

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. 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 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 “disabled,” 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.
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Jill A. Miller



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Lesson 1

Would You Pass the Test?

Materials:

1. John 6:5-13 (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. A brown lunch bag. This is the prop.

Chapter 15a in *Love Walked Among Us* and Lesson 31a in *The Person of Jesus Manual*.

Goals:

Love: Jesus knows we can't do what he asks of us on our own. He loves us so much and wants us to go to him with the tiny bit we have so he can do what we cannot... for his glory.

Jesus: He asks us to do things we cannot do on our own, so we need his help.

Faith: God has a plan.



Kim's World: *In this passage, we see Jesus asking Philip to do the impossible. Andrew does what he can. Philip is kind of whiny. Kim and I, when given an "impossible task," can be very quick to whine. We can also be paralyzed by fear.*

I. Review the Story

10 Minutes

Summing it up: *Nothing interrupts God's plans of love for us. It is all based on his schedule and not mine!*

Bring out the schedule prop from last week.

Q. Do you remember what our lesson was about last week? (Interrupting our schedules.)
Refer to take home sheet from previous lesson.

Yes, we talked about how Jesus had his schedule interrupted.

Q. In our story from last week, where was Jesus on his way to? (Jairus' house.)

Q. Why was Jesus going to Jairus' house? (Jairus' daughter was really sick.)
Jesus was interrupted on his way to Jairus' house.

Q. Who interrupted Jesus? (A woman.)

Q. Tell me what was wrong with the woman. (She was sick and was bleeding.)

Q. Did the woman ask Jesus to help her? (No. She just touched Jesus' clothes.)
And once the woman touched his clothes, she was healed right away!

Q. Do you remember how long the woman was sick for? (Twelve years.)
So after the woman was healed, Jesus went on his way again to Jairus' house. But Jesus got interrupted again!

Q. Who interrupted Jesus this time? (People who told him that Jairus' daughter had died.)

Q. Did that stop Jesus from going to Jairus' house? (No.)

Q. When Jesus got to Jairus' house, what did he do? (He told Jairus' daughter to get up and she did.)
That's right.

Q. Do you remember how many times Jesus' schedule was interrupted last week?
(Four.)
If they have trouble answering, refer to last week's chart.

Q. Did Jesus get mad when his schedule was interrupted? (No.)

Q. Did Jesus love the people who interrupted him? (Yes.)

Q. Did Jesus get everything done that he needed to do? (Yes.)

Yes! Actually, when Jesus had interruptions he got more done than if he never had any interruptions!

Now, let's talk about us.

Q. Did anyone have their schedule interrupted this past week? (Answers will vary.)

Q. Did you think about how Jesus responded to interruptions? (Answers will vary.)

Briefly discuss and remind the students that "we cannot do anything on our own," we need God's help!

2. Experience the Story

20 Minutes

Well, today we are talking about a person who was asked to do something really, really hard.

Read John 6:5-13.

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 6:5-13

5 Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him. So he said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread for these people to eat?"

6 He asked this only to put Philip to the test. He already knew what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' pay would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8 Another of his disciples spoke up. It was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

9 He said, "Here is a boy with five small loaves of barley bread. He also has two small fish. But how far will that go in such a large crowd?"

10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down. The number of men among them was about 5,000.

11 Then Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks. He handed out the bread to those who were seated. He gave them as much as they wanted. And he did the same with the fish.

12 When all of them had enough to eat, Jesus spoke to his disciples. "Gather the leftover pieces," he said. "Don't waste anything."

13 So they gathered what was left over from the five barley loaves. They filled 12 baskets with the pieces left by those who had eaten.

