

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 BLESSED

“Happiness — The Elusive Fruit.”

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

THE BLESSED

“Happiness — The Elusive Fruit.”

A **BIDING PRINCIPLE** – The person becoming like Christ discovers that true happiness is a fruit that comes from living for others and not for oneself. Happiness and fulfillment are not things we should seek- instead, they are what we find when we pursue the heart and purposes of God for our lives.

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit Happiness.”

— Declaration of Independence

The founders of the United States of America obviously considered the opportunity to pursue happiness a right equal to that of freedom and life itself. But the *desire* to be happy did not originate with Thomas Jefferson and those who signed the Declaration of Independence. One need only peruse the open journal of King Solomon nearly three thousand years earlier to discover the painful record of a man who sought all the right things in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. Oddly, though, the avenues of his journey have street names that parallel many of the roads we travel today in our own pursuit of this evasive dream and destiny.

Throughout time, people have sought to be happy. Parents wish it for their children, children wish it for themselves, and most of us envy those who seem to have found it. We struggle to define it, yet know that if it exists, it must be more substantial than smiling emojis. Some of us may believe that happiness is a mirage created by empty people who don't know Christ. Yet deep within us, we Jesus-followers also have memories of moments or seasons when no other word but *happy* accurately captured what life was like for us.

But, is happiness *really* on God's agenda for those He calls His own? Is it wrong to desire it? Or is our error in where we think happiness can be found, and how we try to get there? Most important, is our becoming like Christ the enemy or the enabler of true happiness?

KEY SCRIPTURE: Psalm 40:1-8; Ecclesiastes 6:1-6; 12:13

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. In your own words, write a brief but thorough definition of the following kinds of people:

Blessed:

Happy:

Fulfilled:

2. The word blessed appears between 250 and 330 times in the Bible (depending on the version). Yet it is often difficult for us to know exactly what the word means. Sometimes it means "to speak well of" a person or a thing, but in other places it means, quite simply, "happy." In fact, the word *beatitude*, which we apply to the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that begins with "Blessed are the . . .," literally means "a state of utmost bliss" and comes from a Latin word that means "to be happy"! With this insight as your starting point, look up the following verses that contain the word *blessed* and substitute the word *happy* in its place. Thoughtfully record how the Bible defines happiness, who receives it, and how it is obtained.

a. Job 5:17 –

b. Psalm 1 –

c. Psalm 32:1-2 –

d. Psalm 34:8 –

e. Psalm 41:1 –

f. Psalm 94:12 –

g. Proverbs 3:13 –

h. Proverbs 14:21 –

i. John 13:14-17 –

j. Acts 20:35 –

k. James 1:12 –

l. 1 Peter 4:13 –

3. As Solomon journeyed away from God, he came to the conclusion that there is a strong connection between being happy and being fulfilled. And he unashamedly admitted that he was neither. In fact, he used the word *meaningless* thirty-five times in twelve short chapters in the book of Ecclesiastes to describe his condition and his conclusions about a life without God at the center! But Jesus—the one into whose image the Holy Spirit is changing us—gives us insight into the reality of true happiness and its connection to personal fulfillment. Look at Matthew 5:6, then answer the following questions.

a. Based on what you have discovered so far in this Bible study, what do the following words mean?

Righteousness:

Blessed:

b. What is the significance of Jesus using the verbs *hunger* and *thirst* in regard to righteousness?

c. Considering that the word *satisfied* means "to feed or fatten", what is Jesus saying about these people who hunger and thirst to be like Him?

d. Rewrite this verse in your own words and include other things you have discovered about happiness doing this study.

4. Carefully look over your responses to questions 1 through 3. Answer the questions on the following page, keeping in mind what you've learned about sanctification so far:

- a. Do you think that happiness is a fruit (it comes from something else), or can it be attained by seeking it directly? Explain your answer.

- b. What insights does your answer provide concerning the happiness or unhappiness among all people? Explain.

