

# Foreword to the *Bethesda Series*

Eight years ago I told the pastors of our church that I was going to stop teaching adult Sunday School in order to teach our daughter Kim. Kim was twenty-three, but because of her multiple disabilities she hadn't been taught the Bible consistently at her level. We had tried inclusion in regular Sunday School but that didn't meet Kim's needs. So I gathered a couple of Kim's friends, and found a room in the back of the church basement where I began to teach Kim and her friends the Bible. I was immediately struck by how "dumbed down" the available curriculum was for adults with intellectual disabilities. It touched lightly on Scripture and had little depth. In my desperation to find material, we spent a year just looking at Rembrandt's sketches of the Bible! After several years, our friend Arlene Helfrich and later my wife Jill took over the class.

The *Bethesda Series* curriculum was Jill's idea. She saw the same need for a robust Bible curriculum. She wanted to create a complete Bible curriculum that involved real Bible study. She wanted it to use interactive questions and to be engaging for the students. She didn't just write the curriculum, she also taught every lesson to make sure it "worked."

Jill loved the interactive style and the story focus of seeJesus' *Person of Jesus* study so she thought the material would be ideal to adapt for young adults with disabilities. When Jill started teaching in September, 2009, it was rough going. We quickly discovered why there isn't a lot of curriculum for adults with disabilities. Simultaneously teaching students who are on many different levels and have many different learning styles is challenging. By January Jill told me, "This isn't working. I'm thinking about quitting." Then I realized that I had not prayed for Jill. I began to pray for her daily and within a couple of weeks she got her "voice" and now she has written the draft of six complete courses.

Why do we call it the *Bethesda Series*? Jesus healed a lame man who had gathered with other adults with disabilities at the Pool of Bethesda. Joni Eareckson Tada described how overwhelming it was to visit the pool with her husband Ken. Jill had a similar experience when we visited the Pool of Bethesda in 2011. Bethesda in Hebrew means "house of covenant love." Covenant love doesn't break. It binds itself to the object of its love and determines to love no matter what. That is God's love for us, and it is to be our love for one another.

The lame man at the Pool of Bethesda was frustrated that he couldn't get into the water in time. Our *Bethesda Series* logo, with its image of a splash of water, captures the healing hope of Jesus. Because of Jesus, we make it into the pool, the river of grace. If you look closely at the "splash" in the logo, you can see several figures going into the water.

Make sure you watch the sample lesson (available on [www.seejesus.net/resources/bethesda-video-library](http://www.seejesus.net/resources/bethesda-video-library)) of Jill teaching [The Parable of the Two Debtors](#)

from Luke 7. If you download the sample lesson, you can follow along while Jill teaches it. You will experience not only her love for the kids and the gospel, but also our interactive teaching style.

Paul E. Miller  
Author of *A Praying Life*



# Introduction to Bethesda Series

I love Kim. I love people like Kim. When I am around people that others see as “dis-abled,” I see “abled.” One of those abilities is relentless faith.

Kim is the fourth of our six kids. Paul and I are both teachers, and we tried to teach all six kids the Bible. We sent them to Christian schools. Paul was the principal of a Christian school, but Kim was frequently left out. She wasn't able to go to a Christian school because of her multiple challenges. She was able to keep up in Sunday School up to first grade, and then got frustrated with all the scissors, play groups, and interaction with the other kids and teachers. I stayed with Kim for about twenty years during the Sunday School hour. I got frustrated because “this little light” was being hidden under a bushel 😊.

I believe all of us can learn. We are made in the image of God, and God is limitless. I don't believe in ceilings where people stop learning. With this in mind, I looked at curriculum for Kim and her friends. The material I reviewed looked too simple. Good teachers expose students to concepts that they may never understand. Exposure is important to lifelong learning! I remember being taught trigonometry and thinking, “What in the world is this man trying to teach me!” But that didn't stop him from exposing me to the information and giving me an opportunity to “grab” what I could. This is what I have tried to do with the *Bethesda Series*. I want to give Kim and her friends the opportunity to learn God's Word, the Bible. I want them to have the opportunity to discover. I want them to experience Jesus, to know at a new level, his amazing love for them!

