

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)
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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 PHARISEE

“Is ‘Being Good’ Ever Good Enough?”

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 style with a horizontal line under the first name.

Fran Sciacca
Birmingham, AL

THE PHARISEE

“Is ‘Being Good’ Ever Good Enough?”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – It is my *condition*, not my conduct, that separates me from God. I sin because I was born a sinner.

“If you would know the heart of your sin, you must know the sin of your heart. An old divine says, ‘You say, ‘I have my faults, but at bottom I have a good heart!’ Alas! It is this that deceives you, for your heart is the worst part of you.’”

—Charles H. Spurgeon

Of the four Gospels, only Luke recorded a certain poignant parable about two men doing the same thing in the same place at the same time. Where they were and what they were doing is very important for us today. They were in the Jerusalem temple, as close as the typical first-century Jew could be to God Himself. And both men were praying...or so it seemed.

Their prayers are paradigms of two contrasting ways of viewing our standing with God. The importance of each man's perspective is reflected in the outcome and stands forever as a warning to those of us in the 21st century. One was welcomed by God, while the other was rejected. And the greatest tragedy of all is that the one who stood condemned by God left the temple that day confident of his approved status before God! His misunderstanding about his *condition* led to a mistake about his position. And in this case, it cost him his soul.

Understanding (or misunderstanding) our natural condition before, it turns out, determines what we believe it takes to become a Christian, and then what it means to live as one. This is no small matter. It is the single most important conclusion we can have about ourselves as believers. It's the foundation upon which the rest of our faith is built. Getting this right is crucial in itself. Getting it wrong could be devastating—to the point of eternal death.

So, what is your present understanding of *your* essential problem before God as a human being? Do you know? Do you think that it is what you've done *wrong*, or what you've failed to do *right* in life? Your sins, those words, deeds, or thoughts that are the diet of your conscience and conduct? Or could it be something more basic yet more deadly?

KEY SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:10-14; Romans 3:9-20

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. a. Carefully read over the parable of the two temple visitors in Luke 18:10-14. What had each man obviously concluded about himself *before* he arrived at the temple? Explain your answers below.

Pharisee –

Tax collector –

b. How do you think each man arrived at his conclusion about himself?

Pharisee –

Tax collector –

2. Most Bibles translate the tax collector's description of himself in verse 13 as, "a sinner." But, it could more accurately be translated "*the* sinner." How does that enlarge your understanding of this story?
3. *Sinner* is a pungent word, meaning "devoted to sin." Do you think the tax collector's *shame* came from what he had done and not done, or of who he was as a person? Explain.
4. a. In contrast, which was the source of the Pharisee's *pride*: who he was, or what he had done and not done? (Look closely!)

b. Which words stand out in his prayer?
5. a. Carefully read Job 25:4 and Romans 3:9-10,20.
According to these verses, is man's most basic problem with God something he has done or not done, or *who he is* as a person? Explain your answer.

b. Do you think this distinction is important? Why or why not?

c. Read Romans 3:5,10,20. How does God summarize our problem?
6. Think of the phrase, *righteous acts* as the very best offering of our hearts we can give to God as people. What does God say about these *righteous acts* in Isaiah 64:6?
(Note: The Hebrew words translated "filthy rags" in this verse are used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to a used menstrual cloth. This graphic imagery revealed to Isaiah's readers how ceremonially "unclean"—and thus offensive—their best deeds were in comparison to God's standard of righteousness.)

7. From each of the verses below distill a brief statement of what you understand to be God's standard of acceptance:
- a. Isaiah 6:1-5 –

 - b. Luke 5:4-8 –

 - c. Romans 3:22-23 –

 - 8. Now look back at Luke 18:9. Based on what you've discovered so far, why does it make sense that Jesus was so incensed with people like this Pharisee?

 - 9. Jesus clearly *declared* the tax collector to be righteous. Why is this so important, considering our condition and predicament as human beings?

LOOKING BACK...

We sin because we are sinners. It is natural. We perform *deeds* of unrighteousness because they are the fruit of our unrighteousness. It's true that we are accountable to God for what we do and don't do, but more importantly, we are accountable before God for who we are. While it is true that we can make feeble attempts to improve our *conduct*, we cannot change our *condition*. Left to ourselves, we are hopelessly, helplessly, eternally separated from the God in whose image we were created. This is very bad news for even the best of folks. However, it's the truth. At our best, we can be relatively good, but never truly righteous. And this is as true for the urban pimp as it is for the suburban, SUV-driving mom.

If we don't understand the "bad news" about ourselves, the good news of the gospel will be pleasant, but not life-changing and compelling. We first must "face the music" before we can truly sing His praises!

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

10. a. In the world of education, some teachers grade "on a curve" while others use "pass/fail." Which one of these assessments does God use? Explain.

- b. If you had these reversed, what effect would it have on your understanding of the gospel?
- c. When you think about your own relationship with God, which one of the two assessments do you think *you* use?
11. a. In light of the biblical truths you've discovered in this chapter regarding the condition of all people before God, how should you view yourself?
- b. How should you view other believers? –
- c. How should you view unbelievers? –
12. On a separate sheet of paper, write a prayer to God. In it try to summarize what you have discovered about Him, about yourself, and about your relationship with Him. Be sure to tell Him about any misconceptions you had.
13. Think about someone or even a people group you may have consciously or unconsciously judged just like the self-righteous Pharisee did looking at the tax collector in Luke 18. Confess this sin to God. Beginning right now, begin to pray, asking God to help you see people the way He does.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- The failure of self-righteousness – Isaiah 64:5-6
- My need of God's righteousness – Romans 3:10-11