

# Foreword to the *Bethesda Series*

Several 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 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. Bet-hesda 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](http://www.seejesus.net) Bethesda page) 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, Lydia, for reading through every word and making the edits. Thank you, Liz, for moving us along when my heels were dragging, and thank you, Kelly, for getting *Bethesda Series* out via the web.

A special thank you to Steve and Fran Godfrey, Sr., an anonymous foundation, and several other donors who gave to make this curriculum possible. Thank you for loving those whom Jesus cherishes!

Jill A. Miller



# Table of Contents

Quick Start Guide	9
List of Props	17
Lesson 1: I Can't Do This by Myself!!	19
Lesson 2: I Surrender!!!	27
Lesson 3: What Do You Want Me to Do?	35
Lesson 4: "Just Say No"	43
Lesson 5: When We Pray, We Surrender "My Way"!	51
Lesson 6: I Am Starving!	59
Lesson 7: Me ... Demanding?	67
Lesson 8: Gimme, Gimme, Gimme	75
Lesson 9: You Can Do It ... Say, "Hi"!	81
Lesson 10: I Am Leaking!	89
Lesson 11: Super-Love!	97
Lesson 12: She Messed With the Schedule!	105





# Lesson 1

## I Can't Do This By Myself!!!

### Materials:

1. John 5:19, 30 (refer to the Scripture sheet in the student manual).
2. Flip chart with Scripture written on it in same colors as the student manual sheet.
3. Different colored scarves or shawls (enough for each character in the story).
4. Reminder sheet from the student manual.
5. Figurine of a child. This is the prop.

Chapter 11a in *Love Walked Among Us* and Lesson 21 in *The Person of Jesus*.

### Goals:

Love: We need to depend on God, our Father. As we do this, we will be able to “copy” God’s honesty and compassion.

Faith: We need to depend on God and do what he wants more than do what we want. When I do this God will give me the power to be honest and have compassion.

Jesus: Jesus only did what his Father wanted him to do.



**Kim’s World:** *Kim and her friends can be very dependent. I think we can learn dependence from our students. Sometimes Kim will “check-in” to confirm that all is OK. It can be in the middle of the night, it can be during thunderstorms or it can be in the middle of a funny movie. Kim’s dependence on her mom and dad is a part of her being.*

---

## I. Review the Story

10 Minutes

**Summing it up:** *Love your enemies.*

**Q. Do you remember what we talked about last week?** (Loving our enemies.)

*Hold up the hat prop.*

Yes, that's right.

**Q. Do you remember the skit where Harry was mean to Dan?** (Use your students' names.) **We talked about what we sometimes feel like when people are mean.**

**Q. Do you remember some of the things we said we might do?** (Be mean back to them.)

Yes, we did talk about that. We said if we were mean back, then that person may even be meaner and it would just go around and around.

**Q. In the skit, how did Dan love his enemy, Harry?** (He gave him a cookie.)

Yes.

**Q. When Dan gave Harry a cookie, how did it make Harry feel?** (He apologized. He said he was sorry for being mean.)

Yes. And then Dan forgave his enemy.

**Q. Remember how we talked about the servant who was forgiven a whole lot by the king?** (Yes.)

Then the servant left the king and met his friend who owed him a little bit. The servant didn't forgive his friend.

**Q. Where did the servant have his friend sent?** (To jail.)

The servant is like us. The king is like God. God forgives us a whole lot.

**Q. So when someone does something wrong to us what are we to do?** (Forgive them.)

That's right. We talked about it being hard to forgive. It can be really hard to forgive our enemies, but Jesus tells us to do one step more and that is to bless them and do something good to them.

**Q. Do you think you can do this?** (It is really hard!)

Yes, I think that none of us can do this by ourselves. First, we need to see how Jesus forgives us and then we need to ask Jesus to help us love people who are mean to us. Another word to call them is our "enemies."

## 2. Experience the Story

20 Minutes

We are starting a new part of our Bible study today. The first part we studied was the three steps of love.

**Q. Do you remember those steps?** (Look, share sadness, and then we help.)



Draw this chart to help them remember.



Then the second part of our study has been on being honest.

Now today we are going to start talking about another side of Jesus.



Write: "I can't do anything by myself. I can only do what I see my dad doing."

Read this out loud.

**Q. If you were in a restaurant and you heard someone say this, what would you think about them?** (I think it would be a child.)

**Q. Do you think it would be a young child?** (Yes.)

Read John 5:19, 30.