I looked at the *Person of Jesus* study and thought to myself, “Just start with this.” As the weeks went by, Jesus took over the lessons. He truly gave me the ideas. When I reread the lessons I'd think, “This was not my idea.” Jesus' heart is where the weak are, and I saw His heart revealed as I sat down to adapt these lessons.

Courtney, our oldest daughter, gave me a copy of the Bible with all the stories in the Gospels that had anything to do with disabilities cut out with an exact-o knife. Many pages were almost completely cut away. The Gospels weren't the Gospels without those stories. Could it be that the church isn't the church when people with disabilities are “cut out?” Every week my friends in the class teach me. I learn from them! I need their faith and warm honesty. My hope is that the beauty of Jesus will be seen through “the least of these!”

“As your words are taught, they give light; even the simple can understand them.” Psalm 119:130.

Many blessings!  
Jill A. Miller

# Acknowledgements

Thank you, Paul, for loving me as Jesus loves the church. I love you.

Thank you, Father, for sharing with me one of the secrets of your Kingdom! Thank you for using Kim and her friends to slowly open the door. Thank you, Arlene, for teaching with me in the basement and encouraging me to go on. Thank you, Julie. You took what I had and put it all together, never lacking in love and laughter. Thank you, Seth, for accepting my “chubby people” drawings and making the curriculum look fun. Thank you, Pat, for a beautiful layout. Thank you, Jane, for reading through every word and making the edits. Thank you, Dawn, for reading and commenting through a lens that few have. Thank you, Liz, for moving us along when my heels were dragging, and thank you, Kelly, for getting *Bethesda Series* out via the web.

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Jill A. Miller



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# Lesson 1

## Watching Jesus and Getting to Know Him

### Materials:

**Author's Note:** *The books and movies listed below (The Wizard of Oz, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, and SpongeBob) are suggestions that have worked well in the world of disabilities. Feel free to substitute any book or movie that's appropriate for your group. You will need to modify the questions related to them accordingly.*

1. John 13:15 (refer to Scripture sheet in student manual).
2. Flip chart with Scripture written out in colors.
3. Book and movie of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *SpongeBob* (one of these will be the prop).
4. Costume of Dorothy, Willy Wonka, and SpongeBob (if unable to get costumes make masks of the characters).
5. Sponge—prop for the movie *SpongeBob*.
6. Student manuals.
7. Camera (you can do the lesson without this, but using a camera strengthens it.)

*If possible, have many props so that the students are able to recognize multiple characters from the books and movies you have.*

### Goals:

This is an introductory lesson to help the students understand that the more they watch a movie character, the more they will be able to be like that character. Then the class will be able to connect with the truth that the more they look at Jesus, the more they will be able to be like him. The organization of this lesson is different because we are introducing the reason we are studying the Bible.



**Kim's World:** *Please do not assume that people affected by disability will not be able to understand concepts... with review, visual prompts, personification and humor, people like Kim (and me) can understand concepts and make connections.*

## I. Start the Lesson

**Summing it up:** We learn details about story and movie characters by watching and reading about them.



**Teaching Tip:** The following questions pertain to specific books and movies. If you think your students are unfamiliar with them, then use movies and books they would be familiar with and adjust the questions accordingly.

**Q. I have a bag here and I need some help figuring out who wears outfits like this, can you help me? Tell me who this is and what movie it is from.**

Pull out Toto and the basket. (Toto and *The Wizard of Oz*.)

Pull out the red shoes. (Dorothy)

**Q. What color are her shoes?** (Red.)

**Q. Now what color is her dress?** (Blue and white.)

**Q. What is the pattern of the colors?** (Checks.)

If the students have trouble recalling the word, sometimes giving them the initial sound will help them get the word out.

**Q. If we put on these clothes, who will we look like?** (Dorothy.)

Pull out Willy Wonka's hat. (Willy Wonka.)

Pull out his top coat. (Willy Wonka.)

Pull out sponge.

**Q. Do you know who this may remind me of?** (SpongeBob.)

Pull out the costume of SpongeBob.

**Q. Now tell me is SpongeBob serious or funny?** (Very funny.)

You did such a good job telling me who wears these clothes!

