

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

One Million Sold in the Series!

Includes
Discussion
and Study
Guides

Slightly BAD GIRLS *of the* BIBLE

FLAWED WOMEN LOVED
BY A FLAWLESS GOD

**SNEAK
PEEK**



**SAMPLE
ONLY**

**UNCORRECTED
PROOF**



**Praise for the
Bad Girls of the Bible series**

“Popular storyteller Higgs takes a look at the vamps and tramps of the Bible, searching for the lessons these wicked women have to teach. Higgs retells these biblical stories with rollicking humor and deep insight as she teaches about the nature of sin and goodness.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“*Bad Girls of the Bible* is not only a hoot to read; it is full of serious warnings about shaky choices and serious encouragement to take God’s way for our own good.”

—GLORIA GAITHER

author, speaker, and lyricist

“Liz Curtis Higgs has broken new ground in a refreshing and exciting approach to the study of women in the Bible. The good, bad, and sort-of-bad women become transparent as we, perhaps for the first time, really begin to know and understand them. Bravo!”

—JERE CARLSON

College Avenue Baptist Church, San Diego, California

“Liz takes—with humility and humor—the evangelical message and puts it in a lens that anybody can look through. A truly remarkable accomplishment.”

—*Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*

“I love Liz’s work! She entertains while teaching and leaves me with points to ponder long after. Her insights are fresh and exciting and will draw readers back into the Word.”

—FRANCINE RIVERS

best-selling author of *Redeeming Love*

“Over the years we have wearied of the stories of the women of the Bible. Here we find them presented in a fresh, vibrant style. They leap to life not as the sinless saints of the past but as real women.”

—SIMONE MONROE

First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

“Everything touched by Liz Curtis Higgs turns to humor and encouragement. Higgs connects each of her *Bad Girls* with her readers. A refreshing look at Bible characters we don’t hear much about.”

—*Church & Synagogue Libraries*

“Liz has done it again! She captures the heart and circumstances of a woman of Magdala and brings her into the twenty-first century. What hope and promise this will bring to many women who cannot comprehend how very precious they are to God.”

—KAY ARTHUR

best-selling author of *Lord, I Want to Know You*

“I loved the down-to-earth realism. Instead of an airbrushed, plastic feel, *Bad Girls of the Bible* jumps off the pages with fresh, relevant, and engaging applications.”

—BECKY MOLTUMYR

Brookside Church, Omaha, Nebraska

“Liz Curtis Higgs’s unique use of fiction combined with Scripture and modern application helped me see myself, my past, and my future in a whole new light.”

—ROBIN LEE HATCHER

author of *Whispers from Yesterday*

“The entertainment value of the book is obvious, but the take-home extra is the Bible study. Who but Liz Curtis Higgs could so creatively reveal God’s compassion, unconditional love, and mercy through such *Bad Girls* in Scripture?”

—Carol Kent

author of *When I Lay My Isaac Down*

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Slightly
BAD
GIRLS
of the
BIBLE

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

OTHER BOOKS BY LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

NONFICTION

Bad Girls of the Bible
Really Bad Girls of the Bible
Unveiling Mary Magdalene
Rise and Shine
Embrace Grace
My Heart's in the Lowlands
The Girl's Still Got It
It's Good to Be Queen
The Women of Christmas
The Women of Easter
31 Verses to Write on Your Heart
31 Proverbs to Light Your Path

HISTORICAL FICTION

Thorn in My Heart
Fair Is the Rose
Whence Came a Prince
Grace in Thine Eyes
Here Burns My Candle
Mine Is the Night
A Wreath of Snow

CONTEMPORARY FICTION

Mixed Signals
Bookends

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Pumpkin Patch Parable
The Parable of the Lily
The Sunflower Parable
The Pine Tree Parable
Go Away, Dark Night
Parable Treasury

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

Slightly
BAD
GIRLS
of the
BIBLE

FLAWED WOMEN LOVED
by a FLAWLESS GOD



WATERBROOK

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

SLIGHTLY BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified Bible. Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org). Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are taken from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked (God's Word) are taken from God's Word®, a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (ICB) are taken from the International Children's Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version. Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers Inc. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org). Scripture quotations marked (NCV) are taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NEB) are taken from the New English Bible, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press 1961, 1970. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952, [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The contemporary story in each chapter is fiction. The characters and events are fictional and are not intended to parallel exactly the biblical story.

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-0-7352-9170-6

eBook ISBN 978-0-30744-618-3

Copyright © 2007 by Liz Curtis Higgs

Discussion Questions and Study Guide copyright © 2018 by Liz Curtis Higgs

Cover design by Kelly L. Howard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

WATERBROOK® and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:

Higgs, Liz Curtis

Slightly bad girls of the Bible : flawed women loved by a flawless God / Liz Curtis Higgs.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7212-5

1. Bible. O.T.—Biography. 2. Women in the Bible—Biography. 3. Christian women—Religious life. 1.

Title. BS575.H563 2007

221.9'22082—dc22

2007025161

Printed in the United States of America

2018—First Revised Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please email specialmarkerscms@penguinrandomhouse.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls



To Laura Barker,

My talented editor at WaterBrook
and one of the genuine Good Girls.
Your patience, kindness, and support
kept me going on many a late night
in my writing study.

Bless you for nudging without prodding,
suggesting without insisting,
and caring as much about
the finished pages as I do.
(With special emphasis on
the word *finished*.)

We did it, sis!
Thanks to you.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Contents

Introduction:

Controlling Interest 1

One: *A Matter of Time*

Sarai 9

Two: *Flight Plan*

Hagar 39

Three: *The Last Laugh*

Sarah 67

Four: *A Willful Bride*

Rebekah the Wife 89

Five: *Using Her Wits*

Rebekah the Mother 118

Six: *The Night Has Eyes*

Leah the Unseen 144

Seven: *Morning Has Broken*

Leah the Unloved 168

Eight: *When All Is Said and Done*

Rachel 189

Conclusion:

Endless Life 220

Discussion Questions 223

Study Guide 226

Notes 252

Acknowledgments 276

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls



Controlling Interest

*Let but the puppets move,
I've my desire.*

CHARLES CHURCHILL

Donna gazed at the stack of mail in her husband's gloved hands as he stomped the wet snow from his shoes. "Anything interesting?" she asked, keeping her tone light.

He handed over the day's bounty from their mailbox. "See for yourself."

Donna quickly sorted through the belated Christmas cards, made thicker by family brag letters. Next year *she* might have something to crow about. If all went well, their son, Max, would be a freshman at the finest Christian college in the country. That is, *if*...

With a slight gasp she tossed the rest of the mail on the kitchen table, having found the one piece that mattered: a long, white envelope with the familiar blue logo in the corner. *Yes*. The school had promised a decision by December 31, still two days away. Surely a good sign.

