

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 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. 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 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.

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Jill A. Miller



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Lesson 1

Then What Happened?

Materials:

1. John 20: 1 - 18 (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 “whoobers,” commonly known as a child’s security blanket. This is the prop.

Chapter 23a in *Love Walked Among Us* and Lesson 47 in *The Person of Jesus*.

Goals:

Love: God loves us and will take care of us. He also wants us to take care of others too.

Faith: Because Jesus rose from the dead, everything he said is true and we can believe it!

Jesus: Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to always be with us and never leave us.



Kim’s World: *What a comfort for Kim (and me) to know that we are never alone. We don’t like to be alone. It can be scary. Jesus could only be one place at one time, so he gave us the Holy Spirit to live in each one of us, teaching us, reminding us, and helping us.*

I. Review the Story

10 Minutes

Summing it up: *When Jesus died on the cross his blood washed away all my sins.*

Last time we talked about the greatest story ever told.

Q. Who remembers what that story was? (Jesus died for us on the cross.)
Yes, Jesus had to die.

Q. Do you remember why Jesus died? (To wash away my sins.)
We have been talking about our sins, or things that we have done that haven't made Jesus happy.

Q. Do you remember what we put into the glass each time we thought of something we did that wasn't good? (A coin.)
Yes, and we ended up with a lot of coins in our glass—remember?

Once we had all those coins we were able to “wash out” the coins from the glass using something.

Q. Do you remember what we used? (Red water.)
Yes, that's right.

Q. Why did we make the water red? (To remind us of Jesus' blood.)
Yes. When Jesus died on the cross, he bled. In God's eyes, Jesus' blood is the only thing that will take away all of our sins, or take away all of our “coins.”

When we take communion in church we hold a glass with juice in it. The juice reminds us of Jesus' blood that came out of him as he was dying. It reminds us of how much Jesus loves us and that he died to take away our sins.

Q. After Jesus died, do you remember what happened to him? (He was buried and then he rose from the dead.)

2. Experience the Story

20 Minutes

Summing it up: *After Jesus died he rose from the dead. He told his friend Mary that it is better that he goes to heaven because then the Holy Spirit will come.*

Read John 20:1-18.

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 20:1-18

1 Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. It was still dark. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance.

2 So she ran to Simon Peter and another disciple, the one Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb! We don't know where they have put him!"

3 So Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.

4 Both of them were running. The other disciple ran faster than Peter. He reached the tomb first.

5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there. But he did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived. He went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there.

7 He also saw the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself. It was separate from the linen.

8 The disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed.

9 They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

10 Then the disciples went back to their homes.

11 But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she cried, she bent over to look into the tomb.

12 She saw two angels dressed in white. They were seated where Jesus' body had been. One of them was where Jesus' head had been laid. The other sat where his feet had been placed.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said. "I don't know where they have put him."

14 Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn't realize that it was Jesus.

15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. So she said, "Sir, did you carry him away? Tell me where you put him. Then I will go and get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him. Then she cried out in the Aramaic language, "Rabboni!" Rabboni means Teacher.

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me. I have not yet returned to the Father. Instead, go to those who believe in me. Tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news. She said, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

