

SEE JESUS NETWORK

*Interactive Bible Studies
For Small Groups*

JESUS' PHOTO ALBUM

by Pam Houck

I didn't exactly jump at the chance to go to the seeJesus Pastors Conference to do Small Group Leader Training. Not that I don't love everything about the organization—the material, Paul Miller, the mission, the subject—but I just was so out of it, so confused, so much self-doubt, weariness, dryness of soul. How could I attend much less lead a lesson? I pleaded weakness to Paul, but my excuse didn't hold much weight with him. He invited me to come if for no other reason than to just soak in the Passion for two days. I knew I needed that—competence or incompetence aside.

As it often is with Jesus' teaching in my life, many strands come together—many rivulets of grace. Often I don't notice them until they come together in more of a stream (or flood). My husband Greg had been preaching from Luke 14—take the lower place and invite the low people. I had been mulling that over and what that meant for me.

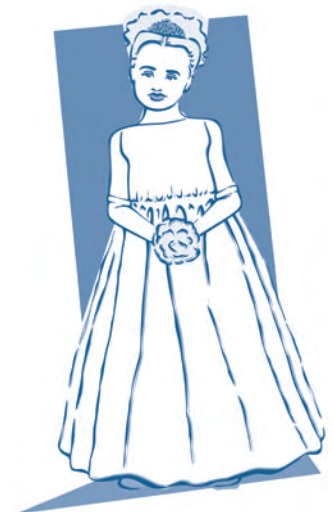
Julie emailed and asked me to lead the last lesson in the Passion unit of *The Person of Jesus* study called "Love is Forever". As I prepared, Paul asks in the lesson, "How do you endure in love when nothing comes back to you?"—a key issue in my current discouragement. I felt like a cheap kitchen sponge. When you run it under water, it doesn't soak up anything. It's dry, hard, and withered. Water just runs off. I felt like I could understand the words on an intellectual or logical level, but the message couldn't quite reach my heart.

My assigned lesson was awesome. We were to image pictures of Jesus' life and who might be in the "photo album" of his life. We reflected on his scars and how they are a sign of his love, how he was changed forever when he became a man, how he continues to suffer with his church, and how he will one day turn the kingdom over to his Father and then serve at his own wedding feast. Exceedingly powerful and overwhelming. Yet, when I finished teaching it in Small Group Leader Training and was asked to critique myself, I felt like (although I didn't say) that my main weakness was that I didn't have the tenderness of heart, or the same receptivity as the other women. Part of it is my Midwestern German-ness. My way of coping is to buck up, be stoic, keep it inside, move ahead. Sometimes that toughness and perseverance in suffering can create an emotional insensitivity or a habit of protective distance. As I ended, I prayed with our group that our experience of Jesus' presence would continue to be real and arresting as we left Williamsburg. But I can't say I believed it. I mean, conferences are conferences and regular life is just that, regular.

I returned to Richmond, grateful and blessed by the teaching and women in my group. But by 1:00 pm I was back at my desk and pretty much regular business as usual.

On Saturday I was planning to attend a wedding. Carol is a dear sister, much in love with Jesus. Simple, kind, gentle—she lives in an apartment on the rougher side of Richmond supported by a generous niece and disability payments. She's very slight and suffers from heart problems that have left her without much energy. She tends to stutter or occasionally have trouble getting her words out. She told us once that she had two hopes in life—one was to be married and one was to be a missionary. She had prayed to that end for many years, but trusted that God's ways, although not necessarily comprehensible, were best. She had not been able to go overseas, but she took on a mission as a volunteer at the Veterans Administration Hospital and spends long days visiting guys in the spinal cord unit. She goes from bed to bed talking to guys about Jesus, listening, praying, giving out books, tapes, cds, mugs, and flags. Now at age 62, she had met Tom, a fellow volunteer. He proposed, and they were to be married.

The site of the wedding was the chapel at the VA Hospital. Originally they had only wanted immediate family as they didn't want to have attention focused on them. But so many wanted to be a part that they opened it up and others just invited themselves. I arrived early with Greg who was officiating along with the chaplain. I sat in the back and watched the guests begin to arrive. Old and young, all manner of dress. People with walkers, guys in wheel chairs, orderlies pushing patients on gurneys, nurses, security guards, janitorial staff. It was Jesus' photo album. I was seeing an illustration unfold, the lesson piercing my heart. I was crying when the vocalist began the service. He was singing what I have long considered to be about the sappiest Christian song ever, "He Touched Me". That didn't seem to matter. Then Carol came down the aisle, looking more beautiful and radiant than any of the many young brides I've seen in my 25 years of attending weddings during Greg's ministry. She had chosen this hymn as a processional and the words played in my mind:



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CAFE Y ALGO MAS

[Coffee and Something More]

PERSON OF JESUS STUDY IN MADRID

by Jennifer Wilson

Jan, a missionary in Madrid, Spain, has been doing *The Person of Jesus* study with a group of women for the past year. (Names have been changed.)

