

Bad Girls of the Bible
By Lee DeLay

Few, if any, of us have made it our ambition in life to be a bad girl. Even Jezebel and Delilah, those hussies from the pages of the Old Testament, probably didn't set their sights on being evil when they were little girls.

This morning's message could seem to be very misleading and off the wall, and tempting as it was, I had some misgivings about using it, but let me explain. I was discussing the need for ideas and asking for suggestions from some of my family members, who are better versed in the Bible than I am. They are my Bible scholars and prayer warriors, so when they said, "why not share about the bad girls of the Bible?", I had to laugh until I realized they were serious. I explained that our service is intended to celebrate the gifts of women who love and serve the Lord and felt this might be a little sacrilegious until they told me about a book called *Bad Girls of the Bible and What We Can Learn From Them* by a best-selling author, Liz Curtis Higgs. The more we discussed it, the better I liked the idea. But before we get into some of those bad girls, let me take a minute to mention some of the good girls we're all familiar with.

Even though I grew up in a Christian home, went to church and Sunday School, and studied the Bible, I wondered how I could ever measure up in any small fashion to the good girls I read about in the Scriptures. I heard the stories about Sarah - so faithful to God and to her husband. She trusted God for the impossible and waited 90 years for it. NINETY YEARS! I could never be that patient in waiting for anything. I even get restless sometimes when waiting for potatoes to bake in the microwave.

And what about Queen Esther? Do you know her story? I will share some of it with you...it's one of my favorites from the Old Testament...to give you an idea of what she was willing to do. Somewhere in Persia lived King Xerxes. When he banned his wife for being disobedient (because men could do that back then) he held a contest to find the most beautiful woman in his country to be his new queen. An orphaned Jewish girl named Esther hid her Jewish heritage and entered the contest. The Bible says she had a good figure and a beautiful face (Esther 2:7), and she made the finals. To make a long story short, it was love at first sight for King Xerxes when he saw the beautiful Jewish girl. Esther was selected from among all the women in the land to be Queen. She won the beauty pageant of the year.

Being queen came with lots of perks - maids, cooks, daily pampering with the best beauty treatments around, the nicest clothes, the best food. But the position also came with a downside. The queen could only speak to her husband when he called for and invited her to speak. Can you imagine? In order to ask your husband a question, you would have to wait until he called you into his presence and then, IF he said you could open your mouth, you could speak to him. Well, that's how it was for Queen Esther.

If you are familiar with her story, you know something unusual happened. Outside of the palace one day, Mordecai, Esther's uncle - the man who reared her - refused to bow down and worship one of the king's highest ranking officials. His name was Haman. Haman, who had an enormous ego to go with his enormous palace responsibilities, was furious. He decided to get rid of Mordecai, the Jew. And hey, why waste all this fury on one man when he could make a real statement and rid the country of all the Jews? Mordecai heard about the plot and told his niece. "Esther", he said, "you've got to do something! You've got to tell the king about this and put a stop to it. You're the only one who can save the Jewish people. Your people!

This put Esther in a precarious predicament. First of all, her husband didn't know she was Jewish. Second, rules being what they were, she couldn't just go to King Xerxes and uncover Haman's plot. She could only mention it in the event she had an audience with him.

And for the rest of the story I would encourage you to open the Book of Esther in the Old Testament (Find Psalms and count back two books), then read the entire story. Let me just say, Esther

risked her life to save her people. She took a monumental step of courage. She, too, was one of the "good girls" with courage I'm not sure I would have had under the same circumstances.

In reading our scriptures we can't help but be touched as well by the loyalty and determination of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. By Miriam, the first choir director on record. And Deborah, a woman who stepped forward to fill a man's shoes, when no man could be found who fit the bill. AND as a judge no less! Lydia and Priscilla were honest, Christian business women functioning in a man's world. And what about the sisters of Bethany...Mary and Martha? And Mary, the mother of Jesus?

In our own time we are touched by the humble and loving care of people like Mother Theresa, who lifted up and cared for the poor and lowly. We could name so many others. All godly women with good qualities and character we could call on as role models. We celebrate their lives and their gifts.

And then from the Old Testament there are women we might sometimes, but not always, relate to who are bad girls. Jezebel, pushy and controlling. The queen of Prima Donas. We might even sympathize with some of her angry outbursts and understand her need to be in charge. Delilah, the woman who conjured up all kinds of deception to get her own way. Greedy Sapphira, who wanted to appear pious and godly to her friends and neighbors, so she did her level best to cover up her selfish behavior. And Bathsheba, the wife of King David and the mother of Solomon, the wisest (and richest) king who ever lived, was guilty of a lot of things, and it all started with bad judgment.

