

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

NICODEMUS

“Spiritual Birth – End or Means?”

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

NICODEMUS

“*Spiritual Birth – End or Means?*”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The surest sign of life is growth. If I really am a follower of Jesus, others will see progress—the fruit of rebirth—in my life. If there is no fruit, there is likely no life.

“In regeneration we pass out of death into life, but in sanctification we pass out of the self-life into the Christ-life.” —A.B. Simpson

We live in an age of counterfeits. Artificial plants, chrome-plated plastic, and contrived online personas abound. But I suspect that cheap substitutions have been a reality since Cain sought to pass off his second-class offering to God just outside the Garden of Eden! Even Jesus understood the human propensity to substitute image for substance. His first call to faith was to His fellow Jews, who believed that they were the chosen of God simply because they were descendants of Abraham. In a clandestine conversation with one of Jerusalem's premier rabbis, Jesus put this myth to bed forever. He set the record straight about what it means to be a true child of God. And His words are as fitting today as they were in first-century Palestine. However, they were *not* God's last word on the subject of salvation. In fact, if we limit our own understanding of salvation to Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, we will become as ineffective and lifeless as most of the Jews of that day.

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 3:1-21; Romans 8:5-11

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Jesus' comments to Nicodemus in John 3:3-6 are best understood in the context of Paul's statement in Colossians 2:13. What is our dilemma?

What do you understand Paul to mean by the word *dead*?

What do you understand Jesus to mean by being "born" a second time?

2. When you think of being "born again", do you tend to think in terms of your past, your present, or your future?

3. Why do you think we don't carry around photos of ourselves as infants on our phones?
4. In Matthew 7:13-23, Jesus indirectly provides some great help for determining who is in the family of God and who is not. Explain what characterizes one who belongs to God, and one who does not belong to God.

Verses 13-14

Verse 18

Verses 13-14

Verses 21-23

5. Read John 15:1-8. What does Jesus point to as the clearest evidence that someone is a genuine disciple of his?

What does this evidence prove? Why?

6. According to the following passages, what do Peter and Paul expect to see happening in the lives of the Jesus-followers to whom they are writing?

2 Peter 3:18 –

2 Thessalonians 1:3 –

Compare these two verses with what Jesus said in John 15:1-8 about fruit being evidence of your faith.

7. Read Romans 8:5-11 and John 3:1-8 again. These passages deal with the Holy Spirit, salvation, and the true believer. Would you say there is a relationship between spiritual *growth* and being spiritually *alive*? If so, what? If not, why not?

8. Based on what you've discovered in this study so far, evaluate the following statements:

"A Christian is someone whose sins are forgiven and who is going to heaven when he dies."

"Discipleship and salvation are related, but independent of each other."

"Someone can be 'born again' but not desire to grow spiritually."

LOOKING BACK...

God's Word is full of metaphors and words relating to conversion: regeneration, rebirth, adoption, and being "born again," to name a few. In response to repentance and faith, God takes away all our guilt, credits the perfect life of Jesus to us, and gives us the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower us forever! The "eternal life" that He imparts is much more than merely the promise that we will live forever. We don't carry around photos of our infancy because they don't represent who we are today. In the same way, we should focus on our present and growing relationship with God rather than simply acknowledge the fact of our spiritual rebirth, and where we'll spend eternity.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

9. According to the following passages, what is God's ultimate goal or purpose for those who have experienced spiritual rebirth?

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 –

Ephesians 4:11-13 –

How does this happen in your life?

10. Each of the passages below contains a characteristic of Jesus' life that should exist, in increasing measure, in any who are true believers. Read the verses, find the spiritual quality mentioned, and complete the following sentence. "Genuine Christians are those who..."

Job 23:12; Jeremiah 15:16 –

Ezekiel 36:26-27 –

Matthew 18:21-33; Colossians 3:13 –

Acts 4:18-20 –

Hebrews 2:11-12 –

Hebrews 10:24-25 –

1John 3:14-17 –

11. Describe the characteristics of the infant believers in the following passages.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 –

Hebrews 5:11-14 –

12. According to Peter's exhortation in 2 Peter 1:5-9, what else should characterize the life of the believer who is maturing in faith?

Why does Peter say that growth is so vital? What happens to us if we aren't growing?

13. Do a little self-audit on your spiritual life in light of the scriptural characteristics of the life of one who is truly a believer from this study. Place an "X" on the line that most honestly represents where you are right now in that area.

HEART TO OBEY GOD

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

HEART OF PRAISE TO GOD

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

DESIRE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

DESIRE FOR FELLOWSHIP

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

ACTIVE LOVE OF OTHER CHRISTIANS

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

QUICKNESS TO FORGIVE OTHERS

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

HUNGER FOR AND DELIGHT IN SCRIPTURE

"dead" _____ infant _____ juvenile _____ mature

14. Summarize what you've discovered about your spiritual "health" from this little self-audit. Honestly evaluate your strengths and your weaknesses.

15. Think about the perspective you had about spiritual growth and discipleship before you began this study. What has changed, and how do you think what you've learned should show up in your life?

16. Prayerfully review your check-up and pick the area in which you are closest to the "infant" stage. Write down one thing you can do this week to begin growing in that area.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- Paul's prayer for growth – Colossians 1:9-10
- The motivation of all growth – 1 John 2:5-6