

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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- **[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)
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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

MARTHA
“Winnowing Your Passions”

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

MARTHA

“Winnowing Your Passions”

ABIDING PRINCIPLE – Busyness is the enemy of God. A life of frenzied activity is touted as the path to accumulate skills for personal achievement, yet will squeeze out the cultivation of godly character and virtue. We should order our priorities so that we give our best time and effort to what matters most, and ultimately lasts the longest.

“Our problem is not that we take refuge from action in spiritual things, but that we take refuge from spiritual things in action.”

” – Monica Furlong

During the final year of Jesus' earthly life, He frequented a home on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives just two miles east of the city of Jerusalem. In this out-of-the-way little town called Bethany, lived a woman named Martha. She was most likely a widow, and had allowed her sister Mary and brother Lazarus to live with her in "her home" (Luke 10:38). This family of three became very precious to our Lord during the final, tension-filled year of His life. Especially during what we know as Holy Week, leading up to Easter.

The Gospels of Luke and John contain our only information on this trio. Luke paints a portrait of Martha that could have come out of many of our own family albums—a woman whose life seemed to be defined by how much she could accomplish in a day. For those of us living in a world that measures time in milliseconds, Martha stands as a reminder that being "distracted" isn't merely unhealthy; it's ungodly.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1 – 12:11

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. In Luke 10:38 it seems that Jesus was planning on a brief visit. If people were "stopping by" to see *you* on their way someplace else, which do you think would be more important to *them*: elaborate hospitality or good conversation? Why?

2. Martha was so blinded to what was really important that she became angry at her sister Mary, who actually *did* recognize what was happening around her. It's really important that we understand what was likely going on in the heart of Martha. And the insight we need is buried in the first of a number of words Luke used to describe her. The Greek word translated "distracted" in Luke 10:40 carries within it the meaning of being sliced up into pieces, or being pulled from every direction at the same time. In addition, the Greek indicates that Martha's activity was going on *continually*. This wasn't merely a momentary burst. Now, look back at Luke 10 :38-40 one more time and answer the following questions.

- a. Where do you think Martha's mind was, on her guest or her plans? Explain.

- b. Do you think Martha saw this visit as an opportunity or a responsibility? Explain.

3. It has been said that sometimes the "good" is often the enemy of the "best." How do you see the scene at Martha's house illustrating that statement?

4. The Bible implies our need for "an undivided heart" (Psalm 86:11 and Ezekiel 11:19). Look at the following passages of Scripture. What do you see each passage teaching, in light of Martha's behavior and God's desire for an "undivided heart"?

 - a. Psalm 23:2-4 –

 - b. Proverbs 15:16 –

 - c. Isaiah 32:17 –

5. It is probably no coincidence that Jesus had just finished telling the apostles the parable of the Good Samaritan shortly before they arrived at Martha's home. Read Luke 10:30-37 and answer the following questions:

 - a. What was the Samaritan willing to invest that the other two "spiritual" men were not?

 - b. How do you explain that the Samaritan chose to do this? What was likely true about him that was not true of the other two?

- c. If Martha and Mary had been the ones on their way to Jericho from Jerusalem in this story, do you think the situation would have gone the same or differently? Explain.

6. Can you think of a recent example when *you* could have been a Good Samaritan for someone but you felt that your schedule simply wouldn't accommodate it? Describe the situation.

7. Suppose the God Himself "called" you on the phone tonight and said He needed you to do something for Him that would take an entire day. Look at your calendar right now. How long would He have to wait until you were "free" to do what He needed? (Rearranging your calendar items is *not* allowed!)
 - a. What if the person on the phone was someone from a homeless shelter in your city who needed help the next entire day, and you sensed that God was asking you to do this? Would your response be the same as above, or different? Why?

8. What do you think is the relationship between our busyness and our availability to God?

9. Are there any relationships or responsibilities that you have neglected or taken advantage of because of a distracted, divided heart?

10. Are there any people in your life (children, fellow workers, etc.) that are becoming "distracted" by imitating your lifestyle?

11. The mechanical clock had its origin in the Benedictine monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, by monks who wanted to provide a more precise regularity to the routines of their religious order. The clock was the technology that the monks used to help them deepen their

spiritual lives. Unfortunately, that technology is now the cruel taskmaster of most people who spend their lives trying to make the hands on the clock stand still long enough to accomplish all that "needs" to be done. Can you think of any technologies you've embraced with the notion of helping you, that have become your masters rather than servants? Make a short list here. Try eliminating one from your life for a week as an "experiment" to see whether or not it is enhancing busyness or diminishing it.

12. Look at your calendar for this month and do a self-audit with the goal of crafting a plan for "downsizing your busyness" over the next three months. What can you eliminate? Begin to pray that God would use your availability to develop Christlike character and godly virtue in your life in the spaces that you have vacated.

13. Finally, think of one person you can share these insights with, someone who will hold you accountable to pray and work them into reality. Who is that person?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- An undivided heart – Psalm 86:11
- Winnowing my passions – Ecclesiastes 4:6

OPTIONAL

Martha is often used as an example of a woman who was "out of balance." This chapter focused on her weaknesses because they are very apparent in today's culture. However, some of her strengths are *absent* from today's culture. Take some time to study what was right about this woman and what you can learn from her.

There is a wonderful technology "self-audit" resource on my website called, "The Darkside Challenge." If you are in a small group, or have a couple of friends who have some concern about the amount of time technology takes from us, you will find this an amazing one month journey. You can access it at: fransciacca.com/the-darkside-challenge/