

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

AN UNNAMED MAN
“How Do You Spell ‘Success’?”

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

AN UNNAMED MAN

“How Do You Spell ‘Success’?”

ABIDING PRINCIPLE – How we measure success is the quiet captain of our lives, directing our values and evaluating our efforts. Because we can be sincere but wrong, it is essential that the purposes that guide *our* lives are aligned with God's purposes for us.

“Wealth is like sea-water; so far from quenching a man's thirst, it intensifies it. The more he gets, the more he wants.” — Roman proverb

The Bible is full of nameless people. They often stand in contrast to the named people, however, only because we cannot attach a name. Lot's wife is no less important than Mary or Martha. I even suspect that in some ways, she may be more significant. Jesus encountered thousands of people during His life and ministry, most of whom remain nameless to us in Scripture: Peter's mother-in-law, the Syro-Phoenician woman, a rich young ruler, and the centurion at the cross, just to name a few. Occasionally, however, Jesus told parables about nameless people who were so typical of all humanity that His listeners no doubt filled in the stories with names of their own. One such story involved a wealthy farmer who had incorrectly self-diagnosed his true condition because of his mistaken view of success. As you work through the parable of this particular nameless man, make sure that the name you fill in is not *your own!*

KEY SCRIPTURE: Luke 12:13-34

STUDY QUESTIONS...

1. Read Luke 12:13-15. In this opening conversation before Jesus launches into the parable, He uncovers a number of tendencies people have regarding their views of success and how they choose to live.

What motivation does Jesus expose in His opening comments?

Jesus isolates a very common definition of *success* in these opening comments. In your own words, explain this faulty but popular definition of success.

“Success is...”

Do you see a relationship between your two answers to this question? Explain.

2. Read Luke 12:16-19 carefully. Jesus introduces a parable here that amplifies both the improper motivation *and* the false definition of success that He exposed in His opening comments. Tragically, the unnamed man in this parable is an accurate portrait of many of us. He's not a rare example. Drawing on the perspective of the unnamed man, come up with another definition of success that accurately represents the typical modern view. (Look carefully. There is a *progression* in his statements that represents stages in life.)

"The modern view of success says..."

3. When this man died, do you think his friends and neighbors considered him a success or a failure? Explain your answer.
4. If *you* had known him, would *you* have considered him a success or failure? Explain your reasons.
5. If people believe that the unnamed man's view of success is wrong, the typical reason is found in God's statements in verse 20. If this verse *is* the true standard, explain how his thinking was wrong.

The *real* reason his view of success was wrong is actually in verse 21. Why was this man really a total failure from God's perspective?

6. What do you think it means to be "rich toward God"? Give an example of a contemporary person you see living like this.
7. The apostle Paul possibly understood the truth of this parable better than anyone else we encounter in the New Testament. Read over his abbreviated autobiography in Philippians 3:4-14.

In what ways was Paul's early life similar to that of the unnamed man?

What was different about his later life?

Paul gives an explanation for the dramatic change in verses 7-8. What happened to his understanding of success, and how did his life change as a result?

Paul's statement in verse 8, "that I may gain Christ," is best understood in light of other things he wrote. Look at the following verses and in your own words explain what you think Paul means by "gaining Christ."

Romans 8:29 –

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 –

Galatians 4:19 –

Colossians 1:28 –

“Gaining Christ means...”

8. Now, define success from a biblical perspective, based on all that you have learned in this study. Note where your understanding has changed.

“Biblical success is...”

LOOKING BACK...

The popular axiom, "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins," isn't true. If you change the word, "wins" to "does," that might be true. But, "wins" finds no support in Scripture. There are, however, examples of those who bought this idea and were deceived by it, including the unnamed man in this parable. In the end, most emblems of success make failures out of even the best of people. True success, according to the Bible, is how closely we resemble and reflect the person God wants us to be, when we die. And the standard by which God makes that determination is the same for every one of us: the person of His beloved Son, Jesus.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

9. Read Luke 12:13-21, then look at the verses below and compare the description of Jesus with the unnamed man in the parable. Describe what is either present or lacking in the life of Jesus, based on each verse.

Isaiah 53:2 –

Matthew 13:54-57 –

Luke 8:1-3 –

Luke 9:58 –

2 Corinthians 8:9 –

10. Jesus takes this whole idea of success a step further. In fact, He takes it to a level we probably wish He hadn't! Look at Luke 16:15. List at least six things that are highly esteemed in our day.

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

11. How do our modern notions of success compare with the life and example of Jesus, *and* the will of God for believers that Paul gave us in the passages you have studied in this chapter? Defend your answer.

12. Put an “X” where would you place your current view of success, and explain why. (Think carefully. Be honest.)

Paul————— unnamed man

13. Put an “X” where would you place the current view of success that you are passing on to those under your influence (such as your spouse, children, coworkers, friends, or neighbors), and explain why.

Paul————— unnamed man

14. How we measure success it turns out, steers our lives onto the course we believe will allow us to reach the standard we have set. For this reason, behavioral changes on our part cannot produce the transformation of motive and conviction that is necessary. Review your answers to questions 12 and 13. If you see that you are more like the unnamed man, begin to pray Ezekiel 36:26-27 for your life, asking God to make this "heart transplant":

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

While it is true that we cannot change ourselves from the inside out, it is also true that we *can* “demote” or eliminate activities that feed a wrong view of success. What activities or things consume most of *your* energy, time, and thoughts? Are there any that contribute to the view of success Jesus said was "detestable in God's sight"? If so, what can you eliminate?

What activities could be *more* involved in right now that are more consistent with God's goal of Christlikeness for your life? Write down a few possibilities. Pick one that you will use to replace one that you've chosen to eliminate. Share this with a person who will hold you accountable to follow through on this plan.

Finally, take several weeks and read through the gospel of Mark with a notebook nearby. Write down every observation you can that helps you understand more clearly and specifically how Jesus lived *His* life. Having a fresh mental image of what He "looked" like will give God something to work with in His transformation of your heart.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY (optional)

- The seriousness of *our* view of success – Luke 16:15
- *God's* definition of success – Colossians 1:28