

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

NAOMI & RUTH

“When Dreams Seem To Have Died”

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

NAOMI & RUTH

“When Dreams Seem To Have Died”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – Instead of seeing our afflictions as invasive enemies to escape, we should embrace them as useful—even necessary—agents in our pilgrimage toward becoming like Jesus.

"The Lord's mercy often rides to the door of our heart upon the black horse of affliction."
—Charles H. Spurgeon

During perhaps the darkest, most prolonged period of sin, rebellion, and deserved judgment in Israel's history, one story rises like the sun. The book of Judges reveals the immense capacity for sin within any human heart that "does what is right in its own eyes." Yet, during this dreary window of time, a light of faithfulness, loyalty, and love shone forth from the lives of two desolate women who had endured enough heartache to embitter anyone. The story of Naomi and Ruth stands as permanent evidence that God can and does, "work all things for the good" of those who love Him and belong to Him. In fact, each of us owes a word of thanks to these two women. If they hadn't been willing to accept adversity as part of God's loving plan for *their* lives, we wouldn't have the same gospel message to proclaim. For out of their personal anguish came the ancestry of Jesus Christ!

KEY SCRIPTURE: Book of Ruth (in one sitting, if possible)

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. The following verses chronicle events of Naomi's life. Carefully record what happened to this woman in each passage. Try to think of these things happening to *you* as a twenty-first-century Christian, and when you can, describe what a modern-day equivalent might be (example: family has to relocate because of husband losing job, etc.).
 - a. Ruth 1:1 (Note: the journey to Moab most likely took at least a week.)
 - b. Ruth 1:3 –
 - c. Ruth 1:4 –
 - d. Ruth 1:6-7 –
 - e. Ruth 1:8-14 –

- f. Ruth 1:15-19 –
2. Naomi's initial commentary on what has happened to her life is recorded in Ruth 1:19-21. Describe her perspective at this point.
 3. What evidence do you discover in the following verses that indicate Naomi was *not* angry or bitter at God, even though she was honest about her difficulties.
 - a. Ruth 1:8-9 –
 - b. Ruth 1:20-21 –
 - c. Ruth 2:17-20 –
 4. What is Naomi's apparent perspective on the suffering and sorrows that arise in life spontaneously or circumstantially (as opposed to that caused by sin)?

Naomi uses two different names for God in this book. One is "Yahweh," which is the proper name for God. It's the most common name used in the Old Testament. But, she also calls Him "Shaddai" twice in 1:20-21 ("the Almighty"). This name for God may have been derived from a Hebrew word for a mother's breast. The idea of nourishment and provision is indicated. If this is true, what further insight is revealed in these verses about Naomi's perspective on God *and* life (think about the characteristics of a nursing infant with his mother)?

5. What can you discover in the following verses about life's unsolicited suffering, our relationship with God, and His plans to transform us to the image of His Son?
 - a. Isaiah 38:17 –
 - b. Psalm 62:5-7 –
 - c. Psalm 34:2-6 –
 - d. Isaiah 41:1-2 –

- e. Psalm 22:24 –
- f. Isaiah 53:3,11 (prophecy of Jesus) –
- g. Matthew 6:31-33 –
- h. John 16:33 –
- i. John 21:18-22 –
- j. Romans 8:18 –
- k. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 –
- l. Philippians 3:7-8 –
- m. Philippians 4:11-12 –

LOOKING BACK...

Since sin entered the human race through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, life has continually kicked back at us. Sometimes, however, we mistakenly assume that because we belong to God, calamity, loss, heartache, and disappointment should visit us less frequently, or certainly with less fury. This is particularly true in our present culture, which promotes the idea that all of us are victims of *someone else's* mistakes or sins. But biblical truth teaches that God has *not* promised His people a specific lifestyle. But, He *has* promised us Himself. The anchor in every storm for the one being conformed to the likeness of Jesus is not the absence of difficulty. Instead, it is a growing confidence in the presence of God in the midst of life, as well as the assurance of an eternal purpose emerging from our pain. We are not random people revolving aimlessly in a circumstantial world. We are children of a heavenly Father who is able to use the effects of sin to serve His eternal purposes. God will not waste your pain. And His desire is always to glorify Himself by conforming us to Christ. To misunderstand this vital truth will inevitably lead us onto the low road of resentment rather than the high road of spiritual transformation.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. One distraction from a proper understanding of unsolicited suffering is an improper gaze. Read Psalm 73:1-6. Where does the suffering saint in this passage fix his gaze, and what effect does it have on how he views his own life?

2. Two additional sources that can corrode our perspective on the difficulties of life are revealed in the following verses. Define and describe the potential power of each of them in your life.
 - a. Job 16:1-5 and Numbers 13:30- 14:1 –

 - b. Proverbs 26:12 –

3. The following verses contain help you can provide to someone else who is suffering. Read each verse and answer by personalizing each of your responses with the following statement: *“To encourage a struggling believer, I would...”*
 - a. 1 Samuel 23:16 –

 - b. Job 16:5 –

 - c. Psalm 119:50,92 –

 - d. Proverbs 12:18 –

 - e. Proverbs 27:9 –

 - f. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 –

 - g. Isaiah 35:3-4 –

 - h. Revelation 21:1-5 –

4. Review your answers to questions 1-3. How would you rate *your own* response to life's adversity over the last six months? Try to incorporate discoveries you have made in this chapter in your response.

5. Reflect on recent counsel you've given to a friend or family member who has been suffering unjustly. How would you evaluate your advice in light of what you've learned in this chapter?
 - a. How do you think you *will* you change the way you look at your own difficulties, in light of your understanding of God's purposes for your life that you gained from this chapter?

6. From what you've discovered about God's purposes in suffering, how will you change the way you counsel others who are afflicted? What will you include? Omit?

7. What's the most significant thing you've learned about yourself from this chapter?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- The assurance of His presence in my pain - Isaiah 41:1-2
- A higher purpose *for* my pain - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4