- c. What about Jesus-followers in particular? Explain.

LOOKING BACK...

Scripture speaks about happiness as something that is real and attainable. It should certainly characterize those who are becoming more like Jesus and less like Adam through the Holy Spirit. But it is clearly much deeper than a superficial "Jesus smile" that we put on as we go out into the world. We've discovered that happiness comes from ministering to the poor, enduring temptation, persevering under God's discipline, and delighting in the Bible. And, of paramount importance, we've learned that true happiness comes from pursuing holiness—the likeness of Jesus. It turns out that true happiness is the fruit of us cooperating with God in His eternal purpose for our lives. No surprise there!

On the other hand, because happiness is a fruit that blooms on the tree of our spiritual transformation, we can never enjoy its sweetness by seeking it apart from God's purpose for our lives. It is as futile as searching for an apple from an oak tree. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we are unhappy at times. And if we are unhappy, then we most likely are seeking our fruit from all the wrong trees.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

5. In the Bible, God isolates some popular dead-end pathways that promise happiness and satisfaction but lead to disillusionment and defeat. Below is a sampling of such verses. Ponder each passage carefully, then answer the questions that follow.

- a. Isaiah 55:2—On which thing (acquired or desired) have you "spent money" while trying to find happiness?

(Note: Two primary vehicles we tend to rely on for satisfaction are addressed by God in this verse: what we can acquire [spend] and what we can do [labor].)

Which “labor” (such as involvement, ministry, or activity) do you pursue in an attempt to find fulfillment?

b. Jeremiah 2:13— According to this verse, what were God's people trying to do?

(Note: Cisterns were receptacles carved out of rock that collected water from an external spring or from rainfall. They were a necessity in Palestine because of the lengthy dry season, and could even have been called the life source for a family, town, or city.)

c. Jeremiah 10:1-5—Can you think of any “scarecrows”— such as projects, organizations, or achievements—that you are depending on to protect your “melon patch”? Explain.

(Note: In this passage, God addresses the folly of trying to derive a sense of security, fulfillment, or happiness from anything we've accomplished ourselves.)

6. a. Look back at Isaiah 55:2-3. List all the verbs in this passage that are commands.

b. What is the obvious truth here about the best way to care for your inmost self (your “soul”)?

Acts 20:24 –

7. Considering that in this passage God is addressing the need for fulfillment (happiness) as well as His people's attempts to secure it on their own, what He has to say is very significant. Review your responses to questions 5 and 6 above, and then honestly answer the following questions.

b. What is my natural tendency in regard to happiness?

c. How does this display itself in my life?

d. What is God's prescription for me to find fulfillment and avoid disillusionment?

8. In Matthew 6:33, God actually commands us to actively pursue His “kingdom.” Look at the two verses before that command, Matthew 6:31-32. If one thing pagans “run after” is happiness, what is God saying in this *whole passage* of Matthew 6:31-33 regarding:
- God’s desire for *you*?
 - The recipe for *lasting* happiness?
9. What specific things have you learned in this study about the relationship between spiritual transformation (becoming more like Jesus) and genuine happiness?
10. Look at the list of statements below. Check all that describe your own pursuit of happiness at present:
- I am happy.
 - I am not happy.
 - I am seeking happiness in what I can accomplish.
 - I am seeking happiness in what I can acquire.
 - I am seeking happiness from what I am able to do.
 - I am seeking happiness in relationships I have or want.
 - I look to people more than Scripture for my security.
 - I look to Scripture more than people for my security.
 - I think (or thought) sanctification and happiness are unrelated.
- b. Each day this week, read and meditate on the verses that you looked at in Question 2 of this study. When someone asks, “How are you?” *choose* to answer with the word *blessed* each time. You’ll be surprised to notice changes in your thinking as a result of changes in your speaking.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- A recipe for fleeting happiness – Jeremiah 2:13
- A recipe for lasting happiness – Matthew 5:6