

INTRODUCTION



NIGHTFALL

Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.

MARK TWAIN

Beth awoke with the twittering birds in the predawn darkness. It took her a few seconds to figure out where she was. Sitting in her car—that much was certain. Parked sideways in the gravel lot behind her apartment building. She'd driven there apparently. But when? And how? From where?

The driver's door was hanging wide open. One blue-jeaned leg was draped out the car door, toes pointed north. Her blouse was half-undone and covered with a horrid-smelling, sticky substance. Remnants of red lipstick were smeared all over her face.

Or was that shame?

Nah. She didn't have any shame left.

She ran a hand through her hair out of habit, then swore at her disheveled image in the rearview mirror. *Disgusting, Beth.*

What day was it anyway? Her throbbing head fell back against the headrest. *Saturday.* The day after Friday, the day after she'd acted like a complete idiot in front of the sales team at work. Lost it, big time. Absolutely *blasted* their ears off. If word got back to her boss, she could kiss this gig good-bye.

Beth groaned and squinted at her watch. *Five something.* The early morning chill seeped through her jeans, making her shiver. Her bladder was screaming for attention, but she ignored it, trying to get her bearings, sort things out, fill in the blank spaces.

Twelve hours ago she'd come stomping into her living room after work, spitting mad, embarrassed over her anger and angry over her embarrassment. Without even shrugging off her jacket, she'd rolled a thimbleful of grass into a tight little joint and dragged hard on it as if it were a cigarette, nearly choking.

Suddenly the blare of a car horn cut through the silent morning darkness and interrupted her thoughts, making her jump with a hungover shudder. Beth sank back in her seat, feeling her heartbeat slowly return to normal. *Easy does it, kid.*

After she'd gotten high last night, then what?

In disjointed pieces more memories shifted into place. She'd fallen asleep on the couch, only to wake up bleary-eyed and stupid around eight. After a hot shower and a cold beer, she'd headed for the club and run into Tee.

Tee. Even now, still semiwasted in her car, she mustered a smile at the memory of Tee looking *fine* in his painted-on jeans. Not the man she'd been looking for, but she'd decided on the spot that he'd do nicely. They'd downed a couple of pitchers of Miller, danced a little, gotten high in the parking lot.

And then...nothing. Did they go to his place? To another bar? Why couldn't she remember? Where did those hours go?

Beth banged the palm of her hand on the steering wheel in frustration, avoiding a second glance in the rearview mirror. Whatever had happened last night, she'd made a spectacle of herself—that was pretty obvious.

C'mon, Beth. Time to go inside. Grabbing her purse, she swung her other leg out of the car and stumbled toward her apartment, fumbling for the keys. Her hands were shaking so badly it was all she could do to get inside before her heaving stomach sent her in search of a trash can, pronto.

Sprawled on the kitchen floor minutes later, every inch of her body in pain, Beth fought against the sobs that pressed against her chest. She'd had bad nights before, but not this bad. Not whole hours lost in the blackness, not driving a car blind drunk, risking her own life and others. How could Tee have let her drive home? Had they argued?

What had happened? *What had happened?*

Beth forced herself to stand up, clutching the edge of the faded Formica counter to keep from falling to her knees. *Enough*. Twenty-seven years was enough, wasn't it? If a chick couldn't get her act together after all that time, she oughta hang it up, right?

Right.

She made her way down the hall, toward a shower and a bed, hoping to wash away her pain and sleep away the shadowy, shameful memories, yet knowing it wouldn't help.

What did she have to live for anyway? No real friends, probably no job come Monday morning, no decent man in her life, no future whatsoever.

Nothing but to get out of bed, get to work, get home, get drunk, get lucky.

Bag it, girl.

Depositing her clothes in an untidy heap on the linoleum floor, Beth fell into the shower. Scalding hot water slapped her across the face. Numb with pain, she simply stood there and took it.

Pills would be the easiest way. No pain, no hassle, just sleep.

Endless sleep.

She turned her back on the water as a flood of unwelcome tears streamed down her cheeks. The pulsating water lashed against her shoulders like a leather strap, a much-deserved punishment.

Death couldn't come soon enough for Beth...



What's So Bad About Being a Bad Girl?

Beth has a problem, but it's not the one you might think of first.

Her problem isn't drinking, drugs, or promiscuity. That's the outside stuff, the part most folks agree makes her a Bad Girl.

But here's the deal: You can straighten up your external act and still be dying inside. People applaud 'cause you're "clean," but inside you feel dirtier than ever.

Beth's problem also isn't low self-esteem, unresolved anger, or feelings of abandonment. Those things may fuel her *Badder-Than-She-Wants-to-Be* lifestyle, but they aren't at the heart of it. When you get such psychological issues worked out, people mistakenly think you're "cured," an emotionally healthy woman ready to face the world.