**Q. Now tell me where you learned about Dorothy, Willy Wonka, and SpongeBob.**

When questioning the students, try to make the sentence a statement; avoid using question words such as when, why, how, and what. Using these question words makes the person go through two steps to answer the question.

(TV, books, movies)

Now hold up the movies and the books of the characters.

That is right!

The more you look at the movie or read the book the more you are able to tell me about Dorothy, Willy Wonka, and SpongeBob.

**Q. How many times have you watched *The Wizard of Oz*?** (Lots!)

Sometimes number concepts are hard for the students to get, using describing words like small, big, little, a lot, etc. helps.

**Q. Tell me if you have seen Willy Wonka one time or lots of times.** (Lots.)

**Q. Tell me if you have watched SpongeBob more than one time.** (Yes.)

With each question hold up the movie.

**Q. So the more you look at the movies the more you can tell me what the people look like...right?** (Yes.)

So let's try on the costumes. If you don't have the costumes, use masks that you have made or purchased.

Let the students pick out a costume, put it on, and have a lot of fun! If you have a camera, take pictures of the group and let them parade around the room.

**Q. So, tell me who do we talk about in Sunday school or church almost every week?**

(Jesus.)

Skip this question if the students don't attend church yet.

**Q. How do we spell Jesus?**

J E S U S



## 2. What About Me?

**Summing it up:** When I read the Bible I will know more about Jesus.

I want to be more like Jesus. Let me read you this verse.

On lined flip chart-size paper have this verse written out in same color as in the student manual.

“I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” John 13:15

**Q. “An example to follow;” have you heard that before?** (Answers will vary.)

Demonstrate with your teaching-partner (or a student) an argument about how you want to go to the zoo and she wants to go to the beach. (The argument reflects meanness.)

**Q. Do you think you should act like we just did?** (No, you weren't nice!)

That is right! Jesus is telling us in this verse (reread) that he wants us to do what he does.



**Q. How do you think we can learn what Jesus does? We learned about Dorothy from watching *The Wizard of Oz*. We learned about SpongeBob from reading the books and seeing him on TV and in movies.** (From reading the Bible.)

**Q. If you want to learn more about Jesus what can you do?** (Read the Bible.)

That's right!



Write down their answers on a flip chart

**Q. Tell me what else you can do to learn about Jesus.** (We can watch in movies about him.)

Yes!

**Q. Anything else we can do to learn more about Jesus?** (Pray.)

Absolutely. You did a great job with this!

**Q. Do you think if we read the Bible and look at in movies about Jesus and pray we will get to know more about Jesus...just like we know so much about Dorothy, Willy Wonka, and SpongeBob?** (Yes.)

So that is what we are going to be doing...we are going to look at Jesus a lot and get to know him like a good friend...and then we will be able to love like him and do the things he used to do. We'll learn that we can only do this when he lives in our hearts. So he is inside of us, helping us to love.



**Gospel Connection:** Looking at Jesus doesn't change us. The only thing that changes us is when Jesus lives in our hearts. But by seeing Jesus we learn what we are supposed to be like. When we look at Jesus we fall in love with him. That is how faith begins, by falling in love with Jesus. I hope you fall in love with Jesus as we look at him.

Go to the verse and re-read it.

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### 3. How am I going to remember this?

**Summing it up:** Every lesson we will have a prop to help us remember what we have learned.

We are going to have a basket, and in the basket is something small from our lesson that will remind us of what we learned today. We can put in a movie. Which one do you want to put in the basket? (Answers will vary.)

In every lesson there will be a prop. The prop is what goes into this basket. You will use these props in the future to help the students remember the stories. This will also help them learn what Jesus is like and how to follow Him.

Now this will remind us that the more we watch *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* the more we will be able to act like Willy Wonka...just like the more we learn about Jesus the more we will be able to love like him.

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#### **4. Student Manual**

*Help students find the correct pages in their student manual before closing your lesson. Take a moment to look at the reminder sheet together and encourage them to look at it throughout the week.*

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#### **5. Close in prayer**

Jesus, we want to know all about you. Please help us to know you even more than we may know about Dorothy. Help us to know what made you laugh. Help us to know what made you sad. Help us to know what frustrated you. Help us to know how much you love us and other people. Amen.