Have the students who are comfortable read aloud one verse each until they finish the passage.

Adapt for slower readers by assisting them and/or giving them shorter portions to read.

**John 5:19, 30**

19 Jesus answered, "What I'm about to tell you is true. The Son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his Father doing. What the Father does, the Son also does.

30 "I can do nothing by myself."



Choose at least two of the next four options to reinforce the primary reading of the passage.

1. Role-play the story. (See script below)

Use different colored scarves or shawls worn over the head or around the shoulders for costumes.

For example:

Person 1: Jesus

Person 2: Disciple



2. Draw out the scene as you teach. The picture below shows a completed drawing.



3. Watch a YouTube video to help understand the story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3HFRIETmCI>

(This video covers more than necessary, so feel free to stop it at 1:02.)

4. Use puppets to act out the story. There is a nice series of Bible character puppets from

[www.thepuppetstore.com/biblical\\_s/62.htm](http://www.thepuppetstore.com/biblical_s/62.htm)



**Teaching Note:** After you have read the story from Scripture and reinforced it with two of the above options, you will begin to get the students involved in the learning process by asking the interactive questions below.

To illustrate the dependence that Jesus has on doing his Father's will, have them act out the first few verses of John 7. You can read the text to them and then prompt them with the dialogue below.

**Jesus' Brothers:** "Hey, come with me to Jerusalem, so everyone will know what you do."

**Jesus:** "No, it's not the right time to show everyone the things I do. I only do what my Father tells me to do."

Jesus' Brothers: "That's crazy! You are an adult. If you want to go you can go! It's not up to your Father!"

Jesus: "What I teach is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me."

---

### 3. Understand the Story

20 Minutes

**Summing it up:** *Jesus is dependent on his Father and he says it is OK for us to be that way too.*

**Q. Who is Jesus' Father?** (God.)

**Q. Why does what Jesus says seem crazy?** (Jesus is acting like a child.)

**Q. Is Jesus acting like he has power?** (No.)

Jesus tells us that it is OK not to be powerful. Jesus is telling us that he wants us to be like a child and depend on God.

Jesus is showing us what it is to live by faith. Faith means not trusting in yourself, but trusting in God for everything.

**Q. What is so weird about this?** (If they have trouble answering, ask the hint questions below, to help them.)

Hint:

**Q. When you watch TV, what do you see when you look at the people?** (They are popular; they wear nice clothes, they are pretty.)

**Q. Are the people on TV weak?** (No.)

**Q. Do the people on TV act like they are all together?** (Yes.)

Well, Jesus is telling his friends that it is OK to be weak and not have it all together. Jesus is telling us that it is OK to ask for help. Jesus is saying, "Let me first check this out with my Father before I do this." That is what Jesus wants us to do!

**Q. Who do you depend on?** (My sister, my mom, my dad.)

**Q. Does Jesus depend on anyone?** (If they have trouble answering, reread the two verses from John 5.)

**Q. If Jesus doesn't do anything on his own, does he depend on someone?** (Yes.)

**Q. Who does Jesus depend on?** (God.)

That's right.

**Q. If Jesus depends on God, do you think we should depend on God?** (Yes.)



#### 4. What About Me?

10 Minutes

**Summing it up:** *I need help to love others and have faith.*

**Q. Did you depend on anyone this morning?** (Yes.)

**Q. Who?** (My mom, my sister, my dad.)

**Q. How does it make you feel that you depended on them?** (If they have trouble answering, ask the hint question below, to help them.)

Hint:

**Q. Do you wish you could do everything by yourself and not need help?** (Yes. I get frustrated about that!)

Jesus wants us to depend on him. He wants us to ask for his help. That is what faith is all about. The definition of faith is that we know we can't do what Jesus wants us to do without trusting in him and asking him for help!

When we depend on God he gives us the power to love others.

**Q. Can you love your enemy on your own?** (No.)

Jesus wants us to tell God, "I can't do this on my own! I need your help to love my enemy!"

**Q. Can you be honest all the time?** (No.)

When we depend on God he can help us be honest. Faith is living all the time with God's help, and doing nothing on your own.





**Gospel Connection:** The good news is that because Jesus is dependent on his Father, we can be too. Because his Spirit lives inside of us, we have someone to ask for help when we need it.

---

## 5. Close in prayer

Jesus, I know I can't do things on my own. Thank you that you always asked God for help. I need your help to love people and to be honest.

