

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

JONAH

“The black-hole of self.”

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

JONAH

“The Black Hole of Self”

ABIDING PRINCIPLE – Whenever we turn our eyes inward toward ourselves, our problems, our accomplishments, or our wounded egos, we turn our eyes away from God and others.

“The smallest package in the world is someone wrapped up in himself.” — Unknown

Jonah was a prophet of God during the reign of Jeroboam, the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C. (1 Kings 14:2.1-27). Jonah received an unusual call from God to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh. What made it unusual was *not* the message he was to bring but the people to whom he was to bring it. The Assyrians were Gentiles! In fact, Jonah was the first Hebrew prophet to actually be sent, and go to a Gentile population.

And to complicate the assignment, the Assyrians as a people were "professional" pagans, *infamous* for their savage cruelties. Nineveh was also the capital city of Assyria at the time of Jonah. Incredibly, the entire city repented at Jonah's message of impending doom, although Jonah almost failed in his presentation of that message because of his own self-centered “gracism.”

This book is more a book *about* Jonah, than a book *by* Jonah. In it we get an insider’s look at his inner trajectory away from God, and down into himself. In our era of self-promotion, Jonah stands as a sobering warning of the corrosive power of narcissism.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Jonah 1-4

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Do you think that the task God gave to Jonah was reasonable? Why or why not? (Jonah 1:1-2).
2. How did Jonah respond to what God specifically wanted from him? (1:3).
3. *Why* do you think he responded this way?
4. Read the passages below and record all the evidence you can find suggesting that Jonah seems to be overly preoccupied with himself.

- Jonah 1:4-5 –

- Jonah 4:1-3 –

- Jonah 4:6-8 –

5. Contrast the feelings and values of Jonah with these other characters in the story:

- the pagan sailors (1:7-10, 11-16) –

- the people of Nineveh (3:4-5) –

- the king of Nineveh (3:6-9) –

- God himself (4:6, 10-11) –

6. What other insights about the outcomes of disobedience can you see in Genesis 3:6-8 and 1 Timothy 1:18-19?

Do you see any of this the life of Jonah? Explain.

7. In the life of Jonah, his self-centeredness set the trajectory towards several negative emotions: fear, apathy, bitterness, anger, and depression. This is "the regression of pride." Do you see any of these negative emotions in *your own* life that you can now trace to self-centeredness and pride? If so, what are they, and how do they manifest themselves?

8. Luke 9:24 contains sobering insight into the seriousness of this "Jonah syndrome." (*the Greek word translated "lose" literally means "to destroy."*) How do you see this principle illustrated in the life of Jonah?

9. Isaiah 58:10-11 contains some enormous promises in the context of deep discouragement. What does God promise here, and what is required of us? (*It might be best to put these into your own words.*)

What I am asked to do:

What God promises to do:

10. Think deeply about your own life right now. Can you think of a situation or relationship in which you have become preoccupied with *yourself* and your *own* feelings to the exclusion of others around you? What is it, and what might be a good first step *towards* someone and *away* from “the black hole of self?”

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- Being others-centered - Isaiah 58:10-11
- Self-fulfillment through self-sacrifice - Luke 9:24

OPTIONAL

1. When you compare the lives of Peter (Acts 10) and Jonah, you’ll find some interesting similarities (the city of Joppa and God's command to go to the Gentiles, for example). But, their responses couldn’t have been more different. Neither could the outcomes. Take a look.
2. Another interesting and profitable study is to list the specific ways in which God attempted to teach Jonah about the importance of *people*. (Take special note whenever the word "appointed" appears in the story.)