

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...

- **[COPYRIGHT]** – Each of the Bible studies that are a part of *Folks Like Us* is copyrighted. You have permission to make as many copies as you like/need for yourself and/or whatever ministry environment you intend to use them. You do *not* have permission to sell these studies. You may, however, request a small fee to cover the cost of copying, if necessary.
- **[PRINTING]** – The security setting for each PDF allows you to print the study, but not to edit it. When you print these studies, you may want to use the “Print Page Range” feature of your software, and start the printing with Page 3, and you won’t have to print the color cover or this Introduction page. *If you plan to have them printed professionally, you may want to include the cover.*
- **[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

PAUL

“Dealing With Your Past.”

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

PAUL

“Dealing with your past.”

ABIDING PRINCIPLE – The past is something to learn from and leave behind, not to dwell on and allow to dictate how you live today.

“In the carriages of the past you can't go anywhere.” —Maxim Gorky

Memory is a marvelous faculty of the mind. It provides us with a perpetual feast of all that is cherished from our past. But it can also be a cruel taskmaster, emotionally blackmailing us with recollections we long to forget, but can't.

Much has been said recently about dealing with and relating to our painful past: healing memories, primal therapy, and codependence, to mention only a few. Does the Bible provide any insight for us as we try to deal with our complex web of tangled emotions?

Saul of Tarsus, known affectionately to us as the apostle Paul, provides us with a case study full of pain, yet radiant with hope and practical help. His own past was one of extremes. He experienced unusual successes and intense opposition and trials. He lived with a whole range of memories, both pleasant and painful. Yet his response was as down-to-earth and relevant as the morning news. Paul knew that his past was a powerful force in his life, but he also knew how to deal with it.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Look at Paul's own description of his past religious affiliation in Philippians 3:5-6 and Acts 26:4-5. What can you learn about him *as a person* from these passages?
2. Using what you wrote for question 1, what other possible insights about “Saul the Pharisee” may be drawn from Matthew 15:1-9, 21:45-46, 26:3-5, and 27:41-43?
3. Describe in as much detail as possible what Saul did (*or might have done*), based on these accounts of his behavior.
 - Acts 7:54-60 –
 - Acts 8:1-3 –
 - Acts 9:1-2 –

4. Do you think Paul would have been better off if he had dealt with his past with a great deal of careful attention and therapy? Explain.

5. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:7-10 carefully and answer the following questions.
 - What evidence is there that Paul had *not* forgotten his past?

 - How had Paul's past affected his perspective on the present?

6. The "secret" to Paul's dealing with his past is spelled out for us in Philippians 3:10-14. What is it?

7. When you consider your answer to the first part of question 5, what do you think Paul means when he uses the phrase, "forgetting what is behind"?

8. In light of what you've learned from the previous verses, what do you think Paul is actually saying in Philippians 3:15?

LEARNING FROM PAUL...

Before his encounter with Jesus Christ, Paul's personal history was decorated with the emblems of worldly and "religious" success. But he also carried with him the stigma of being an enemy of God. He was personally responsible for fragmenting many Christian families, destroying churches, and perhaps even killing some of God's first-century faithful. These vivid recollections were the mental freight Paul carried with him always. So much did it occupy his thinking that he considered himself the "least of the apostles" as a result (1 Corinthians 15:9).

Yet Paul was not stuck in the mire of his past, be it good or bad! He said that he "forgot" what was behind and strained for the goal of being like Jesus, the very thing for which God had laid hold of him in the first place (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul didn't forget his past. How could he? But he didn't massage, nourish, contemplate, and examine it. Instead, he used his past as a testimony to others and a continual reminder to himself that "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

APPLICATION QUESTIONS...

9. Paul said he wanted to "*know Christ and the power of his resurrection*" (Philippians 3:10) and to be "*without blemish and free from accusation*" (Colossians 1:22). What do you think that means, and how does one go about it?
10. Paul's focus was on the powerful person of Christ and the growth process, *not* an event or a time. When it comes to your own painful memories, what do you give most of your mental energy? Explain.
- A person in the past.
 - A place in the past.
 - A time in the past.
 - How Jesus reacted to similar circumstances.
 - What God has already done in your life.
11. Do you think that these principles can apply to painful things that have happened since you've become a Christian as well as those that happened before? Explain.
12. What can *you* do, practically speaking, to "starve" the memory that is holding *you* back from "knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection"? (Read these passages about God's Word [Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1:21-22], prayer [Psalm 62:8, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 1:4-6,9-11], and fellowship [Acts 2:42-47, 1 John 1:3,6-7].)
13. What can you do to help *a friend* starve the memory that is holding him or her back from "knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection"?

14. How could you change the way you think and talk about your past so that it can actually be a *testimony* to the grace of God?

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- Leaving the past behind – Isaiah 43:18-19
- Helping to make God your focus – Philippians 3:13-14