Our girl Beth knows better. She's knows that identifying—even discussing at length—those prickly core issues doesn't make them go away, no matter how many books you read or sermons you hear.

Her problem is simply this: Beth is in a pit, and she can't climb out.

Those who've never been in that particular pit have little patience with Beth. They lean over her abyss and shake their finger at her. "Don't you know that's a pit? What kind of fool gets herself in that much trouble? You've shamed your whole family. Don't you know that?"

Listen to me: This will not help Beth. She is already covered with shame and self-loathing; she doesn't need more added on top. Judgment isn't a lifeline; it's a death sentence.

Good people—parents, spouses, friends, well-meaning folks, Christians—may venture near the edge of Beth's pit, not to judge, but to encourage. They call down to her, "Just climb out, Beth. You can do it! We're all waiting up here for you, sweetie. Come on, take that first step."

Oh, dear. This won't help Beth either. It's too dark down there even to see a toehold or feel a rope bouncing off your shoulder or hear a ladder being lowered rung by rung. It's especially tough when you've been crying for a good while.

Besides, Beth already *knows* she can't do it. She's tried again and again to climb out of her pit of despair, each time slipping deeper into the muck. It may be pitch-black in that hole, but she's been down there so long the darkness feels like home.

Some kind believers may gather in a circle around the top of her pit. They pray that Beth will wake up and climb out—"Dear Lord, let Beth see her sins clearly. Tell her we love her"—before heading to Denny's for brunch, convinced they've done all they could for poor, misguided Beth.

Is this woman beyond reach, beyond hope?

Here's the rest of her story...



Beth fell into bed, sinking into the mattress, a damp towel still wrapped around her body, her arms limp and outstretched, her cheeks ruddy with shame. She would buy those pills when she woke up, but for the moment she was in no shape to drive.

Instead she would sleep.

A little sleep now. A forever sleep soon.

The sleep of the dead.

Little did Beth know that while she planned her own unhappy ending, far above her someone was circling her pit, waiting for the opportune moment. Waiting until she hit bottom. Waiting until she looked up. That time finally came when Beth realized where she was—buried deep in a pit—and how much she hated being there.

On that sacred day, when nothing could be heard but Beth's weeping in that grim and desolate place, a man lowered himself over the side. He eased down the walls of the pit—not in a hurry but not stalling either—giving Beth time to see him coming, to watch his descent and reflect on who he was.

Finally he stood before her and breathed one syllable into the darkness. "Beth."

He knows my name. Stunned, she merely nodded, squinting to see him better.

His eyes were kind. "I came for you."

She stared at the familiar stranger but said nothing.

He brushed a smudge of dirt off her sleeve. "You think I came only for those people up there, don't you?"

"Yes," she managed to croak, hating the sound of her voice.

"I did come for them. But I also came for you."

"No." She shook her head, certain on this one. "I'm not good enough."

"That's true, you're not. Neither are they. But I am." He held his arms out, as if to cradle something. "Are you ready?"

She shrank back. "Ready for what?"

"For me." He regarded her without judgment or disgust. "I'm here to carry you out of your pit."

Her eyes narrowed. "Who says I want out?"

He gazed at the cramped, bleak space that surrounded them. "Nobody really wants to live in a place like this. People convince themselves they do, but they don't."

"I dunno..." She peered upward, aware for the first time that light was seeping in from above. "What if I don't like it... up there?"

"You will," he assured her with a gentle smile. "I promise."

A spark of defiance crept into her voice. "What's so good about it?"

"That's where I live." He touched her hand. "Come with me, Beth. I love you."

He *loved* her? Boy, that was a new one. Not guilt or shame or shoulda-woulda-coulda stuff. *Love*. Hard to say no to that one.

Beth exhaled, preparing for a long haul. "Tell me what I have to do."

He gathered her into his arms like a babe. "What you have to do is simply this: Believe in me. Trust that I can carry you without letting go."

She swallowed hard. "Are you strong enough?"

"I am." He started moving upward without so much as a grunt.

“Are you brave enough?”

“I am.” They were halfway to the top.

Her quivering voice was barely above a whisper. “Do you love me enough?”

“I do.” He looked straight at her when he said it, and despite the knot in her stomach, she believed him.

The truth was undeniable. *He loves me. He loves me!*

All at once they were out of the pit and on solid ground. She blinked at the brightness of the sun. Or was it his face, shining like that?

The man slid her gracefully to her feet. “Welcome home, Beth.”

“Th-thank you,” she stammered.

And then she cried with her whole heart...