She hefted the envelope in her hands, trying to judge how many pieces of paper it might contain. The letter had some weight to it. More than a kindly worded rejection, then.

Donna smiled, savoring the moment. Obviously her prayers had been answered. And months of hard work had paid off—visiting college campuses, completing online applications, gathering letters of reference, proof-reading essays, forwarding transcripts. She'd drafted the cover letter herself. Made sure everything looked presentable. Max hadn't seemed terribly interested, and she had a flair for such things, didn't she?

Her husband looked over her shoulder. "So we've heard from The College of Your Choice."

Donna shrugged, pretending his gentle teasing didn't bother her. Wasn't

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

she allowed to have an opinion about where their son spent the next four years of his life? True, he'd been accepted at other schools, but *this* was the one that counted. The admission policy was far more stringent and the list of alumni far more impressive.

And the campus...oh, the *campus*! Handsome as any Ivy League school with its stately brick buildings and manicured lawns. Last October she'd strolled along the neatly paved walkways, imagining *she* was the incoming freshman: attending classes in well-appointed lecture halls, learning from the brightest and the best thinkers, meeting students from all over the world.

On the long drive home, Max had chided her, "Why don't *you* apply, Mom?" She'd heard the hint of frustration in his voice. Had she pushed too hard, praised the school too enthusiastically? Meeting one-on-one with the admissions counselor might have been overdoing it. But the young woman had offered to answer prospective students' questions. Couldn't a mother ask them just as well while her son perused the campus bookstore?

Her husband disturbed her reverie as he slipped his damp coat over the back of a kitchen chair. "You *are* going to wait until Max gets home to open that." His firm words chafed against her conscience.

"Of course." Donna propped the envelope against the napkin holder, where it couldn't be missed. "I'm not in the habit of reading other people's mail."

When Max finally strolled in an hour later, she grabbed the envelope from the table and waved it at him. "Look what's here."

Her son opened it without comment, then sighed and handed it over. "Here you go, Mom."

Donna scanned the first three words—*Congratulations! Your application*—before letting out a huge whoop. "Max, I'm so proud of you!" Noticing her husband and daughter on the sidelines, she quickly added, "We all are."

He bobbed his head, then wandered off in the direction of his computer. Max's lack of enthusiasm didn't concern her. That was just his way. He'd warm up to the idea soon enough.

But he didn't. All through January he waffled between one school and another, finding excuses not to make a decision. At least that's how it seemed

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

to Donna, who'd sent enrollment deposits to four schools, asking them to hold his place. "Eight hundred dollars' worth of deposits," she reminded Max whenever the subject came up.

Donna made sure it came up daily.

By February she'd run out of patience. "We'll start from the bottom. Which school *don't* you want to attend?" With some difficulty he picked one—the same one she would have chosen as least likely. "Good," she said, giving his shoulder a squeeze. "That wasn't so hard, was it? Next week we'll eliminate another one."

She helped him make that decision too, though she could tell it was harder. Why Max didn't just make a final choice, the *best* choice, was a mystery to her.

When they finally narrowed it down to two schools—her favorite one or her husband's alma mater—she breathed a sigh of relief. A nationally known, prestigious institution versus a low-profile liberal arts college close to home. No contest, really.

Max had promised to give them his decision after dinner. Donna cooked his favorite pasta dish and watched him devour it, proud of herself for not bringing up the subject of college all through the meal. As she served her son a slice of chocolate cake, she leaned down to smile at him. "You've made your decision, haven't you?"

Max met her gaze for the first time that evening. "Yes, I have, Mom."

When he blurted out the name of the school—the *wrong* school—Donna fell back a step, as if she'd been slapped. "You can't be serious."

"I *am* serious," Max assured her, exchanging glances with his dad. "They offered me a bigger scholarship—"

"Never mind the *money*." A spark of anger heated her face, sharpened her words. "You're throwing away your life, Max." *Doesn't he see? Doesn't he understand?* "If my parents had given me that kind of chance..." She choked on the words, tears tightening her throat. "If they'd been willing to pay for my education, to send me anywhere I wanted to go, that's the *last* college I would have picked."

"But, Mom—"

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

“I don’t *care* if your father graduated from there.” Donna was almost shouting now, ignoring her son’s gentle protests, her daughter’s shocked expression, and the hurt in her husband’s eyes. “You’ve chosen a second-rate college in a backwater town in a state I’m ashamed to call home.”

“Donna!”

Her husband’s low voice silenced her, yet the storm inside continued to rage, even as shame and guilt began their dual attack...



A piece of work, Donna. Mistaking motherhood for puppetry, she was determined to pull everyone’s strings.

Some of us have a friend like Donna.

Some of us work with a Donna.

And some of us (let’s be honest) *are* Donnas. Insisting on having our way. Thinking we know what’s best. Controlling whom and what we can, whenever we can. Pretending not to notice if we squash a few toes in the process.

We don’t want to rule the universe—just our corner of the world. We don’t mind slight delays, as long as a positive outcome is guaranteed. When God pours his blessings on us, we’re truly grateful and more than willing to give him all the glory. But when he tells us “no” or “wait” or “soon but not yet,” we start thinking of ways to expedite the process.

Really, Lord. I can help.

If I didn’t know better, I’d think an impatient Bad Girl wrote the phrase “God helps those who help themselves.” Instead, it’s a line from one of Aesop’s fables: “The gods help them that help themselves.”¹ Maybe those man-made Greek gods required human effort, but *the* God, the Lord Almighty, doesn’t need our help to accomplish his divine plan.

My definition of a Slightly Bad Girl is simply this: a woman unwilling to fully submit to God. We love him, serve him, and worship him, yet we find it difficult to trust him completely, to accept his plan for our lives, to rest in his sovereignty.

And so we quietly (or not so quietly) try to take back the reins again and

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

again. *Let me handle things, Lord. I know what's best.* We pray, then move forward without waiting for an answer. We do all the right, Good Girl things and hope no one notices our desperate need to control every aspect of our lives. We read “She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God”² and shudder at the thought, never seeing ourselves in those words.

If you’ve read the other books in my Bad Girls of the Bible series, you know how willing I am to open the pages of my diary, if only to encourage my sisters that God’s forgiveness covers the whole of our lives, not only the years before we knew him.

And so, Donna’s story is my story, and recent history at that.

What kind of Christian mother manipulates her child, belittles her husband, and throws temper tantrums at the dinner table?

This kind, I’m afraid.

As the apostle Paul said, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”³ Amen, brother, and don’t I know it.

When I finally calmed down, asked everyone’s forgiveness—individually and collectively—confessed I truly *do* love my adopted state of Kentucky, and assured my dear son he’d chosen well, peace was restored in the Higgs household.

But I don’t fool myself. Damage was done, and wounds were inflicted, requiring time to repair and heal.

