you just completed. Put a check by the areas of your life where your own desires for personal happiness and peace have replaced a passion for God and His glory.
10. Pray over this list for a couple of days and tell God you are willing to cooperate with Him in changing these areas of your life. Ask Him to give you a desire to live in such a way that He might increase and you might decrease.

11. God promises to get us back on track if our desire is to lay hold of that for which He laid hold of us (Philippians 3:15). If God has revealed an area of your life that needs to be recentered, commit to doing the following this coming week:

- Memorize a verse that deals with the area of your life you'd like to recenter.
- Write out the verse and put it in some conspicuous place to prompt reflection each day.
- Share with a trusted friend what you've learned and are seeking to do. Ask him or her to hold you accountable to do what you have determined, and ask the friend to pray for you daily for at least a month. Do the same yourself.
- Write a one or two-sentence prayer that captures your desire and God's goal in this area. Set it next to your bed, and pray it aloud before getting out of bed each day and before closing your eyes each night.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- Continually *seeking* to glorify God – 1 Corinthians 10:31
- What it *means* to glorify God – John 3:30