

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

SARAH

“Misplaced hope.”

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

# SARAH

*“Misplaced hope.”*

**A** **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – Hope that is grounded in anything other than God’s unchanging character will cause you to become disillusioned and discouraged.

*“When you say a situation or a person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in the face of God.”* — Charles L. Allen

Literature abounds with stories of hope: heroes and heroines who braved life's storms, beat the odds, and saved the day. We all have our favorites. But usually these accounts are merely isolated shrines to a select few who somehow, for a few brief moments, possessed unusual cunning, fortitude, or stamina.

However, for most of us “regular” people, life often serves up a long line of dashed dreams and shattered hopes. Life is difficult, and for some people it seems to get more and more difficult all the time. How do we maintain a genuine sense of hope in the face of constant difficulty and disappointment?

Sarah, the wife of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham, was challenged to hope against overwhelming odds. God promised her husband that he would be the father of many nations. But Sarah was old and barren! The study of her life reveals a pattern of behavior that is typical and should be familiar to us. Sarah finally rested her hope in the only proper place...but not until she had exhausted nearly every other possibility first.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 17:1-22 and 18:1-15

## **STUDY QUESTIONS...**

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1. Describe the importance of hope for our lives (Proverbs 13:12).
2. In your own words, summarize how Sarah probably felt when she found out what God had told her husband at the four significant points in their lives below.

Genesis 12:1-9 (age 65) –

Genesis 15:1-5 (age 70) –

Genesis 16:1-4, 15-16 (age 76) –

Genesis 17:1-8,15-22; 18:1-15 (age 90) –

3. Trace the progression you see in Sarah's thinking? How does she try to preserve her hope?
  
4. Look up the following verses. Read each one carefully, and write down any insights you find that speak about the nature of hope.

VERSES	INSIGHTS ABOUT THE NATURE OF HOPE
Psalm 31:24	
Psalm 39:7	
Romans 8:24	
Romans 15:4	
Hebrews 6:19	

5. Jeremiah contrasts two people who have their hope properly and *improperly* placed. In your own words, contrast the two.
  - Misplaced hope or “trust” (Jeremiah 17:5-6) –
  
  - Properly placed hope or “trust” (Jeremiah 17:7-8) –

## LEARNING FROM SARAH...

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**S**arah first sought to place her hope in anything but the unchanging character of God. She trusted in her own ability to conceive and bear children. But that eventually failed. Then she concocted a scheme that allowed her to dictate how and when God's promised son to Abraham would be born. But that, too, turned sour. Finally, Sarah "gave up" and concluded that God was either impotent or deceitful.

It was precisely at that point in her disillusionment that God appeared to Abraham with a message for his wife: Sarah would give birth to the son she could not bear on her own!

As she exhausted her own resources and plans, Sarah came face-to-face with the sobering truth that it is easy to hope in God when there is a chance that we can fulfill His promises. But such hope is not rooted in God's unchanging character. It is merely an extension of our own abilities, combined with some vague notions about God.

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS...

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6. Describe a time when you felt or acted like Sarah recently.
  
7. Do you think it is possible to maintain genuine hope in God when things go from bad to worse instead of improving? Explain.
  
8. Look back at Paul's statement about cultivating and nurturing hope in Romans 15:4. Which of the two ingredients he mentions do *you* need to cultivate?
  - Endurance
  - Encouragement from the ScripturesWrite out what you need to do and how you plan to go about it.
  
9. Based on what you've learned from this lesson, what would you do differently if you were to meet another circumstance similar to the one you described in question 6?
  
10. Why is it that hope based on God's character becomes a foundation for all other types of hope (hope for the future, hope for success, etc.)?

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

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- The ingredients for cultivating hope – Romans 15:4
- The focus of your hope – Psalm 39:7