Q What is it like to lead *The Person of Jesus* study in Madrid?

A Evangelism in Spain moves very slowly, and building trust in relationships takes years. Further, in this culture Jesus is depicted as either a tiny baby or an emaciated man. In general, Spaniards don't see Jesus as he really is. However, the response to studying *The Person of Jesus* has been an incredible gift. One woman said, "I'm seeing a different God here; I'm seeing a God I never knew about."

Q How did you invite women to join?

A We started with an evangelistic outreach called *café y algo más* (coffee and something more). This monthly breakfast outreach was geared to secular Spanish women. We continued building relationships by meeting in smaller groups for four weeks at a time. Then, any who were still interested kept meeting.

Camila came to know Jesus through this outreach. After having her third child, Camila slipped into depression. Her husband, a non-believer, suggested that Camila call me for support. Camila asked me to do a Bible study. I suggested that we team up to lead a *Person of Jesus* study. I said to Camila, "You pray to see if God puts anyone on your heart to invite." Camila hesitated, "Jan, I don't know."

Q Did Camila invite anyone? Did others come?

A I was praying for God to give Camila courage about inviting other women and to bring hungry and open women to her. The next day, Camila called me and was so excited because she invited her friend Marcela. Marcela agreed to come and in turn invited her friend Elsa, a seeker. Camila was thrilled.

Q Tell me about Elsa.

A Elsa is lovely and gentle. But, her husband treats her terribly, and her eight-year-old son is beginning to do the same. No one will visit Elsa's home because her husband is so unkind. Because of his great suspicion and lack of trust, Elsa even has to hide her *Person of Jesus* study attendance from him. She said to me, "The only thing keeping me alive is the faith I have come to through this group."

Q How have you reached out to other women that you've encountered?

A Every time I saw my neighbor, Irma, she looked so forlorn. She was sad in appearance, speech, and even in the way she walked. She looked as if she was in mourning. So, I decided I would catch Irma's eye, make eye contact, and give her a warm, friendly *hello*. After doing this a few times, Irma and I had a brief conversation. One day while I was weeding my yard, Irma came up and unloaded her troubles. Because Spaniards are generally very private people it was a huge step that Irma even came into my yard to talk to me.

Q What did she say to you?

A With tears in her eyes, Irma shared that her nine-year old son said he hated her. I gathered that Irma was really struggling in relation to her children. Usually, I wouldn't be as forward as I was, but I sensed it was okay to be open. I said to Irma, "I know the only person who can help you is Jesus Christ." At that point I invited Irma to a Bible study I was teaching.

Q What did Irma say?

A Irma, a lawyer, said "I'll think about it." She came back later and said, "I'll come for three weeks and see how it goes." She's been coming ever since and is presently attending the *Person of Jesus* study I am leading.

Q What changes have you seen in Irma's life?

A Irma once said about studying Jesus, "This is the piece that has been missing for me." I see her responding to the gospel. She does have faith in the Lord, and she understands grace.

Q What about her family?

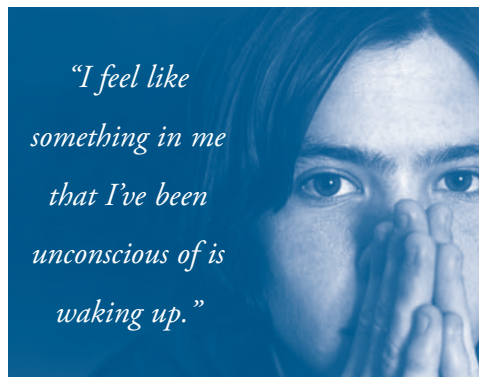
A Irma and her husband have recently invited my husband and me into their home for a meal—another huge step in our relationship. The following week we invited Irma and her family to a church picnic. They had a great time; it's exciting to see what God is doing.

Q What struggles have you dealt with?

A During one lesson I explained that we're not all children of God and shared John 1:12 (NIV), "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Irma said, "You just interpret it differently than we do. I really like all of you, but this is where I differ."

Q How has your study been going recently?

A During one of our recent meetings, Irma said, "I'm seeing things that I never saw before." And Elsa said, "I feel like something in me that I've been unconscious of is waking up."



SEE JESUS PASTORS CONFERENCE

MARCH 29-31 • WILLIAMSBURG VA

SMALL GROUP LEADER TRAINING



In this track, six participants each teach a lesson from Unit V, *The Passion* unit of *The Person of Jesus* study. Each participant does a self-critique, is critiqued by the group and by the two leaders. Three groups were lead by six seeJesus Trainers: Julie Courtney and Debbie Ellington, Timo Strawbridge and Andy Newell, Monte Starks and Drew Bennett.

