



## *A Chat with Liz Curtis Higgs* *about* ***Really Bad Girls of the Bible***

**In the following Q&A session,** Liz gives us a closer look at how *Really Bad Girls of the Bible* was created and why. She also shares reactions from her readers and her own surprising discoveries while writing this second book in her Bad Girls of the Bible series.

### **What sets apart the women in this book as Really Bad Girls, compared to the rest of the series?**

Oh dear. You *would* ask this question first. The truth is, these women were remnants—chosen for *Bad Girls of the Bible* when I was certain I could shoehorn twenty women into one book, then put aside when I realized only ten would fit. Naturally, Bathsheba and company stood around my writing study, hands on hips, demanding a book of their own. I could have called it *More Bad Girls of the Bible*, but how boring is that? Besides, the eight women in this book were decidedly different than their predecessors. Their stories were more difficult, more challenging, and the dividing line between right and wrong wasn't always as clearly drawn.

Herodias and Athaliah were “Bad and Proud of It,” making them far worse than some of the just plain Bad Girls. Jael and Tamar both flummoxed me, as they committed truly evil deeds yet contributed to God's cause, making them “Bad for a Good Reason.” The Medium of En Dor and Bathsheba both catered to a king under the darkness of night. Their actions were indeed bad, but did they really have a choice? That moral ambiguity placed them under a “Bad Moon Rising.” And our two grace-bearers of the book, the Adulteress and the Bleeding Woman, were both “Bad, but Not Condemned” by the Lord, who came to set such women free. A really mixed bag, this group of Really Bad Girls. Even if I didn't like them all as people, I loved the time I spent with them.

### **Which woman's story do you personally find it easiest to relate to and why?**

For all the reasons unveiled in her chapter, the Adulteress is the one who most speaks to me. When I found the opening epigraph for her chapter, William Somerville's captivating phrase "peculiar grace" gave me both my fictional character's name and her quirky personality. The notion of having her be a model for art students flowed naturally from the next line about "boldest painters." Then a red dress and white paint came to mind and...well, let's just say I feared I might short-circuit the keyboard, so steady was my flow of tears. I never feel closer to the Lord than when I'm writing, and when he paints a picture for me, as Dr. Consuelo did for Grace, it's all I can do to get the words on the page, praying I've captured what God has graciously shown me.

Grace's story and the biblical story both align with a painful experience from my own life. In my freshman year of college, a group of mean-spirited guys stole my clothes while I was in bed with one of their buddies. He slipped out a few minutes later, leaving me alone in his dorm room, while they stood in the hall, laughing uproariously, waiting for me to emerge. I did so, wrapped in a bed sheet, crimson from head to toe. Oh yes, I've felt this woman's shame. I know what it's like to be condemned by friends and strangers alike. But Jesus held no stones in his hands. Only grace.

### **Which of the Really Bad Girls do most women seem to connect with?**

Judging by my mailbox, the Bleeding Woman is our far-and-away favorite. One dear sister wrote, "I have suffered from and battled with depression for seven years. Two suicide attempts later, I'm beginning to understand and strive for the same faith this bleeding woman had. I'm in complete awe of her." Me too.

Many readers have rightfully asked, "What's her story doing in a book about Bad Girls?" Of course, today we would never see her as anything but desperately sick. But two thousand years ago, she would have been labeled a Really, Really Bad Girl by her neighbors, since physical ailments were considered a direct result of sin. Hence, our unnamed sister with the issue of blood belongs here, since she'd have been marked as a serious sinner in her time, with a vile disease to prove it.

There's another reason I included her in this book: after so much murder and mayhem, so much sex and sorcery, we needed one utterly redemptive story to bring things to a satisfying close. I can't think of a more glorious example of faith in action than this woman's journey to wholeness. And what a revelation that Jesus didn't say, "Your sins are forgiven"; he said "be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34). The people of Capernaum might have called her Really Bad, but Jesus called her Really Healed.

### **In the introduction, you describe having spent a decade in a pit. Do many of your readers identify with your experience?**

More than I could have possibly imagined when I wrote those words. One woman, who signed her letter "A Recovering Really Bad Girl," shared with me, "I have been in the front seat of that car with you, sister—the morning after a night of whatever—and I know the feeling of not wanting to go on. Yet I know that God doesn't go back—he has forgiven and forgotten my sins. He loves me again and again. Unbelievable!"

Another sister wrote, "When I read the introduction of your book, it produced cleansing tears, realizing that God was right there in the pit with me, waiting to take me home. I shared your pit story with a friend of mine, and she shared it with her sister, who was not saved and really despised Christianity. Your story made her cry and now *she* believes in Jesus. Her experience was a miracle!"

It certainly was a miracle only God could produce. The scary thing about putting the good, the bad, and the ugly truth about my life on paper is that I write in the privacy of my study, not knowing how it will be received by readers. I do so with fear and trembling, trusting God to use it for his good purposes. Letters like these, which come months, even years, after the book leaves my hands, are a balm to my soul.

### **In what ways do we deceive ourselves about our relative goodness or badness?**

The word “relative” is the problem. We compare ourselves to other women and say, “Well, I’m not as bad as *she* is,” even as we swell with self-righteousness. Or we see ourselves as *worse* than other women, mistakenly assuming they’re Good Girls because they seem to have it all together. Either way, we’re not getting an accurate picture.

The key is to look in the right place—not comparing our lives to one another’s but to God’s timeless, trustworthy Word—which tells us, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). My goal with this series is to help us face that truth. To help us see ourselves as sinners in need of grace, as Bad Girls in need of God’s forgiveness—not just for our past mistakes before coming to know Christ, but for every day of our earthly lives. Where we land on some arbitrary, human continuum of goodness to badness really doesn’t matter spiritually; all sin separates us from God. His grace alone bridges the gap between our badness and his goodness.

### **Can Former Bad Girls ever breathe easy, or do we always have to worry about falling back into the pit?**

Honey, I am definitely into breathing easy! Besides, Jesus cautioned his disciples not to worry. “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:27). Worry robs our joy yet seldom increases our obedience.

The joy of surrendering ourselves fully to the Lord is knowing he will guard our steps and steer us away from that pit. Just as David pleaded, “Guard my life, for I am devoted to you” (Psalm 86:2), we can count on the Lord to watch over us and keep us from falling headlong toward disaster. One reader summed it up perfectly: “My sinful nature wants to jump right back into that miserable pit. But the faithfulness of gentle Jesus keeps my feet on solid ground.”

If we *do* willfully stumble back into that pit, God stands ready to rescue us: “Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save” (Isaiah 59:1). More than once in the early months of my Christian walk, I sat on the rim of that pit, dangling my legs over the edge, thinking I could revisit my old life now and then. God used a dear friend to coax me away from that dangerous precipice and get me back on track. Because of his mercy, we can rejoice, breathe easier, and stop worrying, knowing that “he redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light” (Job 33:28).