He forgives all my sins

and heals all my diseases;

he redeems my life from the pit

and crowns me with love and compassion. *Psalm 103:3-4*

Sometimes I still cry. I'm crying now. Weeping, in fact, with joy and gratitude. You've guessed by this point, I imagine, that Beth's story is my own. Though I'm *Elizabeth*, everybody calls me Liz.

I know what you're thinking.

How did you end up in that pit, Liz? Were you tossed in against your will? Did you crawl in on purpose? Or did you wake up there one morning, dazed and confused?

Yes, yes, and yes. Don't waste any energy on questions like these.

It doesn't matter how we get down in a pit. *It only matters that we get out of it.*

Not all pits are dark either. Some are neon bright, filled with the spoils of materialism or the trophies of worldly success.

The ten years I spent in the pit are my hardest-earned credentials for writing *Really Bad Girls of the Bible*, the stories of eight biblical women who lived in pits of one design or another. They had some all-too-obvious sins going on in their lives as well. Public sins. Nasty sins. Murder. Sorcery. Adultery. Deceit.

One writer observed, “Life hasn’t changed a great deal in over two thousand years. The images of the good girl and the bad girl are still very much with us.”¹ They sure are. We’ll save the Good Girls for another time. I always learn more from women who are less than perfect, simply because we have much more in common.

Try as I might (and I did!), I couldn’t change their lives into happy endings. The Lord himself did so in several cases. In others, although the women made poor choices, God worked through their situations anyway. They were Bad Girls—but he is a good and sovereign God.

When I wrote *Bad Girls of the Bible*, I never dreamed there were so many other Former Bad Girls like me out there who needed to know they are not alone. These precious sisters sent letters and e-mails, which I read in private, then prayed over and tucked in a safe place. I treasure their confessions, knowing the courage it took to write them.

Carefully keeping their identities close to my heart, I’ll share only a few words so you’ll know that *you* are not alone as well. Three women wrote:

- It’s nice to know I’m not as hopeless as I once thought and God does have a special plan for each of us.
- Though most people have not forgiven me, God certainly has.
- When you are on the bottom, God can still reach down and bring you up.

Yes, he can! What words of comfort for us pit dwellers. Now it’s time to meet our historical counterparts.

Athaliah and Herodias were *Bad and Proud of It*. “Make no apologies” and “take no prisoners” were the mottoes of these two vengeful females.

The Medium of En Dor and Bathsheba both experienced a *Bad Moon Rising*. A royal pain came knocking on their doors one moonlit night—different nights, different kings, but double trouble just the same.

Our two *Bad for a Good Reason* Girls, Jael and Tamar the widow, were used by God despite their highly unusual means of putting men in their place.

Finally, two New Testament women—known by their no-nos but not by their names—give us hope with their stories of being *Bad, but Not Condemned*.

All eight chapters begin with a contemporary, fictional take on our biblical Bad Girls, just to remind us that when it comes to badness, there's nothing new under the sun.

If the first *Bad Girls of the Bible* book was about grace, this second one is all about the sovereignty of God, the unstoppable power of God to accomplish his perfect will, no matter how much we mess up.

Get this: God doesn't work *around* our sin; he works *through* it.

Honey, I can hear you now: "You mean God is waiting for us to sin so he can show his mighty power despite our foolish interference?"

Uh...no. God doesn't have to wait for us to sin in order to act. We're already sinning. No waiting involved. God is also not sitting around wringing his holy hands and saying, "Now look what they've done. How am I gonna manage with *that* mess?"

God is God. He is all-powerful, all-wise. He is omni-everything. My controlling nature, however, chafes at the thought of not being in charge. I suspect our eight Really Bad Girls weren't eager to relinquish control either.

And yet, if we would choose the life of a Future Good Girl over remaining a Forever Bad Girl, there are two truths we need to grasp:

1. God will be sovereign in our lives only if we accept the truth that we are not—and never were—in charge.

2. God will extend his grace to us the minute we admit that we are utterly lost without it.

Mary Magdalene, one of the most shining examples of a Good Girl, didn't start out that way. She started out harboring seven demons in her spirit. Talk about a deep dark *pit*! Jesus, bless him, carried her out. Delivered her. Sent the demons packing. "That she became a gloriously good woman is an encouragement to every bad girl...to repent."² I'll say!

Dear one, if you've never been in a dark pit, we all rejoice with you. I will, however, offer this gentle reminder: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"³

If you've been saved from the bottom of the pit as I have, let's celebrate our freedom without forgetting those dear souls we left behind who are waiting desperately to hear our Good News.

And if you're still down in that pit of shame, beloved, remember that Jesus came to earth for *you*. His arms are open, ready, and waiting to carry you home.