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

1. Role-play the story.

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

For example:

Person 1: Jesus

Person 2: Philip

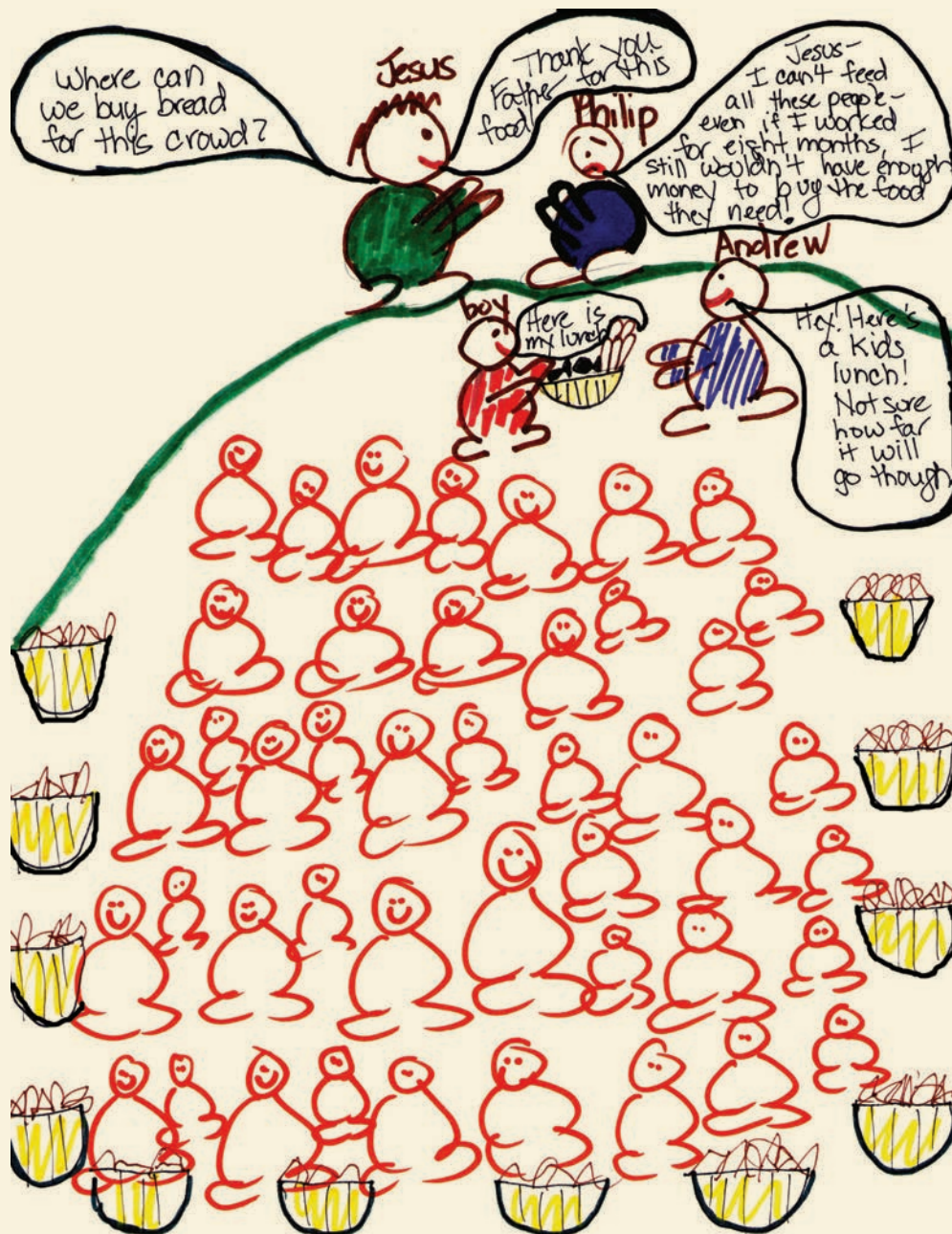
Person 3: Andrew

Person 4: Man

Person 5: Woman



2. Draw out the scene as you teach. Below is a completed drawing.



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

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6TjOhnvINk>

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

3. Understand the Story

20 Minutes

Summing it up: Jesus asks his disciples how they should feed more than 5,000 people. Then he feeds them with only 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish.

