**“Slightly Bad Girls of the Bible”**

Based on the Book & Teachings by Liz Curtis Higgs



 **Small Group Guide**

**By**

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**First Created for Summer Women’s Study 2019**

**What you need to know about this Guide**

This guide is gleaned from the study guide at the back of the book. However, these questions were intentionally designed to be *small group* questions instead of *Bible study* questions. Bible study focuses on learning more about the text. Small groups emphasize mining what the Holy Spirit is doing in each person in order to take steps to live more like Jesus.

As you share the facilitation of this guide, take note when the discussion turns too much about the *information.* That is, it becomes a book study. The goal is to use the information presented in the book and scriptures to help each person pay attention to what God is doing in *their own* lives. These questions are simply a guide to help you accomplish that goal.

These are very same questions used in the Summer Study around the tables. In order to use this guide most effectively, the following is a general outline for how to facilitate each session.

**Suggested Small Group Facilitation Guide**

**ENTER: Welcome**

* Light a candle or moment of silence to mark the beginning of the group.
* Prayer
* Anything from last week we need to talk a little more about?
* Warm-up Question
* Small Group Guidelines: Go over the guidelines the first week in detail, making sure everyone understands them. Then EVERY week, briefly review them, and ask the group to point out how we are doing with them.

**EXPLORE**

* Use the suggested questions to engage in a personal exploration of how the material, scriptures, etc. impacted the participants in the group. Feel free to use other questions and go in directions that the group needs.

**REFLECT**

* Invite the group to spend 2-3 minutes in silence to reflect on today’s discussion and to listen for anything that God might be trying to say to you.

**SHARE**

* With a new tone, give the group an opportunity to share anything that God might be stirring in their soul. Be patient and comfortable with silence. If no one shares, that is okay. Some follow up questions like:
	+ What is the Holy Spirit telling you?
	+ What are you thinking of doing about it?
	+ How can we help?

**PRAYER**

* Try to avoid the typical prayer concerns. There’s other opportunities for that. Instead, explain that we want to specifically pray for what God is doing in each other’s lives. What we are dealing with in our Spirit, opportunities for growth, gratitude for what God has done, guidance for new challenges, etc.

**BLESS**

* Blow out the candle and extend a blessing to one another. Here is a simple one: Look at the person/group in the eyes: “You are blessed by God. Be a blessing to others. Go in peace.”

**Small Group Ground Rules**

This is the “operating system” of a small group. This is the most important piece to building an authentic community. These rules provide the boundaries of a space that is safe to be real, authentic and vulnerable so that Holy Spirit can do its work. We live, act, and talk differently in a small group! Developing this kind of environment takes time, team-work, and a lot of trust.

At your first gathering, go over these *in detail* and why they are important. Make sure they understand and agree to them. Remind them *each week* of the rules and how to maintain them. Finally, it is *critical* that you ensure the group follows these rules. Interrupt any conversation in order to remind them to adjust their talk.

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| *1.* ***Safe Environment*** *– This is a judgment free zone! Feel safe to be your authentic self.* | *6.* ***Pause****—Allow a pause after someone finishes to provide room to consider what was said before responding.* |
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| *2.* ***Accountability****—Everyone’s help is expected to make this safe.* | *7.* ***Silence****—Expect and welcome silence. Consider it sacred space for God to speak.* |
|  |  |
| *3.* ***Confidentiality****—What is said in the group stays in the group, unless permission is given.* | *8.* ***Respect****—Don’t try to solve or fix each other. Just receive what they share (even if you disagree) as a gift. Offer encouragement, speak truth, point to Jesus.* |
|  |  |
| *4.* ***“I” statements****—Speak for yourself-your beliefs, feelings, responses. It’s easy to talk about the issues of others, but we want you to put* ***yourself*** *on the table.  Use “I” statements rather than “them,” “the church,” “us,” “we,” “you.”* | *9.* ***Honor****-- Honor the different ways God works in individuals. Resist the temptation to console or offer condolences, as it may lead some to stop sharing, or try to fix.* |
|  |  |
| *5.* ***Listen****—Try to avoid thinking about what you are going to say next. Avoid “cross-talk” and interrupting.* | *10.* ***Sharing****—Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Recognize that all group members are invited to share aloud only what and when they are ready to share.* |

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***Week 1: “A Matter of Time”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and why you decided to join this study.