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: Mary Magdalene

Person 2: John

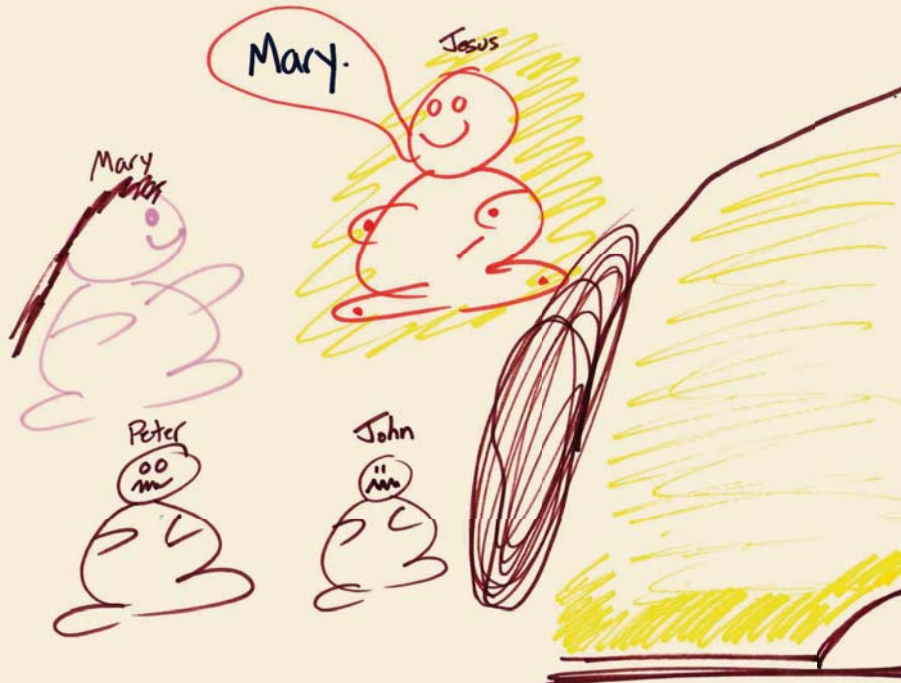
Person 3: Peter

Person 4: Angel

Person 5: Angel



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



3. Watch a YouTube video of the story: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70GMOGzEMQM>].

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.



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.

3. Understand the Story

20 Minutes

Summing it up: Mary thought after Jesus' death that he was gone forever because the tomb was empty. When he revealed himself to her in the garden, she didn't want him to leave again. Jesus understood that and comforted her by telling her he would send his Holy Spirit to be inside of her.

This woman, Mary, is not Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is also not Lazarus' sister Mary. All we know about this Mary is that she came from a town called Magdala, which is next to the Sea of Galilee. This Mary had seven demons in her and Jesus commanded all of them to get out of her. Mary loved Jesus very much.

Show a map of Galilee: http://www.bible-history.com/maps/galilee_north_palestine.html.

Q. What did John and Peter do after they discovered that Jesus wasn't in the tomb?

(Went home.)

Reread John 20:10.

Q. What did Mary do? (Mary stood outside the tomb and cried. Then she looked into the tomb again.)

Reread John 20:11.

Q. Why do you think Mary didn't go home? (She wanted to stay.)

Q. What is the first thing Jesus asks Mary? (Why are you crying?)

Reread John 20:15.

Q. Do you think Jesus knew why Mary was crying without even asking her? (Yes.)

Q. Why do you think Jesus asked Mary why she was crying when he already knew why? (He wanted her to think of an answer.)

Sometimes when our moms or dads ask us, "Why?," it just makes us think. Jesus was being so gentle when he asked Mary, "Why are you crying?" Jesus could have said, "Stop crying!" Jesus is giving Mary time to think. Jesus is never in a hurry. He always cares about what we are thinking and feeling. He cares about our heart.

Q. Jesus answers Mary with one word. What was that word? (Mary.)

Reread John 20:16.

Q. With this one word, "Mary," how did that make her feel? (Happy. Jesus remembered her. He wasn't dead! Jesus cared about her.)

Q. As soon as Mary knows it is Jesus, she cries out, "Teacher!" As she said this we can tell she also did something else. What else did she do? The clue for what she did is in verse 17. (She hugged Jesus.)

Reread John 20:17.

Q. Why do you think Mary is holding on tight to Jesus? (Mary loves Jesus. She doesn't want to let go.)

Q. Tell me what could happen if she let go of him. (Answers will vary.)

Q. What happened to him before? (He died.)

Q. Do you think Jesus knew what Mary was thinking and feeling? (Yes.)

Q. How was Mary feeling? (Happy.)

Q. Do you think Jesus knew Mary was scared to let him go because he might die again? (Yes.)

Read John 14:16, then use this verse to go into the teaching point below.

John 14:16

16 I will ask the Father. And he will give you another Friend to help you and to be with you forever.

Jesus looks and shares Mary's feelings. Then he helps her. Jesus looks and shares our feelings. Then he helps us.