Q. Why does Jesus ask Philip where you could buy enough bread to feed 5,000 men?

(If they have trouble answering this question, go on to the next ones.)

And that was just the men. How about the women? How about the children? Wow! There were at least 15,000 people!

Q. Is it possible to buy bread for 15,000 people? (No.)

So, Jesus is asking Philip a crazy question! Jesus knows how he is going to get enough bread to feed all the people, but Jesus is trying to see what Philip would do.

Q. What does Jesus say he is doing with Philip in John 6:6? (Testing him.)

Jesus is testing Philip to see how he would feed these people. Jesus knows it is impossible for Philip to get enough food for 15,000, yet Jesus wants to see what Philip does.

Q. How does Philip answer Jesus? (He says they don't have enough money to buy food for all the people.)

Reread John 6:7.

Philip is a great guy. He just tells it like it is. He isn't afraid to tell Jesus just what he is thinking.

Q. What do you think Jesus wants Philip to do? (Ask Jesus to feed them because he knows he can't.)

Yes. Jesus wants Philip to say, "I can't do this, but you can! Help us!"

Then Andrew, one of Jesus' disciples, has an idea.

Q. What did Andrew do? (He found a boy who had a lunch of fish and bread.)

Reread John 6:9.

Make a chart of differences between Philip's response and Andrew's response.

Philip	Andrew
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Even if I worked for 8 months all of these people maybe would only each take one bite of food!"• Kind of whiny.• "This is impossible."• "Jesus, you are crazy!"• Scared.• Philip flunked Jesus' test.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Didn't just stand there.• Found a young boy who had a little bit of food.• Believed that Jesus really could feed this many people.• Came to Jesus with just a little bit, knowing that Jesus could do something with the boy's lunch.• He did what he could.• Andrew passed Jesus' test.

Historical Background

The little boy's food of barley and fish was the simple meal of a poor person. The fish would have been small like sardines, and they were from the Sea of Galilee.

Q. How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus told them to tell all the people to sit down and get ready to eat, knowing that all Jesus had were 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread? (Nervous.)

Now remember, these people hadn't eaten all day. There were children there who hadn't eaten all day.

Q. What does Jesus do? (He gives thanks.)

Reread John 6:11.

Yes. Jesus gives thanks. Jesus said grace.

Q. Then what happens? (All the people ate.)

Yes. And Jesus isn't stingy.

Q. How much did they all eat? (As much as they wanted.)

Reread John 6:11.

Q. How much food was left over? (Twelve baskets full!)

That is Jesus. He loves to give good things to us.



4. What About Me?

10 Minutes

Summing it up: *Jesus loves to have us come to him with all our needs and he will supply them.*

We have talked about how Jesus put Philip to the test. Jesus asked Philip to do something that Jesus knew he could not do. Jesus wanted Philip to say, “Jesus, I can’t do this by myself, I need you to do this, help me!”

Q. Does Jesus ask you to do things that seem impossible for you to do? *(Answers will vary.)*



Make a list.

Examples:

- *Not worry about my family.*
- *Have a quiet heart and quiet mind when life seems out of control.*
- *Remember Jesus loves me as if I were the only person in the whole world! (My picture is on his refrigerator!)*

Remember, Jesus said, “I can’t do anything on my own. I need my Father’s help.” If Jesus needed God’s help, we sure do too.



Gospel Connection: Jesus doesn’t just give us good things, he also gives us his Spirit that helps us when we are weak and need help. We know that he had to die in order for us to receive his Spirit.

5. Close in prayer

Father, please help us to do what you have asked us to do. Help us not to be afraid. You have told us to love some people that are really hard for us to love. You have told us to do things that seem impossible for us to do. We can’t do this by ourselves. God, we need your help. Amen.