Even two years later, when I sent these pages to my sophomore son for him to critique, he e-mailed me and admitted, “This brought tears to my eyes, Mother. I’m sorry I disappointed you so much.”

Groan.

I wrote back at once. “The problem was all mine, sweet boy. You are exactly where God wanted you to be, which is wonderful. I love having you so close to home...”

That’s the trouble with sin: its influence lingers. My ten-minute tirade still has the power to hurt my precious son, years after the fact. No matter what I say or do now, he will remember what I said and did then. God forgives our sins completely, yet the consequences remain. Spoken words can

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

never be unspoken. Even so, my son closed his comments with “Please don’t beat yourself up, Mom. You don’t deserve it.”

What I truly don’t deserve is a son who extends forgiveness so generously.

Thank goodness the Lord knows what to do with Bad Girls (and Bad Boys, for that matter). He rescues us from ourselves. And showers us with grace. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”⁴

From the first page of his Word to the last, God reveals our badness and his goodness. Our neediness and his provision. Our brokenness and his healing touch. That’s the beauty of the Bible: “It shows us life and people as they really are, not as we wish them to be.”⁵ It shows us the truth about God and about ourselves. I, for one, am grateful to learn our biblical ancestors were flawed. Knowing God loved this imperfect patriarchal family, we can be sure there’s hope for us all.

One reader shared with me, “I’m light-years away from the Good Girls of the Bible.” Here’s encouraging news on that score: even the Good Girls of the Bible had their Bad Girl moments. The five females we’ll be studying here are mostly good, yet slightly bad. Women of faith, but not without flaws. And all of them are seriously strong willed.

Sarah, our first Slightly Bad Girl, is touted in the New Testament as an example for us all: “For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.”⁶

She did indeed call her husband lord. But, honey, that’s not all she said. Wait until you hear the strident words that came out of Sarah’s mouth! Even so, God blessed her, entrusted her with a son, and loved her. So did Abraham.

I’m breathing easier already. You too?

The other Slightly Bad Girls also may surprise you. Rebekah and Rachel: surely *they* were good. Well, like Sarah, they were beautiful. They were loved. And (oops) they were pushy, manipulative, willful, scheming...oh my. And while the stories of Hagar and Leah may be less familiar, they have much to teach us about the kindness and mercy God extends to women forced into

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

bad situations. As a group, these women “grace the pages of Genesis with their laughter, their sorrows, their strength, and their power.”⁷ We’ll also consider the men in their lives and discover they made a few Bad Boy bloopers over the years.

Each chapter begins with our Slightly Bad Girl’s fictional modern counterpart to help us avoid thinking, “Things were different then.” *Au contraire*. Fashions, food, and furnishings may alter over the centuries, but human nature hasn’t changed since the days of our first Bad Girl, Eve. Though historically these women spanned three generations and more than two hundred years, I’ve chosen to place each opening scene in the present day so we can more easily relate to their stories.

Prepare to have four thousand years swept away as Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel walk right into your living room. So glad you’re on hand to greet them, sis.

P.S. Wherever you went to college—or didn’t go to college—is fine with me. Really.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls



A Matter of Time

*I'm extraordinarily patient,
provided I get my own way in the end.*

MARGARET THATCHER

T*wo minutes?* Sandi glanced at her watch, then stifled a groan. *More like ten, Alan.*

She paced outside her husband's private office, barely noticing the elegant Oriental rug beneath her feet: a gift from one of his business associates in Istanbul, woven in midnight blue and dusky rose, the colors surprisingly vibrant. Alan's interior designer dated the classic Kerman rug as late nineteenth century.

And here's another antique. Pausing at the foyer mirror, Sandi lifted a sweep of ash blond hair from her forehead, relieved not to notice any telltale silver strands, yet dismayed by the fine lines near her eyes. Alan had already crossed the half-century mark. But on a sunlit Maryland morning, he fearlessly greeted the day, sans wrinkles, while she, five years younger, hid beneath a wide-brimmed hat. Sandi took a step back, assessing her figure as well.

"Admiring the view?" Alan teased, standing in his office doorway. "I believe that's my job." He crossed the vacant foyer to stand behind her at the mirror, slipped his arms around her waist, and drew her near. When he pressed a warm kiss against the back of her neck, she felt a frisson of pleasure and watched herself blush.

Twenty-five years of marriage, and he still treated her like a princess.

She sighed, no longer irritated that he'd kept her waiting. From Alan's viewpoint, she had nothing but time. Time to shop for his designer clothes. Time to organize elaborate dinner parties. Time to travel the world at a moment's notice.

To be fair, she *did* have time; what she didn't have was children.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

“You look wonderful in royal blue,” Alan said, his gaze meeting hers in the mirrored glass. “Was that one of the colors our photographer suggested?”

“No, Pavla chose it.”

“Ah.”

Sandi heard his even tone, sensed his unspoken words. Alan thought she was too dependent on Pavla, the young housekeeper who made their lives run smoothly.

He turned Sandi around to face him, then gently kissed her. “What you need is an hour with a photographer who fawns over your beautiful self.” When she protested, his features darkened into an exaggerated scowl. “None of this ‘considering my age’ business. The moment we step into his studio, Yafeu will insist on adding you to his roster of models.”

“*Senior* models perhaps,” Sandi murmured, though she held his compliments close to her heart. Few husbands were as supportive as Alan Cannon.

That evening the mingled scents of garlic and onion greeted them at the door. “Dinner at seven,” Sandi reminded her husband as he headed toward his office in the back of the house. She aimed toward the kitchen, where Cossack Chicken was on the menu.

She found Pavla chopping fresh mushrooms, hands and knife moving across the cutting board with effortless precision. In a neat line along the countertop stood the other ingredients to be added: grated swiss, crumbled feta, sour cream, and nutmeg. Pavla looked up, touching the back of her hand to the mass of hair gathered into a knot on her crown. “Your photos went well, yes?”

Sandi merely shrugged. Yafeu had indeed showered her with praise. Hair, features, wardrobe, posture—his dark Egyptian eyes missed nothing. But since the appointment book noted “Family Portrait,” Yafeu had asked not once but three times, “Are there no children? No grandchildren?”

“No,” Alan had repeatedly answered for both of them, the resignation in his voice unmistakable. One son: that was all he prayed for, all he longed for. For her part, Sandi had felt ready to scream by session’s end. Yafeu could not know the pain his innocent words inflicted. The photographer had sent

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

them out the door with a gratis collection of sterling silver picture frames, yet his words lingered, taunting her. *No children?*

"You are tired," Pavla said simply as she added the chopped mushrooms to a saucepan. "Maybe lie down before dinner?"

