

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.
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



Contents

Quick Start Guide	9
List of Props	17
Lesson 1: Oh No! They Are Arguing!	19
Lesson 2: At Your Service!	27
Lesson 3: Don't Fall Off the Cliff!	33
Lesson 4: Ugh...	39
Lesson 5: Jesus Flips Out!	47
Lesson 6: Here Comes King Jesus!	55
Lesson 7: He Did What He Said He Would Do!	63



Lesson 1

Oh No! They Are Arguing!

Materials:

1. Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5 (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. DVD of *The Wizard of Oz*. (You will show a short clip from it.)
6. Figure of a child (i.e. Fisher Price people). This is the prop.

Chapter 19a in *Love Walked Among Us* and Lesson 38a in the *Person of Jesus Manual*.

Goals:

Love: To love we need to empty ourselves of pride and fill up with humility.

Faith: What Jesus says is true. (Matthew 18:3)

Jesus: Jesus knows every thought and action of ours. He knows our hearts, and He still loves us and teaches us by his example!



Kim's World: People affected by disability tend to think in a concrete way. So when we talk about not wanting to take the "best" seat or take the "first" place, this may mean to the students, the prettiest chair in the room or to be the first in line at the snack bar. Take time with this lesson so the group understands that it is a position of the heart that Jesus is really seeking.

I. Review the Story

10 Minutes

Summing it up: Any fruits hanging off of you this week?

Q. Do you remember what our lesson was about last week? (The fruits of the Spirit.)
Show prop.

Yes, we talked about how fruits grow on the vine.

Q. In the Bible, who is the vine? (Jesus.)
Right.

Q. Who are the branches? (Us.)

Q. Who is the gardener? (God.)
That's good. Yes, we talked about how fruit grows off the branches. God trims or prunes the branch so more fruit will grow on it. When God trims or prunes us he may remove something from us so the fruits of the Spirit will grow even more. Maybe he may take away your health for a few weeks and that may make the fruit of patience grow in you more. Maybe God may put a person in your life who is very hard to love and who would make the fruit of love grow in you. God is the gardener and his job is to make you have a whole lot of fruits hanging all over you!

Q. What is the fruit that God is talking about? (Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.)

Q. How did it go this week with fruits hanging off you? (*Answers will vary.*)

Q. Did you have any fruits? Which ones were they?
Let them discuss which fruit.

Q. It is hard to have these fruits? (Yes.)
We talked about how Jesus said, "You can't do anything without me." We can't have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control without Jesus helping us!

Jesus is always with us, helping us. Without Jesus we can do NOTHING! However, with him we can do everything (Phil. 4:13).

2. Experience the Story

20 Minutes

And this week we are going to look at another way Jesus loves us, even when he knows we have been arguing!

Read Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5.

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.

Mark 9:33-37

33 Jesus and his disciples came to a house in Capernaum. There he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

34 But they kept quiet. On the way, they had argued about which one of them was the most important person.

35 Jesus sat down and called for the 12 disciples to come to him. Then he said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last. They must be the servant of everyone."

36 Jesus took a little child and had the child stand among them. Then he took the child in his arms. He said to them,

37 "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me also welcomes the one who sent me."

Matthew 18:1-5

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus. They asked him, "Then who is the most important person in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 Jesus called a little child over to him. He had the child stand among them.

3 Jesus said, "What I'm about to tell you is true. You need to change and become like little children. If you don't, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Anyone who takes the humble position of this child is the most important in the kingdom of heaven.

5 "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this one in my name welcomes me."

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: Little child

Person 3: Disciple #1

Person 4: Disciple #2

Person 5: Disciple #3



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



3. Watch a YouTube video to help understand the story:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNb_4ffnKR8

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: *I need to become the least important; like a small child.*

As we read this story in the Bible, we need to remember that Jesus is getting closer and closer to going to the cross.

Q. How do you think Jesus feels as he is getting closer to the cross? (Sad, scared.)
Nobody wants to go on a cross. It is a very shameful way to die. Jesus knows people will hate him and do terrible things to him. But, Jesus still wants to be a servant and obey his Father. He knows God wanted him to die for us so we can live forever in heaven. Because of this, Jesus will become the least important.