"I thought I was coming to learn to teach better, but Jesus wanted to teach me.... Jesus' sacrifice for me is so fresh and real." —Virginia

"I was expecting an intellectual exercise and honing of skills. While that happened, that was the least of it. I saw Jesus, and I leave this seminar changed." —Florida

"The Holy Spirit moved through our group all week-end. We needed Kleenex." —Florida

PRAYERLIFE — Led by Bob Allums (IL)

"The materials are so earth-shattering, yet so simple that everyone could be impacted by them." —Tennessee

"I desperately needed this workshop—even more than I realized. This de-complicates the discipline of prayer and, like the other materials you have developed, it makes my prayer life meaningful and doable." —Virginia

"I have studied prayer for years. Read over 50 books on prayer...[yet] the

simple insight of a child relationship revitalizes the joy of prayer." —New York

PERSON OF JESUS — Led by Paul Miller

"This sounds silly—although I always loved Jesus, now I also like him." —Pennsylvania

"As a pastor I find myself scared to death of talking with non-Christians. I am grateful for this material that not only gives me an avenue but shows me the compassion and love Jesus has for the lost." —North Carolina

"It took a session or two to get through to me, but I see the point—I am not at all like Jesus yet I am totally drawn to Him more. I was undone in a marvelous way." —New York

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON WILLIAMSBURG



It was a joy for me to see Bob, Timo, Julie, and our new seeJesus trainers equipping pastors and leaders effectively, in three different tracks. My favorite comment was from Sallie Fredericks, a pastors' wife from Maryland, *"Most conferences I hear people leave saying, 'He/she really knows the Bible, or is a great speaker.' We are all saying, 'I can do this.'"* John the Baptist explained to his disciples, *"I must decrease and he must increase."* —Paul Miller

CONFERENCE STATISTICS

Attendees: 123 • Staff and Volunteers: 11

Pastors and Spouses—58 • Non-Pastors—65

16 States: AL, DE, FL, GA, IL, MD, MN, MO, NC, NJ, NY, PA, TN, VA, WI, WV

9 Denominations: Baptist General Conference, E-Free, EPC, Lutheran, OPC, PCA, PC-USA, Southern Baptist, and non-denominational.



SEE JESUS PASTORS CONFERENCE

bringing new life to your small groups

Thursday, May 18, 2006

The Person of Jesus study (Conference fee £20, includes lunch)

Friday, May 19, 2006

Small Group Leader Training (Conference fee £15, includes lunch)

Location—Highbury Baptist Church, 40 Highbury Place, London

Times for both days—Registration 9:30am • Conference 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Sponsored by World Harvest Mission's London Team

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER GO TO WWW.SEEJESUS.NET

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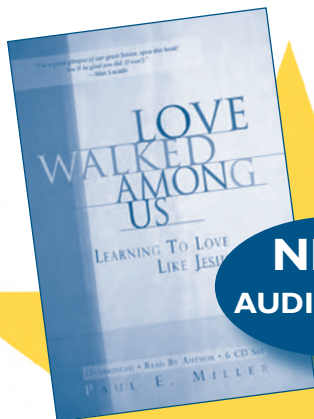
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Report on Williamsburg Pastors Conference



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*Buy online at www.seeJesus.net
[click on Small Group Resources]*

JESUS' PHOTO ALBUM

—continued from page 1

*“Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him, How I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus, Oh for grace to trust Him more.”*

I began almost to pray, “Enough, Lord.” I felt like I wanted his touch, something to reach me emotionally, a personal experience of Him, and not just thoughts and ideas. But now in the moment I felt as if I couldn’t handle any more! I managed not to fall to the floor weeping (I am German after all) and the service proceeded. The vows were perfect, and Carol spoke hers without a single hesitation or stutter. My view of the church as the Bride of Christ was rapidly undergoing renovation as I began to see the true bride of the Kingdom, not as someone young, fresh, untried, naïve, but as someone who has known the trials and pain of life, who has seen suffering and struggle, who is weak, broken, wounded, and yet so loved. The church as it really is, with much weakness and failing, yet beautiful.

Carol and Tom recessed slowly to cheers and clapping. They were going over to the side of the chapel to greet people and have a few pictures when Carol stepped aside from the “path.” She went to the bedside of a vet, lying flat, hands deformed on top of the sheets. She smiled and kissed him gently on the forehead. It was Jesus’ mission accomplished. He will present to the Father a church who indeed does love—the lowly, the hurt, the forgotten—like He does.