STUDY GUIDE

SIX SESSIONS

THE FIGHT TO *Flourish*

Engaging in the Struggle to Cultivate the Life You Were Born to Live

JENNIE LUSKO

THE FIGHT TO *Flourish*

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JENNIE LUSKO

W Publishing Group
An Imprint of Thomas Nelson

The Fight to Flourish Study Guide

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ISBN 978-0-310-11248-8 (softcover)
ISBN 978-0-310-11249-5 (ebook)

20 21 22 23 24 /LSC/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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A NOTE FROM JENNIE

Thank you so much for joining me in this Bible study. It was written for women who want to thrive yet feel often as though they are failing. If you are anything like me, you might get frustrated when life feels a lot more like fighting than flourishing. It's like you're trying to get somewhere while walking knee-deep in mud.

But there's good news for you. You're already there. You are right where you are supposed to be!

I'm serious. You have already arrived at your destination. I'm not going to spoil the coming teaching, but you're going to learn in the first session how we are each like a seed packet. The picture might represent lush dahlias or bright roses or succulent strawberries or a ripe watermelon, but there we are, a seed. We might be small and insignificant, but we are growing. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is the picture on our seed packet, and we are becoming more and more like Him every day.

When we make the decision to trust in Jesus, we live our lives from the finish line. We understand that He has come to earth, died, and rose from the dead so we can live an abundant life, a flourishing life. The goal of a flourishing life is not to be perfect. Nor is it about the bloom. It's to engage in the present, point others to Jesus, and keep fighting through the struggle. It's the very things we struggle with that actually cause us to flourish right where we are. It's not about where you are going as much as it's about who you are becoming on the way there. Even when it feels gut-wrenching.

In this teaching, I have the privilege of sharing about our daughter, Lenya. She died and went to heaven on December 20, 2012. She was only five. My worst day on earth was Lenya's best day in heaven. In the battle against grief, I was reminded that,

> "[My] future is bright and filled with a living hope that will never fade away" (Proverbs 23:18 TPT).

This was true in the absence of my little girl and it is still true in everyday life—while I fight to be kind, to serve, to give, to hope, to love, and be a better woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, and leader.

God has put inside you and me the capacity and ability to live the beautiful flourishing life He has called us to live. It looks different for each of us. We're all on our own journeys and fighting in our own ways.

True flourishing comes from embracing the difficulty of growth. And we can't do that in our own strength. We fight with the power of the Holy Spirit. We fight with Jesus in our corner. We fight with God fighting for us.

We're not fighting and flourishing without purpose. The apostle Paul wrote,

> "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

There's more to this life. More than our scars or bruises or cut lips. Everything we do on earth has an eternal purpose. Just wait, there's more. But for now, let's get growing!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

You can work through this study guide in a group setting or on your own. It's also formatted to work in conjunction with Jennie's book, *The Fight to Flourish*, and the video teaching. If you haven't read the book or won't get a chance to watch the video segments, don't worry. There's plenty of content that will help you begin, today, to activate growth in your life.

This study guide is divided into six sessions that include:

- An overview introducing the message of the session
- A review of last week's session (sessions 2–6)
- A start-up segment that sets the stage for the video session and the discussion to follow
- Video session and notes
- A set of in-depth group discussion questions drawn from the Bible, the video, the book, and real-life matters
- A closing prayer
- Four days of personal study to be completed on your own time
- A prayer from Jennie for you

If you want to maximize your experience outside the small group, spend time in the Dig Deeper portion at the end of each session. This includes four days of assignments to reflect on what you've learned as well as what God has been speaking to you about.

Timing ::

The times listed indicate the actual time of the video segments and the suggested times of the other group segments to help facilitate the meeting. This takes into consideration whether your group meets for an hour or an hour and a half. Group leaders should keep track of time.

What You'll Need ::

Unless otherwise marked, all the Scripture references in this guide are offered in the *New King James Version* (NKJV). If you prefer a different version, have a Bible or Bible app handy to look up the verses in the translation of your choice. While not necessary, as space is provided in this guide, feel free to use a journal or digital device to jot down notes or anything that speaks to you. Finally, while you don't have to, you'll get the most out of this guide if you read it alongside Jennie's book *The Fight to Flourish*.

For the Group Leader ::

Unless indicated otherwise, read each segment and questions. Select volunteers to read the Scripture and content from *The Fight to Flourish* and to close the group in prayer.