"I *am* exhausted," Sandi agreed. Of late she wasn't sleeping well and had trouble staying focused. Most days her nerves were on edge, and she often snapped at Alan for no reason. At last week's visit to her ob-gyn, Sandi had recited a litany of her symptoms as Dr. Goodman nodded, then delivered a single-word diagnosis: "Perimenopausal."

No need to spell it out. At forty-six she understood too well.

Out of habit Sandi reviewed Pavla's dinner preparations once more, then retreated to the cool darkness of the master bedroom. Her housekeeper was right: a short nap would improve her perspective. After slipping off her blue dress, she snuggled under the goose-down duvet and closed her eyes, waiting for the hypnotic pull of sleep. "Bless you, Pavla," she whispered, sinking deeper into the pillow.

When Pavla Teslenko had first arrived from Ukraine seeking a new life, Alan and Sandi had ushered the girl into their home, certain they would require an au pair. As the years passed and no children came, Pavla made herself useful cleaning the house, doing laundry, running errands. Gradually she'd taken over Sandi's kitchen, specializing in Alan's favorite potato pancakes—*deruny*, she called them—and a liver pâté their dinner guests adored.

Under their guidance, the frightened, awkward teenager had grown into a self-assured and competent young woman, whose raven hair framed a round, pleasing face. Fluent in English, Pavla had become a naturalized citizen last spring, yet remained loyal to the Cannons.

More than one friend had cautioned Sandi about harboring a younger woman under the same roof as a wealthy husband. "Pavla's half your age," Lynn from their couples' class had reminded her last Sunday. "I know she's your right hand—"

"And my left as well," Sandi had told her friend, bringing the discussion to an abrupt end. She wasn't about to send away a valuable housekeeper to appease Lynn or anyone else.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Too agitated to sleep now, Sandi rolled over with a groan and squinted at the alarm clock. Did she need bifocals too?

A firm knock at the door, then Alan entered their bedroom. “Pavla said I might find you resting.” He eased onto their bed and reached down to brush the hair from her eyes. “I’m sorry you’ve had a hard day.”

She looked away, his tender expression more than she could bear. “It’s worse than that.”

A long silence. “Tell me again what Dr. Goodman said last week.”

“He told me that...a healthy pregnancy is...unlikely.” Her throat tightened. “We’ve done everything right, Alan. Why can’t I...”

Alan bent over her and kissed each cheek. “God alone knows,” he said softly, meaning to comfort her.

Sandi would never confess such a thing to her saintly husband, but she wasn’t convinced God cared enough to intervene. He’d created the world and all it contained. Could he not bless her womb with one healthy son? Was it too much to ask? She and Alan had endured years of fertility tests and medical procedures, each failure crushing their hopes yet again.

Dr. Goodman had ruled out in vitro fertilization. And adoption was out of the question since Alan insisted their child be biologically his. “Not because adoption isn’t a wonderful thing,” he assured her each time she raised the possibility. “But God has assured me that if I’ll trust him, he’ll give us a son of our own someday. I know that’s what you want too.”

Sandi just wanted a child in her arms. *Soon. Tomorrow. Now.*

When Alan stood, he pulled her up with him. “Come to dinner, sweetheart. There’s no heartache Pavla can’t mend with her cooking.”

Dear, thoughtful Alan. The man was determined to make her happy.

Minutes later, freshly dressed and perfumed, Sandi joined her husband in their oversize dining room, designed with entertaining in mind. They sat at one end of the long table, a spray of red gladioli creating a more intimate space. Pavla served the meal as usual, placing each course before them with quiet assurance.

Sandi watched her closely, noticing as if for the first time how mature

Pavla had become. A healthy, twenty-something woman. Full of energy, brimming with life. The perfect age for conceiving a child, for giving birth...

Sandi's eyes widened. *There's no heartache Pavla can't mend.*

Alan's words, but with a very different meaning.

Pavla. Bearing my husband's child. For me.

Sandi blanched at the outrageous notion. Had anyone she'd ever known done such a thing? Yet if the law allowed surrogate motherhood and if both parties were willing, might it not be the very best solution?

Distracted by her thoughts, she let Alan carry their dinner conversation until Pavla arrived with dessert...



Sarai: Princess Bride

A lovely name, Sarah. All soft consonants and airy vowels. Not so much spoken as released, like a sigh. Among popular biblical names, *Sarah* reigns and rightly so: her name means “princess.”¹

You'll find her mentioned by name in Scripture more than any other woman—an impressive fifty-three times in the NIV translation, beginning here:

The name of Abram's wife was Sarai... *Genesis 11:29*

No, not a typo; for most of her life she was known as “Sarai.” Scholars say, even with the *i*, the meaning of her name is “princess,” but one source offers an intriguing alternative definition for *Sarai*: “argumentative.”² Keep that feisty notion in mind as our story unfolds. *Sarai* was also a popular name among devotees of Ningal, consort of the moon god, worshiped in her native Assyria.³ No wonder the Lord was eager to change the spelling of *Sarai* to *Sarah*!

Ah, but we're getting ahead of ourselves. We can assume that, with such a royal name, Sarai was born at the top of the social ladder and “lived a privileged life in one of the ancient world's great cities.”⁴ That is to say, Ur.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Reminds me of that sound people make when they're stalling for time.

"Where's home?"

"Uh...er..."

However plain the name, Ur in its day was a commercial and cultural hub, a gathering place for philosophers and astronomers.⁵ Thanks to the nightly news, we can point to the region on a world map, between the head of the Persian Gulf and Baghdad.

That's right: southeastern Iraq.

Twelve thousand people crowded the streets of Ur when the place was really hopping, around 2100 BC.⁶ Archaeologists have unearthed a treasure trove of objects where Ur once stood: gold, silver, precious stones, musical instruments, weapons, even game boards.⁷ (I haven't a Clue whether they played Monopoly, Scrabble, Candy Land...oh, Sorry!)

When my husband read this part of the manuscript, he piped up, "The Royal Game of Ur." *The what?* Turns out, it's a wooden board game still on the market, a replica of the ancient gaming board found in the Royal Cemetery of Ur by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920s.⁸

Just think: Abram and Sarai might have been gamers!

But they weren't playing games when it came to marriage. Their 'til-death-do-us-part relationship lasted a *century* or more, depending on Sarai's age the day they wed. Though the ancients said she was a beauty—"All the maidens and all the brides that go beneath the wedding canopy are not more fair than she"⁹—a dark cloud shadowed Sarai's tent.

Now Sarai was barren; she had no children. *Genesis 11:30*

Oh dear. Whether phrased as a singular "child" (NASB) or plural "children," the sad truth is made doubly clear in one stark verse. By describing Sarai as barren *and* without children, Scripture "emphasizes the seriousness of her plight by the repetition."¹⁰

Listen, we got it the first time. We're already grieving for this beautiful but infertile woman, imagining the hope that blossomed in her heart each month, only to be crushed by despair when she found a spot of blood on her tunic. *Not this month. Not any month.*

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Four thousand years ago barrenness was “the ultimate disgrace, understood as a sign of divine disfavor.”¹¹ A woman who couldn’t conceive would have been considered a Bad Girl indeed. Furthermore, a barren woman “suffered not only lack of esteem, but also threat of divorce.”¹² Talk about adding insult to injury: she was ridiculed by others, believed to be shunned by God, *and* considered disposable by her husband.