Let's be honest. Have you ever wanted your own way? Or been in hot water because you made a bad decision? Have you ever manipulated a situation so you could get what you wanted? Have you ever found yourself doing something, then in order to put your best face forward, shown another side of yourself because "what would people think", if they knew the real you?

Do you identify with any of Jezebel's traits? Strong-willed, domineering, quick to criticize, stubborn, impatient, unwilling to admit you're wrong? She didn't even try to rein herself in. Ever. Maybe this doesn't describe you, but it certainly may sound remarkably like someone you know. There might be a positive side to these aggressive character traits: leadership, boldness, assertiveness, courage. If this describes you (or someone you know), is it possible you could serve Christ with the same passion that Jezebel served her false God?

Play armchair psychologist with me for a moment as we take a closer look at DeLilah. What do you see? An angry woman? A hurt and disappointed child? A deserted wife? A greedy harlot? What was at the root of her sin? Lust? Greed? Idolatry? Selfishness? Could any of those sins ever show up in your life? We don't honor any of those actions, but we could learn from them.

Are you familiar with Sapphira's story in the New Testament? I think we need to think about this one, too. Turn to Acts, Chapter 5 and read about her. She and her husband, Ananias, were well known and probably respected in their church. When funds were needed, they offered to sell some of their property and turn over all the funds to the church and the cause of Christ. Pretty noble, don't you think? They sold the land and brought part of the money to the apostles. Note I said PART of the money. Not all of the money, as they had promised. The biggest mistake was they lied about it. The Bible isn't clear about their motives, but it is clear about the high price of being dishonest. In the presence of God honesty isn't the best policy. It's the ONLY policy.

When they dropped the money into the offering plate, they made a big deal about giving all of it even though they secretly kept a portion of it for themselves. Were they looking for approval from their friends? Did they get greedy in the pursuit of earthly riches? Pride and generosity don't mix. God is delighted when we share our time and our resources for the pure joy of serving Him and not out of some need to be praised by our community.

I believe all of the bad girls, with some of their faults no worse than our own, were never beyond God's reach. They were never outside the realm of His grace, had they chosen to turn in His direction. And some of them did. From the New Testament we remember Mary Magdalene, who turned her back on her ways and followed Jesus; the woman at the well who became the first evangelist to the Samaritans, and the woman who was caught in adultery and Jesus told her accusers whoever was without sin to cast the first stone.

There's a little bit of badness in all of us, but the bottom line is Good Girls and Bad Girls are both in need of a Savior. The choice was theirs and the choice is ours. So we can learn from the good and the bad.

The good women in the Bible aren't the only ones who come to mind when we think of great faith and service to the Lord. There were and are women in our church who have modeled the qualities that not only delight God, but that have made a difference in our lives.

When I joined this church as a young bride over fifty years ago, I was welcomed here by ladies who some of you may have known and remember, like Mae Potter. She was a loving and enthusiastic encourager who taught and inspired so many of us, and it's the chapel here in our church that was dedicated to her memory. Then there were our teachers: Ella Evans, along with Evelyn Gahm, who had no children of their own, but taught and loved our children, and I might add they passed their gavel on to Frances DeMent when they were no longer able to teach. There were more. Elizabeth Morgan, Mabel Parry, Peggy Gahm and others who taught the rest of us. Leaders in our church like Viola Hutchison, Beatrice Bloss, Elizabeth Roderick, Gladys McClung, Esther Dauber, Eva Ridgeway, Elvarie Davis, Lola Smith, Madge Morrow, Audrey McNair, Eleanor Ice, and you will remember others that I don't mean to overlook. It would be so easy to forget a name because the roll call is so long. Deacons and Elders, choir members, music directors, and organists, ministers' wives, youth leaders, our mothers, aunts, sisters, daughters, and friends who strengthened our church and led us in our walk with Him. We celebrate their gifts.

But there are more.

Even though it is important for us to look back and see how women have answered His call in the past we need to look ahead and realize that God wants to use us, too...each one of us to accomplish His will. We all have gifts to share and none are too small. All we have to do is hear His call, step up to the plate and in the words of one of my favorite hymns say "Here I am Lord...".

So now in closing I would like to ask all of you, girls of all ages, who are here this morning to stand for just a moment. I'll give you plenty of time to get to your feet, while I catch my breath and check to be sure our choir members are standing as well. And, as you are standing, we remember and include those who aren't able to be here with us this morning.

We look to all of you who are and who have been willing to serve, and we celebrate your gifts and honor you this morning.