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading or the teaching?
2. Sarai is the first woman in Scripture described as barren, though she would not be the last. Even God’s people are compared to a barren woman (Isaiah 54:1-5). In what ways have you longed for God’s blessing, yet you find yourself waiting?
3. Abram and Sarai lived in Canaan for 10 years before she took steps to secure an heir for her husband (Genesis 16:1-3). Describe a time when you took your future into your own hands without seeking God’s guidance. Why is waiting so hard? What can be done to make it easier?
4. Once Hagar becomes pregnant, her attitude toward Sarai shifts abruptly, and she looked with contempt on her childless mistress (Genesis 16:4). When have you (be honest) been tempted to look down on someone—even in passing—because of appearance, education, social status, or anything else that made the person of lesser value in your eyes?
5. Sarai blamed Abram for her misery rather than acknowledge her part in the situation (Genesis 16:5-6). Have you ever blamed someone else and neglected to take responsibility for your part in a situation?
6. Neither Abram nor Sarai behaved admirably in this chapter. Why do you suppose God chose to bless such deeply flawed people?
7. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Sarai, a princess bride who ran out of patience?

Today’s Thoughts and Prayers ….

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***Week 2: “Flight Plan”***

**Warm-Up Question:** **Introduce yourself by sharing ONE quality about *YOURSELF* that you really love.**

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading or the teaching?
2. Hagar’s chosen name for the Lord, “God Who Sees Me,” has such a personal meaning. What would YOU name God, and why?
3. Do you believe God also sees you? Hears you? Loves you? On what do you base your beliefs?
4. Sarai’s envy of Hagar and Hagar’s lack of sympathy for barren Sarai qualify both women as “Mean Girls of the Bible.” When have you personally observed or experienced that kind of woman-to-woman cruelty? How can we help each other avoid such behavior?
5. Hagar fled to a “land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives” (Jeremiah 2:6). Have you ever spent time in a “spiritual” wilderness? Describe your experience.
6. Genesis 21:19 reveals that Hagar had a truly eye-opening experience on her second foray into the desert. Have you ever had a spiritual “eye-opening” experience? Why do you suppose God open the eyes of his people? (see Numbers 22:31, Mark 8:25, Luke 24:30-31)
7. Though Hagar may have felt abandoned by her master and mistress, God remained by her side and Ishmael’s as well. That God cares for any of us, flawed as we are, is remarkable. What *must* you know about God to trust him as Hagar did? (See Isaiah 45:5-6)
8. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Hagar, who beat a path to the desert twice and found God waiting for her both times?

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***Week 3: “The Last Laugh”***

**Warm-Up Question:** **Introduce yourself by sharing something that really makes you laugh!**

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading or the teaching?
2. Have you, like Sarah, ever laughed at God in disbelief? (Perhaps scoffed at a promise made in Scripture, certain it couldn’t happen in your life?)
3. All of us—single or married, with or without children—can impact the next generation. In what ways will the life you live today affect the future?
4. Perhaps the most thrilling way of becoming a “mother of nations” is sharing in the birth of new believers, nurturing them in the faith, and helping them reach spiritual maturity. If you are doing such things, what have you discovered in the process? If you’re hesitant to disciple the next generation of believers, what’s holding you back? How can committing to a small group help?
5. Even those who believe in God can and will stumble. How does Sarah’s story encourage *your* trust in God’s promises such as the life-changing one in Romans 10:9?
6. In Titus 2:3-5, we find a list of expectations for older women including skills they’re meant to teach younger women. How would Sarah rate as a Titus 2 woman? How are you fulfilling the expectations of the older woman? How well are you seeking and receiving guidance from older women?
7. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Sarah, a woman who laughed at God and (almost) got away with it?

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***Week 4: “A Willful Bride”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and one thing that you are really hard on yourself about.

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading and/or the teaching?
2. Rebekah went the extra mile to show generous hospitality to Abraham’s servant, who recognized it as a sign from God that she would make a good wife for Abraham’s son. What motivates you to be generous and hospitable to others?
3. Have you ever launched on faith down an uncertain path much as Rebekah did? What convinced you that such the journey was God’s idea and not your own? In what areas do you now sense God might be prompting you to let Him stretch your faith?
4. One scholar described Isaac as having “a sedate, contemplative, and yielding disposition,” the sort of man who “followed, but did not lead.” Rebekah seemed to have none of those qualities. What are the pluses and minuses of marrying someone who is your opposite?
5. If you have an Isaac in your life who struggles because he is NOT a hard-driving, Type A kind of guy, how could you encourage him emotionally and spiritually?
6. “Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.” (Genesis 25:21) We often take time to tell God our needs, but we may neglect taking time to notice how God answers our prayers. In the past week or so what needs, expressed in prayer, did God meet for you? Share with your group an unanswered need that you want prayers for.
7. Rebekah gave birth to twins, and it seems she loved Jacob and not Esau. If you have children, do you ever struggle with favoring one over the other(s)? What are some healthy ways to balance parental affection?
8. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Rebekah, a young wife who said “I will” with gusto?