Thank goodness we no longer use the word *barren* to describe a woman unable to bear children. *Sterile* or *infertile* sounds more clinical and less judgmental, though for a woman who longs to give birth, the unfortunate outcome is the same: an empty womb.

Some of us understand Sarai’s heartache at a deeply personal level. Is that you, dear sister? Then a word of comfort before we go any further: you are safe here. I’ll not prod at your pain. And you can be very sure it wasn’t Sarai’s inability to conceive that made her a Slightly Bad Girl. Not for one minute. In fact, her childless state made room for a miracle. God was not displeased with her; he intended to be glorified in her. Think of that! Barrenness became “the arena of God’s life-giving action.”¹³

Though Ur is where Sarai’s story began, that’s not where it ended. This family was on the move.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. *Genesis 11:31*

The centuries have reduced prosperous Ur to ruins, with one prominent object left standing: a “pyramid-like brick tower, or ziggurat, built in tribute to Sin, the moon god.”¹⁴ Naturally, Abram and Sarai had to turn their backs on Sin to follow God (sorry, couldn’t resist), and so this determined couple directed their camels northward, skirting the vast Arabian Desert.

Sarai exchanged “certainty for uncertainty, possession for chance, acquaintances for strangers...the amenities of the city for the hardships of the desert.”¹⁵ She displayed strength, bravery, and a willingness to take risks. I like her already.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

But when they came to Haran, they settled there. *Genesis 11:31*

Not for long. Though some family members remained in Haran, Abram and Sarai knew their journey had only begun.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”

Genesis 12:1

No question, God was asking a great deal of Abram, including “giving up his inheritance and his right to family property.”¹⁶ You and I know courageous friends who’ve left behind loved ones and all their earthly possessions, headed for a distant mission field. I stand in awe of such commitment.

But God expected even more of Abram and Sarai. The Land I Will Show You doesn’t appear on any map. God didn’t explain the location of this unnamed land or how many years he intended Abram and company to stay there. God just said, “Go and I will show you.” Period. As callings go, this one was “dangerously open-ended.”¹⁷

I travel easier with a return ticket in my purse, don’t you?

That’s precisely why Abram and Sarai are celebrated for their faith: *they went*. And put their trust in the Lord—in Yahweh—a very different deity than the gods of Ur, tied to their ziggurats and statues. “Yahweh stands alone.”¹⁸ And moves around. And bids his people follow.

Two thousand years later God’s Son offered the same imperative: “Whoever serves me must follow me.”¹⁹ He neither drags us nor pushes us. Rather, the Lord Jesus walks ahead of us, planting footsteps in the sand so we’ll never lose sight of him. All of history affirms the wisdom of following God; Abram and Sarai were our pioneers. We’ll discover their imperfections soon enough. When we do, keep in mind the courage required to take that first step.

An Iron Will

Though the Lord spoke only to Abram, I feel certain the man shared every word with his wife. Who could keep quiet about astounding promises like these?

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” *Genesis 12:2*

If Sarai was present, you know she raised her hand on that first one. “A great nation? From a barren wife? Never happen.” We’re quick to see our limitations, yet God even more swiftly offers guarantees. Look at all these “I wills”!

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;...” *Genesis 12:3*

Tuck that in your memory bank for a certain scene not far down the pike when a whole household suffered under a curse because of this man. Finally God stated the most important point again.

“...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” *Genesis 12:3*

Abram and Sarai couldn’t have guessed what that would look like down the ages. Paul called it “the gospel in advance,”²⁰ preparing the way for the good news of God’s grace. “It was all laid out beforehand in Scripture that God would set things right with non-Jews by faith. Scripture anticipated this in the promise to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed in you.’”²¹

That blessing would come through Abram, yes, and also through the womb of a woman. Sarai was part of God’s plan for Abram from the beginning, though she didn’t know it yet—a detail that will soon become a major sticking point in our story. For the moment, “Sarai had nothing but Abram’s word on which to base the most radical move of her life.”²²

Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.
Genesis 12:4

Back then, seventy-five was the new forty, since the life span of a patriarch was nearly double our own.²³ Abram had another century ahead of him, and Sarai, ten years his junior, still had plenty of get-up-and-go. Good thing, since she got up and went.

He took his wife Sarai... *Genesis 12:5*

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

No protest, no complaining, no demands—at least not recorded in Scripture. So far Sarai gets a gold star for accepting God’s call on her husband’s life. If you’ve followed a spouse to a foreign mission field or a new job far from home, you, too, deserve an attagirl for your willingness to follow God *and* your mate.

We can picture these ancient travelers “in heavy leather sandals and loose woolen robes dyed in brilliant combinations of yellow, red, and blue”²⁴ as they made their way south. Unlike Lot’s wife in a later scene,²⁵ Sarai apparently didn’t look back, pining for the life and luxury she once knew. She pressed on, trusting her husband and the God who’d called them to a nomadic life.

Let’s face it: Abram “needed a plucky wife, and he got one.”²⁶

...and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Genesis 12:5

The weather in this part of the world is all about extremes, with torrential downpours quickly followed by bright blue skies. The landscape is varied as well: hills and deep valleys, fertile plains and stretches of wilderness.²⁷

Awandering Abram and Sarai went, past “the great tree of Moreh at Shechem,”²⁸ where the Lord appeared to Abram and promised the land to his offspring. No real estate for Abe, mind you, but at least the grandkids would have property to call their own. Marking the spot, Abram built an altar, then moved on to the hills east of Bethel, where he built another altar—“the first in the Holy Land”²⁹—and “called on the name of the LORD.”³⁰

Unfortunately, the couple’s joy in the land of promise was short lived. The ground beneath their feet soon became as barren as...well, you know.

Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. *Genesis 12:10*

Famine plays a starring role in the Bible. Of some one hundred references, this is the first. According to geologists and archaeologists, during Abram’s lifetime a “massive three-hundred-year drought”³¹ ravaged the Canaanite countryside. No rain, no crops, no food.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Had I been Sarai, I'd have been seriously whining by this point. "Are you sure God wanted us in Canaan? Maybe he meant Canada. I told you we should have stopped and asked for directions..."

Desperate and hungry, Abram made tracks for the fertile land of the Pharaohs. We have no record that he checked with God or prayed for help when he headed west with his famished bride. Sister, you *know* trouble was on the horizon.

