

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

SAMSON

“Deserved Suffering - God’s Unexpected Tool”

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

SAMSON

“Deserved Suffering - God’s Unexpected Tool”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The suffering that results from sin—even the foul fruit of our own folly—can be a tool of grace in the hands of God.

"Only the willingness to suffer can conquer suffering."

—David J. Bosch

The book of Judges is a depressing record of cyclical anarchy. Twenty-one chapters explore seven successions of God's people choosing sin rather than obedience. The closing statement of the book is the best synopsis of the era's tumultuous nature: *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."*

In the midst of perennial disobedience, however, God responded to His people’s perennial cries of repentance. He lovingly raised up rulers to deliver His people and lead them into a brief season of peace and rest. We know them collectively as "the judges." They weren't perfect people, but each of them illustrated what God can do with a humble, surrendered life.

The life of Samson began with a miraculous birth. His parents were told that he was to be totally set apart to God. The great strength and reputation for justice that Samson demonstrated extruded him into the position of judge. Notoriety, power, and success characterized his rule—but his life ended in humiliation and obscurity. Samson also suffered more than all the other judges. But his anguish was the result of his own sinful choices, *not* the judgment of God.

Samson's life—and death—portray how God can glorify Himself in and through us, despite our disobedience.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Judges 13-16

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Even though God gave detailed instructions on the requirements for a Nazirite (someone set apart to God for a season) many years earlier, Samson is the first person to actually take such a vow in Scripture. Look at Numbers 6:1-8. What were the three main restrictions placed on a Nazirite?

(1)

(2)

(3)

2. What do the following passages tell you about how faithful Samson was in following the requirements of a Nazirite?
 - (1) Judges 14:5-9 –

 - (2) Judges 14:8,10-12 (implied) –

 - (3) Judges 16:15-17 –

3. In your own words, contrast the beginning of Samson's life with its end (Judges 13:2-5,24-25; 16:15-31).

4. Proverbs 19:3 and Revelation 16:9-11 contain a similar insight regarding one possible response to suffering in our lives that is the result of our own sin. What is it?
 - a. Why do you think we tend to react this way?

5. Read Judges 16:26-30 and Hebrews 11:32-34. Do you see the principle you wrote about in question 4 above, at work in Samson's life? Use the two texts to explain your answer.

6. In Psalm 51 we have a rare glimpse into the heart of King David. He apparently penned this sorrowful psalm soon after the prophet Nathan had confronted him for having Uriah the Hittite killed in battle after stealing Uriah's wife (see 2 Samuel 11-12). Read the following passages and describe some of the suffering David experienced that resulted from his own sin:
 - a. 2 Samuel 12:14-18 –

 - b. 2 Samuel 12:8-11; 16:22 –

 - c. Psalm 51:3 –

- d. Psalm 51:8 –

 - e. Psalm 51:10 –

 - f. Psalm 51:12 –
7. Carefully read Psalm 51 again. Isolate as many insights as you can about how God worked *good* in David's life through his struggles with sin.
8. The following passages point to God's ability to bring good out of our sin and the suffering that often accompanies it. Explain how He's able to conform us to the likeness of Christ in our attitudes or behavior, if we are willing to cooperate with Him:
- a. Ezra 9:13 -

 - b. Psalm 73:21-26 –

 - c. Psalm 103:1-13 –

 - d. Psalm 119:67 –

 - e. Psalm 119:71-72 –

 - f. Jeremiah 3:19-25 –

 - g. Jeremiah 31:18 –

h. Daniel 9:20-22 –

i. Hosea 5:15 –

LOOKING BACK...

Frequently, the frenzy and pain in our lives is the result of our own prideful choices. Because we live in a cause-and-effect universe, our decisions are never an end in themselves. They always produce fruit; some of it healthy and lasting, but much of it is foul with a longer half-life than we would wish. Some suffering is the inevitable *harvest* of sin. Instead of bowing before God in sorrow and repentance, we may be tempted to be angry at Him for "allowing it to happen," or for "not stopping us."

A remarkable truth of Scripture is that our Father's relentless pursuit to continually make us more like Jesus and less like Adam, is more powerful than our choice to have it our own way. God is able to repurpose even *our* sin and its attendant suffering for *His* eternal purposes. He alone can take our failures and use them for His glory and our good.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The parable of the "prodigal son" in Luke 15:11-32 is an excellent illustration of the principles in this study. Read the story slowly a couple of times, and then thoughtfully answer the questions below.
 - a. What do you think the sins of the younger brother were that prompted his choices?
 - b. What suffering resulted from his choices?
 - c. What insight inspired the "turning point" in this young man's life?
 - d. What's so amazing about the *father* in this parable?
 - e. In the healing process, what part did the "prodigal" son play?
2. Describe the differences between the *older* brother and the father (look and think carefully).

3. Think about your own view of God right now. Is it more consistent with the character of the father or of the older brother in this parable? Explain your answer.

4. The following promises reveal some amazing truths regarding God's desire to make us like Jesus *in the midst* of our misery from our own sin. Summarize the promise contained in each passage, and try to connect it to your own life:
 - a. Deuteronomy 8:2-4 –

 - b. Psalm 30:7-12 –

 - c. Isaiah 61:1-3 (prophecy about the coming of Christ) –

 - d. Jeremiah 24:7 –

 - e. Joel 2:25 –

5. Reflect on your life. Are there any areas where you've blamed God or been angry with Him (or others) because *you* thought you'd been treated unfairly? If so, ask for God's forgiveness and that He'll reveal His good purposes for using this to make you more like Him. Share this with a trusted friend who will pray for you and help you view this situation with a new perspective and expectation regarding what God will do in and through you.

6. Maybe you know someone else who is angry with God right now for circumstances that person set in motion himself or herself. Pray that God would develop the heart of the "younger son" in this person. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share the insights you've discovered in this chapter about God's good purposes to use our sin for His glory. Commit to pray with and for this person. Below, write down his or her initials, and specify when you plan to act on this.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- The threat of misplaced anger - Proverbs 19:3

- The promise of restoration - Joel 2:25