

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. 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.