

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

THE APOSTLE PAUL  
“Depression as a Tool in God’s Hand.”

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, slightly slanted style.

Fran Sciacca  
Birmingham, AL

# THE APOSTLE PAUL

## “*Depression as a Tool in God’s Hand.*”

**A**BIDING PRINCIPLE – A godly response to depressing circumstances can actually serve to *attract* nonbelievers to Christ, and give credibility to the gospel message.

*“People today tell us that they are realistic and practical. They say that they are not interested in doctrine, and not interested to listen very much to what we say, but if they see a body of people who seem to have something that enables them to triumph over life, they become interested at once. — Martin Lloyd Jones*

**T**he apostle Paul wrote the letter we call Second Corinthians from somewhere in Macedonia while on his third missionary journey in the middle 50's A.D. This letter is Paul's most intensely *personal* correspondence. It gives us a rare and exciting window into the personality and deep feelings of this seemingly tireless servant of God. One major theme in this letter is suffering and its tremendous *value* in the life of the Christian.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** 2 Corinthians 1:1-14; 4:1-8; 12:7-11

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### STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Two of Paul's favorite teaching methods were to illustrate major points by using examples from his own life, and passages from the Old Testament. Try to summarize the central truth of 2 Corinthians 1:3 -7, and then how Paul *illustrated* that truth in verses 8-10.

**Main Truth:**

**Paul’s Illustration:**

2. In your own words, describe Paul’s description of how he *felt* during his time in Asia (1:8).
3. But then, Paul gives us what he learned about despair in 2 Corinthians 4:8. What did he say?

4. This apparent contradiction regarding despair actually contains a tremendous lesson about the place of depression in the plan of God. The Greek verbs for "despair" in both these passages are identical. However, in 2 Corinthians 1:8 the *force* of the verb indicates that it happened at that time and then *ended*, whereas in 4:8 the despair is referred to is an *ongoing* pattern. In light of this, what is Paul *actually* saying about the Christian and despair?

What encouragement can you draw from this truth from Paul's life?

5. What was God's purpose behind the circumstances that engulfed Paul in Asia? (1:8-10).
6. In what way is this truth actually a *prerequisite* of sorts for what Paul talked about in 1:3-4?
7. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul discussed another personal hardship that came directly from the hand of God. What was Paul saying in this passage about the relationship between our personal struggles and our effective ministry to *others*?
8. Many Christians can think of an incident in which God has done something *through* them during a time of great weakness or failure. Take a few minutes to reflect on your own life. Write out an incident from *your* life where you have seen that happen.
9. Read each of the following scriptures slowly and thoughtfully. Then record any insights you see in them about the good that God can bring out of a proper response to your struggles.

Proverbs 19:3 –

Proverbs 25:4 –

Zechariah 8:23 –

Romans 2:23-24 –

10. Take a few minutes and look back over this study, especially Questions 4, 6, and 9. Write-out anything you've discovered about how depression can actually be useful to God.

11. Do a little self-assessment. Is there a situation you are facing that is painful? Perhaps you have been holding God at arm's length instead of trying to *find* Him in it. Think of creative ways you can draw the Lord into *your* painful situation, with a vision of being able in the future to be a channel of His comfort to *someone else* in a similar difficulty.

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**SCRIPTURE MEMORY** (optional)

- Pain with a purpose – Proverbs 25:4 and 2 Corinthians 1:9