But the disciples are not thinking about being the least important, but the *most* important! They have it all wrong, again!!!! The disciples want to be the greatest.

Q. What is so strange about this? (The disciples should know what Jesus means to be humble after being with Jesus for so long.)
Yes, they got it wrong about how to become the greatest.

Historical Background: Peter's House

The house referred to here is Peter's house. Archaeologists (people who dig in the dirt to find out about the past) are pretty sure that they can identify the room where this discussion took place. The house is very small.

Q. How do you think the disciples thought they would become the most important person? (By having smart things to say, by letting everyone notice them.)

Q. What would the greatest person look like to the disciples?

Make a chart and write down their answers on left side of chart labeled "Greatest Person."



Hint: ask them how a President acts.

Greatest Person	Least Important Person (Humble) (like little children)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would be important • They are wonderful. • They are a good teacher. • Have a lot of power • Many, many people would come to see them. • They are the center of attention. • They have all the answers. • They order people around. • They have important friends. • They would be really smart. • They try to be right all the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They ask for help. • They trust their parents. • They don't worry. • They always ask for things. • They are not fake; they don't pretend how they feel. • They don't worry about what other people think of them. • They care when others are hurt • They want to help. • They copy what other people do. • They are persistent. • They believe what you say. • They tell other people what they believe.

Jesus tells the disciples that they need to change.

Q. How do they need to change? (Become like little children.)

Read Matthew 18:3.

Show prop of little child figure.

Q. What do children do?

Write down answers on right side of chart under "Least Important Person."



Q. Jesus says one thing here about children. What are they? (Humble.)

Re-read Matthew 18:4.

Q. What does it mean to be humble? (Looking at other people and wanting them to be better than me at something.)

Jesus says anyone who acts like a child and is humble is the most important person in the kingdom of heaven.

Q. What do you think the disciples thought about what Jesus said? (Surprised.)

Yes. Who wants to be like a little child? We are all trying to act like smart adults!

Tell your own story here about how you struggle to be humble.

Show a clip from "The Wizard of Oz" where the wizard says, "I am the great Oz!"

Q. Do you think the wizard thinks he is great? (Yes.)

Q. So is the wizard proud or humble? (Proud.)

Q. If the wizard is proud, what does it look like to be humble? (To think that other people are better than I am.)

Right, that's what Jesus means to be humble.



4. What About Me?

10 Minutes

Summing it up: *The greatest in heaven is the person who takes the lowest position on earth.*

It is one thing to say to Jesus, "I want to be a servant for you, I want to put others first in front of myself." But it is another thing when someone *treats you* like a servant and makes you feel like nothing! That drives me crazy! But that really shows me what is in my heart. I want to say I am a servant with my mouth, but my heart says that I really don't want to be a servant.

Q. Let's say there was a pile of dishes from last night's dinner with old spaghetti sauce on them. It was your job to wash those dishes while your brother and mom went clothes shopping. How would that make you feel? (Like a slave, my mom is mean. I would be mad. I would be jealous.)

Jesus says he came to be a servant, and we are to copy him, especially if we don't feel like it. Jesus would do the dishes. And he would do it with joy. That's what being humble is like.

Q. Is it hard to be humble? (Yes.)

It sure is! To remember that other people are better than yourself.

That means my husband is better than me! That means your sister is better than you!

We talked about when we love that it costs us something. When we love we need to give up things that we want to keep. We may need to give up the idea of wanting to be important. Give up the idea of going clothes shopping with our mother and brother when we have chores to do. We may need to give up the idea of wanting to be the center of attention. We may need to give up the idea of only hanging around “cool” people.

We need Jesus to give us a heart that is humble. Remember, Jesus said without him we can do NOTHING!



Gospel Connection: Jesus wants us to be like him. He gave up everything so we could go to heaven when we die.

5. Close in Prayer

Jesus, please help us to think about other people more than we think about ourselves. Help us to love them and serve them the way you loved and served us. Amen.