As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are." *Genesis 12:11*

The Hebrew makes it clear she was "a fair woman to look upon" (KJV) and "beautiful in appearance" (NRSV). Even the Dead Sea Scrolls include a flattering description of Sarai: "how fine is the hair of her head, how pleasing her nose and all the radiance of her face."³²

Wait. Her *nose* was pleasing?

Historians say Cleopatra sported a distinctively large nose; maybe Egyptians fancied a prominent schnoz. Whatever Sarai's features, "her dignity, her bearing, her countenance"³³ all added up to an attractive female certain to catch Pharaoh's eye. And that was the problem.

"When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live." *Genesis 12:12*

In this culture "adultery was considered a very grievous offense,"³⁴ but there was no law against Pharaoh killing a man. Apparently, with the husband conveniently dispatched, his widow became fair game for this decadent ruler, who possessed "one of the largest harems in all the world."³⁵

Easy to forgive Abram for panicking. Not so easy to forgive his shameless request.

"Say you are my sister..." *Genesis 12:13*

Adding "I pray thee" (KJV) or "please" (NASB) didn't improve things. He was still asking his wife to lie. Okay, *half* lie. Since Sarai was his father's daughter by a different mother, she was his half sister.³⁶ But it still seems like

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

the coward's way out. More to the point, we have no record of God instructing Abram to head for Egypt. Looks like Abram acted on his own.

“...so that I will be treated well for your sake...” *Genesis 12:13*

“Because of their interest in you” (NLT), Abram told Sarai, “it may go well with me” (NASB). Humph. It would have been nicer if he'd said, “it may go well with *us*.”

“...and my life will be spared because of you.” *Genesis 12:13*

What about *her* life?

I realize Abram was Papa Patriarch, but I can't let his shoddy behavior slip by without comment. What kind of husband subjects his wife to moral and physical danger? “Faced with the threat of death, he surrenders what he ought not surrender.”³⁷ Boy howdy.

Some commentators chalk up Abram's actions to “unbelief and distrust,”³⁸ seeing him as “an anxious man, a man of unfaith,”³⁹ whose “prime fault and folly...consisted in not waiting for the divine direction.”⁴⁰ Others defend him, remarking that he hadn't traveled much and lived in “a rough and perilous time.”⁴¹ Especially perilous for Sarai, I'd say.

When a scene like this unfolds, one does begin to wonder: Did Sarai's barrenness make her less valuable to him? Or was her love for Abram so powerful her husband knew she would do anything to spare his life?

Whatever the case, nascent Israel was “in danger of losing its ancestress.”⁴²

Harem Scare 'Em

When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. *Genesis 12:14*

Just as Abram feared, “everyone spoke of her beauty” (NLT). All well and good to have a trophy wife—until someone wants your prize for his display case.

Back in 1963 Jimmy Soul crooned, “If you wanna be happy for the rest

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK



SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

of your life, never make a pretty woman your wife.”⁴³ Bet Abram was whistling that one under his breath as they neared the palace. In Scripture the mention of a woman’s beauty often portends disaster, since “beauty sets up the beautiful to be desired and taken.”⁴⁴ Ask Bathsheba or Dinah or Tamar, the sister of Absalom, how beauty can lead to tragedy.

Please talk to us, Sarai. Were you frightened when the Egyptians “took one look” and declared you “stunningly beautiful” (MSG)? Were you disgusted by their interest? Or secretly flattered? (We won’t tell.)

Alas, we’ll never know what she was thinking because Sarai remains maddeningly silent in this biblical scene, “a testimony to her powerlessness.”⁴⁵ At this juncture in our story, I can’t decide if she was Mostly Good because she obeyed her husband or Slightly Bad because she “consented to a deception.”⁴⁶

Here’s another possibility: maybe Sarai trusted God more than her husband did. Maybe she prayed to Yahweh to protect her or to provide a means of escape. Maybe she strolled into Pharaoh’s presence with her elegant nose held high, confident of God’s deliverance, knowing a lie on her part would not be necessary.

And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh,
and she was taken into his palace. *Genesis 12:15*

More specifically, “she was taken into his harem” (NLT). Since it was a supermarket-sized one, a few weeks may have gone by before Pharaoh noticed the comely addition. Sarai was a bit past her prime for those skimpy Egyptian costumes, but “Pharaoh would not hesitate to add a striking older woman to his harem to give variety.”⁴⁷ Think Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada* or Helen Mirren in *Calendar Girls*.

As to Pharaoh’s officials, revered commentator Matthew Henry described them as “Pharaoh’s princes (his pimps rather).”⁴⁸ His *what*? Indeed, that centuries-old word suits the situation perfectly. According to Rev. Henry, these officials commended Sarai “not for that which was really her praise—her virtue and modesty, her faith and piety,” but for her beauty.⁴⁹

The more things change, the more they... Well, you know the rest.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

It *is* encouraging to realize the Bible mentions a woman's appearance only when her story hinges on that fact. What the Lord applauds in his Word is a woman's character. In the whole of Proverbs 31—that litmus test for godly women—nothing is said of an ideal woman's physical appearance. No, not even the size of her nose. Instead, we learn she was dressed in dignity and feared God, for, after all, “beauty is fleeting.”⁵⁰

Speaking of which, Pharaoh clearly got a gander at Sarai and liked what he saw.

He treated Abram well for her sake... *Genesis 12:16*

Very well. Pharaoh didn't just spare the man's life; he showered him with goodies.

...and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, menservants and maidservants, and camels. *Genesis 12:16*

No small outpouring. Obviously, “Pharaoh viewed Abram as nobility” and may have intended these gifts to serve “as an elaborate dowry for Sarai.”⁵¹

Dowry, as in a *wedding*? Didn't Abram see where this was going? Or was he too busy counting sheep?

Somebody please yell, “Stop!”

But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. *Genesis 12:17*

When it comes to timing, no chronometer on earth is the equal of God's stopwatch. At the perfect moment, in the nick of time, “Yahweh entered the scene.”⁵² And what a scene it was. “The LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues” (KJV), and “everybody in the palace got seriously sick” (MSG). *Ick.*

Don't blame the lettuce. Or spinach. Or contaminated irrigation water.

In the ancient world, “disease was considered the direct result of sin or some violation of custom.”⁵³ Pharaoh was no fool. He understood “a powerful deity was cursing him because of Sarai's presence in his household.”⁵⁴

And how did Pharaoh know that? Only two persons in the palace remained disease free: Abram and Sarai, who were surely avoiding Pharaoh like the plague.

So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What have you done to me?” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife?” *Genesis 12:18*

He didn’t summon beautiful Sarai. Ohhh no. Pharaoh made sure the Hebrew head of the household took the heat on this one. The terseness of Pharaoh’s words and his rapid-fire questions make his anger apparent.

“Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’...” *Genesis 12:19*

Now that’s interesting. I thought Abram asked Sarai to lie. Apparently he went first.

“...so that I took her to be my wife?” *Genesis 12:19*

I’m getting nervous here. What does Pharaoh mean by he “took her”? Some translations—“I made her my wife” (ICB) or “Now I’ve married her” (CEV)—give cause for concern. “Sarah seems to have had sexual relations with Pharaoh.”⁵⁵

Say it isn’t so! Not our silent Sarai, who trusted God to protect her.

Other translations offer a more hopeful view. “I might have taken her to me to wife” (KJV) or “Why were you willing to let me marry her?” (NLT) suggests their union was contemplated but not consummated. *Whew.*

Since God, with his flawless timing, acted here “not to punish Abraham for lying, but to protect Sarah from assault,”⁵⁶ he apparently intervened before Sarai’s virtue was compromised.

Pharaoh, as a gesture of respect, didn’t use Sarai’s name when he sent them packing.

“Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” *Genesis 12:19*

Having scolded Abram for lying, Pharaoh evicted him from the country. The Egyptian couldn’t have made his wishes plainer: “be gone” (NRSV),

“go thy way” (KJV), “take her and get out!” (MSG). Okay, okay, they’re leaving already.

Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had. *Genesis 12:20*

“Everything” included servants. The sages of old believed that Pharaoh gave “his own daughter to Sarai, one that had been born to one of his concubines” to serve as Sarai’s handmaiden and that “her name was Hagar, and she was very young and strong.”⁵⁷ Though we have no biblical proof, I find it a credible story. More on that when we meet Hagar, who would one day serve this couple in ways they never could have predicted.

Still not a peep from Abe as the twosome were “whisked out of Egypt under military escort”⁵⁸ with their gifts in tow but their pride duly trampled. The nomadic followers of Yahweh, loaded down with gold and silver, flocks and herds, slowly moved “from place to place,”⁵⁹ “traveling by stages.”⁶⁰ When Abram and his nephew Lot began to cramp each other’s style, they went their separate ways.

Counting the Stars

Some time later Abram experienced his “first actual dialogue with God.”⁶¹ The Lord began by putting him at ease.

...the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

Genesis 15:1

In his Word, God says, “Fear not” (KJV) about seventy-five times, yet we can’t seem to hear it enough. I confess, fear nags at me constantly, as it does at many take-charge chicks. *Am I good enough? Have I done enough? Are others pleased with me?* Grabbing for control is our attempt to hold such fears at bay. Only when we realize God is in control can we truly let go of our apprehensions.

“Do not be afraid,” God says. To Abram, to Sarai, to us.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Fretful Abram didn't distinguish himself with his response, missing completely God's promise to guard him and crying out a lament that "implies a reproach."⁶²

But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" *Genesis 15:2*

Eliezer was Abram's chief servant. According to the law of the land, if Abram died without sons, his servant would become his heir. Once again the discussion centered on Sarai's barrenness, and Abram put the blame squarely on God: "you have given me everything I could ask for, except children" (CEV).

The Lord quickly quashed any notion of Abram's bestowing his inheritance on a servant.

"This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." *Genesis 15:4*

No question about it: Abram would father a son. And from that son would come countless more.

"Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." *Genesis 15:5*

We can hear Abram's mental wheels turning. *But I'm getting older. Sarai is barren.* How could such a seemingly impossible promise be fulfilled? By faith alone. And so our flawed but willing hero took that sacred leap.

Abram believed the LORD... *Genesis 15:6*

Don't let those words slip past you: "And he believed! Believed GOD!" (MSG).

Heavenly Father, help us see the enormity of this truth: a man filled with fear, filled with doubt, laid aside his limitations and was filled with faith. He simply *believed* in your spoken word. Without evidence or proof, without

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

knowing the details of how, when, or where, Abram “believed in (trusted in, relied on, remained steadfast to) the Lord” (AMP).

A perfect man? Pharaoh knew better, and so do we.

But God’s man? Absolutely.

...and he credited it to him as righteousness. *Genesis 15:6*

The word “credited” here is also translated “counted” (KJV) and “reckoned” (NASB). Simply put, a sizable deposit was made in Abram’s spiritual bank account. Riches not borrowed, but bestowed. Not earned, but inherited. Not a debit, but a credit.

“Righteousness” doesn’t refer to Abram’s good behavior or ours; it means “right standing with God” (AMP). Only the Lord can determine where we stand with him. Truth is, “Abram had no righteousness,” not of his own making. “And if he had not, no man had.”⁶³ No woman either. Not *this* woman, for sure!

When the prophet Isaiah moans, “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags,”⁶⁴ we moan right along with him, knowing how many times we’ve done good works for all the wrong reasons. But Isaiah didn’t quit there, beloved, nor should we: “Yet, O LORD, you are our Father.”⁶⁵ Even dressed in filthy rags, we are his. Even after lying to Pharaohs, we are his. Even while pushing and prodding our college-bound children, *we are his*.

“God declared him ‘Set-Right-with-God’ ” (MSG), and so he was. The gift the Lord gave Abram is the same gift he presents to us: a paid-in-full account of righteousness.

Considering that Sarai was barren and soon would be past the age of childbearing, Abram’s ability to believe in the promise of countless offspring required an enormous leap of faith—a leap only God could empower, a faith defined as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”⁶⁶

Did Sarai share her husband’s over-the-top faith? Let’s press on with her story and find out. You’ll see that the next chapter of Genesis opens with the word *now*, which is meant to “interrupt the flow of the story—that is, it marks the beginning of a new episode.”⁶⁷ And what an episode it is...

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Sarai Takes Charge

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. *Genesis 16:1*

The poor woman. How many times have we gone over this? The fact that she “hadn't yet produced a child” (MSG) continued to trouble her because “there was no other way for a woman to be a member of society.”⁶⁸ Sarai had to be getting desperate.

She was seventy-five and her husband, eighty-five.

Too late, too late, too late.

Sister, when we stare anxiously at calendars and clocks rather than turn to God, we're looking in the wrong direction. Weary of numbering the wrinkles reflected in her polished brass mirror, Sarai cast her gaze toward a young servant.

But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar... *Genesis 16:1*

“But...” When I think of the times I've justified my rebellious behavior by tossing out that innocent word! If I've pegged her right, Sarai lined up excuses like tin cans on a fence, daring God to shoot them down.

“But my husband must have a son.”

“But I'm too old to be a mother.”

“But I have this slave girl...”

The young woman was a “handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar” (KJV). Just the word “Egyptian” reminds us of the incident with Pharaoh, of foreign people worshiping foreign gods, of *other*. “Hagar was on the outside looking in.”⁶⁹

Sarai and Hagar couldn't have been more different: one Hebrew, one Gentile; one married, one single; one wealthy, one poor; one a mistress, one a slave. Concerning the matter at hand, one woman was “brittle, aging, and barren,” while the other was “resilient, young, and fertile.”⁷⁰ I wonder if Sarai resented Hagar's youthful energy or if Hagar coveted Sarai's wealth and comfort. Whatever their relationship, Hagar was the property of her mistress. Hagar could not even call her womb her own, as we'll discover shortly.