Q. Do you remember the three steps of love? (Look, share the person's sorrow, and help.)

Refer to the drawing below or redraw to remind them.



Jesus' way to help Mary not to be scared was to send a helper for her. Jesus' way to help us not to be scared is to send a helper for us.

That helper is called the Holy Spirit. He lived inside Mary. He lives inside of us when we ask Jesus to forgive us. The Holy Spirit is like Jesus climbing into each one of us and living in us.

So Jesus said to Mary, "Let go of me and now hold on to the Holy Spirit."

Jesus knew he was going to go back to heaven, so he didn't want to leave Mary and his friends alone. Jesus knew Mary was afraid to be without him. So Jesus sent a special gift to her, the Holy Spirit.

Jill's Personal Illustration: My grandkids never want to be separated from their mommy. But sometimes they are. When they leave their mommy, they are all upset and sometimes crying. Then their mommy gives them their "whoobers." A whoober is a blanket in the shape of an animal. My grandchildren stop crying as soon as they hold on to their "whoobers."

Q. Did you have a “whoobers” when you were little? (Answers will vary.)

Well, Jesus kind of gives us a “super, duper whoobers,” but this “whoobers” is powerful! It is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus wanted Mary to hold on to the Holy Spirit the same way she was hanging on to him. Jesus wanted Mary to get help from the Holy Spirit, the same way Jesus had helped her before he died.

Q. Tell me the times when you need help. (At work, to be patient with my sister; not to be scared, etc.)

The Holy Spirit is waiting for us to ask him to help us at our jobs; to ask him for patience with people who may bug us. The Holy Spirit is always with us, no matter where we go, so we never have to be afraid. Jesus has come inside of us and always is with us!



4. What About Me?

10 Minutes

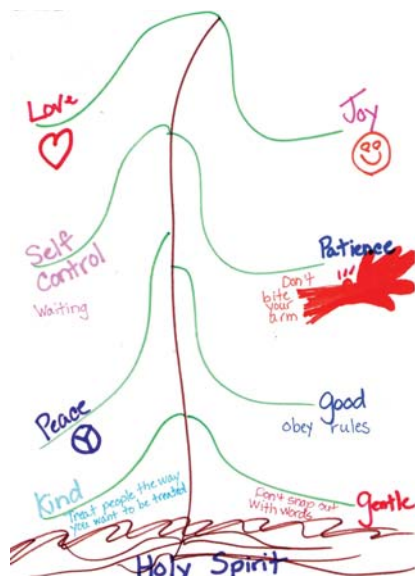
Summing it up: Jesus knew it was impossible to live without him, which is why he sent the Holy Spirit.

Q. How does it make you feel when you think about the Holy Spirit in you? (Happy, not scared, etc.)

Q. When you wake up in the morning and think about the Holy Spirit in you, how could your day be different, than if you didn't think about him? (Not get mad, not complain, etc.)

We have talked about the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Refer to the drawing below or redraw to remind them.



Q. How can you tell if a tree is an apple tree? (It has apples growing on it.)

Q. How can you tell if a tree is a pear tree? (It has pears growing on it.)

There is a way to tell if a person has the Holy Spirit or Jesus in them. The person has “fruit” growing in them. It is not fruit like apples or pears, but it is like invisible fruit. And the invisible fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Q. If you are having a day where your plans don’t go like you want them to, how could we tell the Holy Spirit lives inside you? (You would be patient, you wouldn’t get frustrated, etc.)

Q. If you are frustrated, how could people tell Jesus is in you? (You wouldn’t get mad; you would be patient; you wouldn’t act mean, etc.)

Q. If you are having a day where you could get cranky, how can the Holy Spirit help you? (He can give you joy.)



Gospel Connection: Jesus knew it would be impossible to live without him. That is why we have the Holy Spirit. He is our helper. He is always in us and can give us the help we need, at any moment! We can ask him any time to help us with whatever is bothering us.

5. Close in prayer

Jesus, thank you for dying for us. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit. Thank you that the Holy Spirit lives in us and is our helper. Thank you that you have promised never to leave us. Amen.