SESSION 1

THE FIGHT IN THE *Dark*

Overview ::

When we get to heaven, we will be fully made in the image of Christ, perfect and without blemish or shame. But until then, we live imperfect lives in an imperfect world. But no matter how hard the fight or dark the night, we can still flourish in the struggle because we are in Jesus Christ and He is the light that has overcome the world.

Session Start-up ::

(5 minutes)

LEADER: Read aloud to group.

A seed is destined to grow. But it's not as simple as tossing a few apple seeds into dirt and expecting an apple tree to sprout within days. Seeds must germinate. Then they must be planted. And then, with the right soil, water, air, light, and temperature, they grow. They do what they were born to do. And they do more than just bloom, they grow.

It's easy to dismiss the growth process when we're focused on the flourishing part. Let's be real. Flourishing is more fun. It's gorgeous. It's our "after" picture. It's where we show off results, showcase our victory, and personify success. We get our degree. We run the marathon. Our dreams actualize. We get it right and stop feeling like we're always failing at something. The thing is, flourishing is not reserved only for our desired outcome. Flourishing is interwoven with growth, with struggle, with fighting. And doesn't life seem like that sometimes? A fight? A fight to be kind, a fight to do what's right, a fight to focus on what matters most, a fight to live with purpose, peace, and passion.

In 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul the apostle who wrote most of the New Testament, encouraged us to,

> "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (NIV).

While we receive the gift of salvation and are born again, it doesn't mean we live in this trouble-free dimension flush with sunshine, rainbows, and fairytales. Paul gives us the directive to fight. In other words, it's not going to be easy. We're going to get sweaty and tired. We might even sport a black eye or a cut lip. We are born to flourish, yes, but we need the fight in order to flourish.

This truth is not meant to dampen your parade of living your best life. Jesus is with

us in the fight and in the darkness. We are not alone. We are not left battling it out in our human strength. We don't need epic ninja skills or superhero punches. We hope in the darkness because we have the light of Jesus in us. Light that shines in and cannot be overcome by the darkness. Light that cannot be dimmed or snuffed out. Light that gives and keeps giving light to each of us. And no matter what situation we find ourselves in, whether we're wallowing in disappointment, crushed by heartache, or seeing stars from one of life's sucker punches, we can allow the Light of the world to shine through us.

Talk About It ::

(5-10 minutes)

What value does darkness have in everyday life?

Watch the Video ::

(15 minutes)

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

Watch the session 1 video. While viewing the video, use the outline and space below to record key ideas or any thoughts you want to remember.

- What does it mean/look like to flourish?

- The process we are going through right now is the destination God has for us.

- Psalm 92:12–15

> "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
> He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
> Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
> Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
> They shall still bear fruit in old age;
> They shall be fresh and flourishing,
> To declare that the LORD is upright;
> He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

- Our life right now is motivated by and caused by starting at the finish line.

- When we follow Jesus, God looks at us and sees His Son.

- In this fight to flourish, God created us for a very unique purpose and for us to walk in it.

- God desires us to grow and live an abundant, full-of-joy life.

- When you hurt and it's hard, know that God is right with you in the pain.

- Psalm 18:28–29

> "For you will light my lamp;
> The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.
> For by You I can run against a troop,
> By my God I can leap over a wall."

Small Group Discussion ::

(30-40 minutes)

LEADER: Read aloud each numbered prompt. Select a volunteer to read the Scripture and content from *The Fight to Flourish* book.

1. Read Psalm 92:12–15:

> "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
> He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
> Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
> Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
> They shall still bear fruit in old age;
> They shall be fresh and flourishing,
> To declare that the LORD is upright;"
> He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

List aloud three attributes of a flourishing life found in this passage.

2. In the video teaching, Jennie talks about how our lives represent a seed packet. The picture on the packet shows what the seed inside will grow to look like. The seed itself looks insignificant, but it has great potential. When we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we have the potential of being like Him, the picture on the seed packet of our lives.

   Describe an instance when you felt overwhelmed by failure, great or small, few or many. How does knowing that God doesn't look at us and see our flaws, but rather Jesus, encourage you?

3. Read John 16:33:

   > "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

   How does this promise from Jesus encourage you to trust Him and not give up during tough times?

4. Share what has been the darkest time in your life. Name one or two ways you have experienced Jesus working in and through you during that time?

5. Read the following Scriptures:
   - John 1:4–5:

     "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

   - John 9:5:

     "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

   - 1 John 1:5–7:

     "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

   Take turns naming something these Bible passages teach us about the source and importance of light.

6. Consider the concept of us reflecting the light of Jesus. How have you reflected the light of Jesus to others? Talk about a time when you were encouraged by someone who reflected the light of Jesus to you.