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***Week 5: “Using Her Wits”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and a part of your life that you have struggled to get “under control.”

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading and/or the teaching?
2. Did your mother or father offer a blessing over you—say a prayer on your behalf, serve a special meal, present you with a family heirloom—to launch you into the world? What impact do you think this blessing or its absence, had on your life?
3. Rebekah was a woman so in control she was out of control! What areas of your life might benefit from less control on your part and more control on the Holy Spirit’s part?
4. How do you feel about this mother who went to such deceptive lengths for her son? Have you ever ‘pushed the boundaries’ for something or someone? How did you feel? Do the ends ever justify the means?
5. Hebrews 12:17 remembers the impact on Esau, “He (Esau) could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.” Do you feel sympathetic toward Esau in this scene, or did he deserve to lose his inheritance? Why do you feel that way?
6. Reviewing Genesis 27:42-46, Rebekah continues her controlling habits. Have you ever experienced being controlled in ways reminiscent of Rebekah’s control of Jacob and Isaac? What impact has that had on your relationship with this person? On others?
7. Rebekah’s last recorded speech is in Genesis 27:46 is quite telling. Have you ever felt the way she did?
8. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Rebekah, a mother who cared only about the end, not the means?

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***Week 6: “The Night Has Eyes”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and describe one sibling (or if you are an only child, a non-parent family member) you are closest to.

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading and/or the teaching?
2. Have you experienced sibling rivalry? What was that like?
3. Have you struggled with the temptation to view other women as competition to be bested rather than as sisters to be loved? How do you resist it?
4. God promised to be with Jacob, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, etc. How do you know without a doubt that God will watch over you, as he did these ancient believers?
5. Jacob seems to make a “deal” with God in Genesis 28:20-22. Have you made any “deals” with God? How did they turn out?
6. How important are family ties and a common faith to you in your choice of a mate? What else matters to you in this regard?
7. In Genesis 29:17, Leah and Rachel are defined only by their physical appearance. Do you feel you are defined by your looks? What are men defined by?
8. For what relationship have you labored, only find a surprise twist in the end?
9. Jacob had to wait quite a while to get what he wanted. What delays have you experienced from God? What did/does God seem to want from you?
10. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Leah, an unseen sister veiled in duplicity?

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***Week 7: “Morning Has Broken”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and describe briefly what someone can do to make you feel the most ‘loved.’

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading and/or the teaching?
2. Jacob was deceived by Laban. Think of a time you were betrayed or deceived in some way. Was it the motive, the method, or the outcome that bothered you most? Why?
3. From whom do you seek counsel when you are wounded by someone you trust?
4. Even loved by God as she was, Leah still longed for Jacob’s love. But as Genesis 29:30 makes clear, Leah did not know Jacob’s love. Were you ever disappointed in your expectation of ‘being loved?’ When have you felt *unloved*?
5. How do the words of verse 29:31, “*When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved*…” speak into *your* moments of despair?
6. Leah hoped the birth of her first three sons would bring Jacob’s affection. What things have you done hoping it would bring love and affection into your life? How did it turn out?
7. After the birth of Judah in Genesis 29:35, Leah didn’t look to Jacob for love; she’d already found God’s love to be more than enough. Practically speaking, how can you put God first as Leah finally did?
8. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Leah, an unloved wife who was very much loved by God?

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***Week 8: “When All Is Said and Done”***

**Warm-Up Question:** Introduce yourself and what was the best thing that happened in your life this week?

**Suggested “Table Talk” Questions**

1. What’s one thing that really jumps out to you from the reading and/or the teaching?
2. Rachel bitterly resented Leah, and was envious of her. What specific situations push your buttons, and why? How do you normally express your bitterness?
3. Would you say that God has planted contentment in your life? If this is something you desire, how might you prepare the soil of your heart for those healthy seeds? (Reminder to the group to NOT TRY TO FIX EACH OTHER. Just listen and receive other person’s stories).
4. Genesis 30:22 “God remembered Rachel.” Such a tender phrase. What does it mean to you to be remembered by God?
5. God took away not only the societal disgrace of Rachel’s barrenness but also the shame of her sin. What tears, what sorrows, what shame in your life are you praying that God would take away?
6. Though we cannot change our past, God can and will direct our future. Describe the “new self” you long to become, shaped by God’s loving hands.
7. Which of the five “Slightly Bad Girls” do you most identify with? Why?
8. What’s the Holy Spirit stirring up in you as you reflect on Rachel, the memorable mother of Joseph and Benjamin?

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