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Silent in the biblical account until this moment, Sarai finally spoke up.

...so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children.” *Genesis 16:2*

Despite how inflammatory her words sound, Sarai was not blaming God per se, merely acknowledging what all believed to be true in her day: the Lord “restrained” (KJV) or “prevented” (NASB) women from bearing children for reasons known only to him. “GOD has not seen fit to let me have a child” (MSG), Sarai told Abram. Do you hear in her voice bitterness or sorrow? Was she angry or merely resigned? Any of those emotions would be valid, yet none of them are recorded in Scripture.

One scholar insisted her words bespoke “the usual impatience of unbelief,”⁷¹ but I’ll stand up for Sarai on this one. She’d been exceedingly patient—with her husband, with her God, with her barrenness—from the day she married, as much as *sixty years* earlier. If her patience was running thin, no wonder. If her faith was waning, who could fault her?

At this crucial point, if she’d called out to God for strength, prayed to God for direction, or pleaded with God to open her womb, we would defend her without question. “Had Sarah said, Nature has failed me, but God is my resource, how different it would have been!”⁷²

But Sarai did not call on God. Instead, she came up with a ready remedy for the hubby-needs-an-heir problem. With her next words, our aging Princess tilted her crown at a defiant angle and a Slightly Bad Girl stepped forward.

“Go, sleep with my maidservant...” *Genesis 16:2*

No matter the translation, those words hit us like a slap. “Go *what*?!”

Remember how Abram added “I pray thee” when he asked Sarai to lie to the Egyptians? We find the same wheedling “I pray thee” (KJV) in this verse—except here we have an altogether different form of lying. Sarai didn’t ask her man to catch forty winks with Hagar; she demanded that he “have sexual relations” (NCV), “have intercourse” (AMP), indeed “go in to my maid” (NASB).

Heavens! What was Sarai thinking?

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Perhaps she decided that if she didn't do something, her husband might take another wife and leave her in disgrace. Or that her family's destiny rested solely in her hands and she needed to act. Or that if she waited much longer, Abram might be as incapable of fathering a child as she was of conceiving one. Whatever her reasoning, Sarai believed her infertility "forced her to find a way out of this embarrassment to her husband."⁷³

Hence, her forthright words to Abram: "Sleep with my maid" (MSG).

Scandalous as her plan appears, Sarai didn't come up with this on her own. An Assyrian marriage contract, dating from around 1900 BC, stipulated "if the wife does not give birth in two years, she will purchase a slave woman for the husband."⁷⁴ Still, no matter how common that solution was in her culture, *Sarai was not of that culture*. God had set apart Abram and Sarai. His promises were extended to no other man or woman on earth.

Tempting as it is to wag my finger at Sarai, I see in my own life the same willingness to follow the law of the land rather than God's command. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," Jesus said.⁷⁵ Yet when April 15 draws near and Caesar demands his due, I find myself staring at the figures on the 1040 form, wondering if there isn't *some* legal loophole we could slip part of our income through.

The Word tells us, "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."⁷⁶ But Sarai had a better plan, or so she thought.

"...perhaps I can build a family through her." *Genesis 16:2*

By law Sarai could claim any child born to Hagar as her own. What would Hagar get out of the deal? A very wealthy husband.

"Liz, do you mean..."

I do.

"We have here the marriage of Abram to Hagar, who was his secondary wife."⁷⁷ Not a concubine or a mistress or a surrogate mother for his child. A *wife* in every sense of the word. Unbelievable as it sounds, Sarai was agreeing to "share her husband with another woman."⁷⁸

Swallow a Tums to calm your churning stomach and imagine for one awful moment that you were Sarai. What sort of woman would you choose

UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

to play Hagar's role? Beautiful, for your husband's sake? Or unattractive, for yours? One writer thought Sarai selected "the most physically appealing, intelligent, spiritually evolved woman in her household."⁷⁹ If the goal was solely to produce a healthy, bright child, that approach sounds prudent. But if I were choosing a secondary wife for my husband, she'd be the plainest, dumbest woman in five states!

This much we do know: Sarai "was guilty of no light sin."⁸⁰ Without seeking God's direction in the matter, she chose "a Gentile idolater from a pagan country...to bear the promised seed."⁸¹

All was not lost, however. Abram still had to comply with his wife's audacious plan. A man who had spoken with God, who had faith in God's word, and who'd been declared righteous by a grace-giving God—surely this man would refuse to sin so egregiously.

Abram the Cave Man

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. *Genesis 16:2*

No resistance? No discussion? No seeking God's blessing before proceeding with this no-no? Uh...no. Abram "listened to the voice of Sarai" (NASB) and "heeded what Sarai said" (AMP).

We've heard this before: "Here, honey. Try this tasty fruit." From the beginning, women have gently but firmly bent their husbands to their will, sometimes without saying a word. Abram offered "no more protest to his wife's plan than Adam had to Eve's picnic in paradise."⁸²

Admit it: we women often get what we want through not-so-subtle persuasion, verbal agility, and emotional expression. At least, that's how it works in our family. We live in the old farmhouse I fell in love with and drive the Toyota I picked out. Does my dear husband have an opinion? Of course. My husband, Bill, is also a peacemaker, and granting my wishes gives him what *he* wants: harmony at the Higgs house.

I can see Abram nodding (and Sarai glaring at me for giving away our time-honored tactics) as her husband sought "to buy conjugal peace at

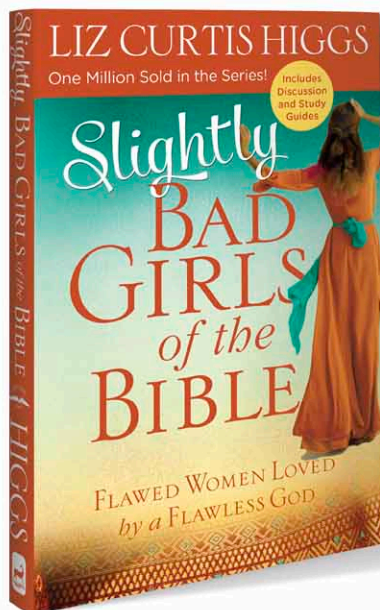
UNCORRECTED PROOF

SNEAK PEEK  SAMPLE ONLY

Buy the whole book at WMbooks.com/SlightlyBadGirls

Continue
Reading...

Order
*SLIGHTLY
BAD GIRLS
OF THE BIBLE*
now!



BUY NOW



WATERBROOK