7. In the video teaching, Jennie talks about beauty being possible in a dark place, even in our struggles. Read Psalm 18:28–29:

   "For You will light my lamp;
   The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.
   For by You I can run against a troop,
   By my God I can leap over a wall."

   What has it looked like in your life to "run against a troop" or "leap over a wall" as a result of God shining a light in your darkness?

Wrap It Up ::

(5 minutes)

LEADER: Read the paragraph below and select a reader to close the group in prayer. She can use her own words or be guided by the ideas below:

Today we have learned that God shines the brightest in the darkness. We can flourish in the dark and in the fight because He is in and with us. And there's more. God can heal and use our pain to uncover brilliance in our lives and in those around us.

Let's close this session in prayer.

- Thank Him for being the light of the world.
- Ask Him to reveal opportunities in which you can shine for Him.
- Pray for strength, courage, and grit to do the hard things, the things you don't feel like doing.
- Ask your heavenly Father to use your pain or your darkest day to bring about good in the life of someone who needs it most.

Dig Deeper

PERSONAL STUDY / SESSION 1

Day 1

STUDY

Read and meditate on Romans 3:21–26 NIV:

> "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

Some people get so stuck in religion and religious things that they miss the most important part of the Christian faith—Jesus, and His life, death, and resurrection. It's not about what we do or don't do; it's about Jesus and His righteousness. Always.

REFLECT

In *The Fight to Flourish*, page xix, Jennie writes:

> "The Bible teaches us that when we surrender to Jesus, we are, in a moment, made righteous. We don't earn salvation; we believe and receive freely. We don't pay for it—not with money, not with the good things we do. It's purely a gift from the God who loves us. We're covered by the grace found only in Jesus through His death and resurrection. And in that moment of salvation, we're made like Christ. So when God looks at us, He sees Jesus. That doesn't seem possible to me, but it's the way God does it, and it's beautiful.
>
> "But until we get to heaven, where we will truly be perfect like Jesus, we're still here, in these imperfect bodies and minds. We're in a period of sanctification. That's a fancy way of saying that, yes, we're already in Christ, and yes, we're also still in the process of becoming more like him—right now. We're living in the dash between the date of our birth and the date of our last breath on earth. That last breath will lead us to our first breath in heaven with Jesus. But we're not there yet.
>
> "Does flourishing in this life seem out of reach? It often feels like that to me. . . . The great news, though, is that we are actually in the process of flourishing right now, whether we feel it or not."

How does it feel to know you are declared righteous when you make the decision to receive Jesus as your personal Savior and trust in Him? Name one way this takes the pressure off the need to get it all right all the time.

How does this truth give you the confidence to live your life, failures and all?

Write down something in your life that you would like to see improve or an area in which you feel as though you are constantly failing. Maybe you want to let go of a bad habit or desire more patience to parent your child well.

It can be easy to replay the moments where we've missed the mark or gotten stuck in the mistakes we seem to make over and over and over again. Staying in that space keeps us from growing.

If you're feeling this way, write out a prayer to God. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you messed up. Thank Him for the new mercies He freely gives you each day. Ask Him to pour into your weaknesses His strength and to step in with His grace when you fall short.

Paul experienced firsthand the power of the grace of God. Paul knew it wasn't a free pass to do whatever we want to do. He wrote,

> "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:15).

While grace doesn't give us a license to sin, we are also not bound by condemnation. Read Romans 8:1–2:

> "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

You may be so discouraged with the progress (or lack thereof) in your life. But that's just impatience talking. Never forget the One who is in charge of the process. You may not be where you want to be but, thank goodness, you are not where you were! God is faithful. God is good. And God is working on you. He is trustworthy. He will complete the work He started. Until then, rest in the grace of what Jesus did for you on the cross.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what grace means to you. How has your life been changed as a result? Has it become something you take for granted, or something you really haven't thought of in a while?

_____

_____

_____

Now, fill in the following blanks:

Grace is _____.

Grace can _____.

Grace will _____.

It's not about

what we do or

don't do; it's

about Jesus and

His righteousness.

Day 2

READ

If you are reading *The Fight to Flourish* in conjunction with this study guide, read chapters 1, 2, and 3 in the book.

REMEMBER

"You may feel as though you're not flourishing *because* of the fight, *because* of the struggle. But it's the embracing of the fight that will create the space to flourish. A fight for honor. A fight for a sweet spirit. A fight to choose to get uncomfortable. A fight to keep fighting. Jesus said,

> "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Jesus doesn't mention overcoming the trouble; He tells us He has overcome the world. We want Him to take away the trial, but He's taking care of the even bigger picture: the world our trouble is in." (*The Fight to Flourish*, pages xx–xxi)

REFLECT

Jennie shares the tragic story of losing her five-year-old daughter Lenya. Journal a few paragraphs about your darkest moment and how you were able to see glimpses of God's love, comfort, peace, perhaps even joy in the midst of your pain.

Write down what you have learned, a breakthrough you experienced, or a shift in perspective from this video session or discussion. Prepare to share with the group next week.

REFLECT

God shines the

brightest in the

darkness.

Day 3

STUDY

No matter how hard things get, you can continue to grow. Most of us want to run from hard times. It's a space we'd rather not set foot in, let alone stay for a while and endure the pain, heartache, rejection, or disappointment. Read what the Bible teaches about how we are to view hard times.

> "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2–4).

Count it all joy? Sounds crazy, right? But the good news is that trials don't just show up to knock us down. There's a bigger plan at work. If we choose to let Him, God can use the hardship we face to help us become more and more like Jesus, to develop our character, and to give Him an opportunity to be our strength in weakness.

Think of a difficult time you went through. Write down three ways in which this situation changed you for the better. Maybe it's a truth you learned that brought to life a dormant faith or a character trait that grew in a way it wouldn't have without that difficulty.

Don't run from your trials. Don't shy away from surrendering to God because you're afraid of what may come. Be bold and courageous knowing you are safe in the arms of Jesus. Things happen that are beyond our control. Know as you walk with God, as you love and trust Him, that He won't allow you to be removed from His presence.

Read the following passage out loud:

> "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
> I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
> He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
> I will be with him in trouble;
> I will deliver him and honor him.
> With long life I will satisfy him,
> And show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14–16).

List three promises found in this Scripture. Memorize them and say them out loud when you feel overwhelmed. Keep them handy. Write them down in your journal, on a note posted on your mirror or in your phone, so you can refresh yourself with these promises when needed.

Promise 1 _____

_____

Promise 2 _____

_____

Promise 3 _____

_____

REFLECT

A life that blooms with growth doesn't just happen. Progress requires effort and energy, stamina and sweat, persistence and perseverance. Think about what it takes for a plant to grow. After a seed is planted, it needs air and the right amount of water, light, space, time, and temperature to germinate and flourish. In other words, growth doesn't just happen overnight. The same can be said for us. We grow over time and—this is a big truth—we all don't grow at the same rate.

Reflect on what you were like a year ago. Since that time, journal the areas in which you have noticed growth. Where have you seen progress, no matter how

slow? Note: This is not an exercise to unveil the full picture of what blooming looks like. None of us are going to find perfection this side of heaven. Be encouraged by even the small steps of forward movement you have taken in the right direction.

Now think back to five years ago. Journal your thoughts: have you changed for the better since then? Have some habits improved? Have you prioritized better?

God can use

the hardship we

face to help us

become more

and more like

Jesus.

Day 4

REMEMBER

> "Everything we do in the current season is preparing us for the next one. We call this training for the trial we're not yet in. Fighting to grow sets us up to glow in the dark, so each step is essential to the next. The flourishing life is all about being faithful with the small things and watching God handle the impossible." (*The Fight to Flourish*, page 24)

PREPARE

If you are reading along in *The Fight to Flourish* book, read chapters 4, 5, and 6 this week. Capture any statements or phrases that motivated or challenged you and that you'd like to share with the group next week.

JENNIE'S PRAYER FOR YOU

Heavenly Father, I pray for this beautiful woman. Remind her that You are good, that You have designed her for this very moment, and that she can be the good thing You have created her to be. Give her boldness and strength to shine brilliantly in her world. Ignite in her a desire to flourish, wherever she is, and I pray she would know that even in the fight, she is flourishing. Nurture in her a readiness and a willingness for what you have in store for her life. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

THE FIGHT TO *Flourish*

by JENNIE LUSKO

What if your struggles aren't a barrier to thriving but an invitation into your most vibrant days?

Just like some plants need darkness to grow, many of us grow stronger in our faith in the dark and difficult times. It is in the sacred space of pain and promise that we begin to flourish. In *Fight to Flourish*, Jennie Lusko offers biblical hope in your struggles through personal and vulnerable examples of God not only helping her survive the darkness but thrive in it.

Jennie draws on her experiences after the loss of her five-year-old daughter, Lenya, to show you that the ingredients for a fresh and thriving life are right in front of you.

Fighting and flourishing are meant to blend together. God can help you make the most out of your struggle because a flourishing life in every season is worth fighting for.

LEARN MORE