

study
guide

jennifer
strickland



beautiful
Lies



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*For the beautiful women
who have so bravely handed me a microphone,
granting me a voice in this generation:
You know who you are. This is written in your honor.*

BEAUTIFUL LIES STUDY GUIDE

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A Letter from Jen

Dear Girlfriend,

If you are drawn to this message, I adore you already. The core of *Beautiful Lies* is based on one premise: We are more alike than we are different. We grapple with the same lies and need the same truths to free us.

About seven years ago, at the start of our ministry, the Lord began to etch this message on my heart. Today, my stack of Bibles and their falling-out, worn pages are tattered messes of highlights and scribbles which showcase truth after truth, like precious stones paving the pathway of the journey you are about to take.

This study is designed to help us see how the world imprints its darkest lies on our hearts, thereby twisting our vision of ourselves, others, and God. Conversely, this study helps us take a close look at the power born in us when we turn away from what we can see to what we can't see. When we look to God for our strength, value, and dignity, he is like a streaming light through the stained glass windows of our soul, illuminating the colorful picture of who he designed us to be.

My friend, I wrote this study because it was the one I needed; it is a journey I had to take to walk tall, strong, and whole. More than anything, I desire to be a better reflection of our beautiful God, to

stop looking to temporary things to validate or define me, and to make a positive imprint on this war-torn, tumultuous world.

In this study, we will follow the book *Beautiful Lies*. We look at five lies of the world and five truths of the Word. The lies are effective because they are dressed attractively. On the surface, they look good. But we will look at what a roller-coaster ride it is when these five outside sources—men, mirrors, magazines, masks, and the media—control the way we see ourselves. I know the roller coaster. I've lived it.

These pages contain a journey I took because I needed it, but the truth is, I would never have taken it only for myself. It is written for you, and for your daughter, and for her daughter when her time comes. Because I believe we are the same. I believe at the finish line of this journey, you and I will be stronger, brighter, more purposeful, and more powerful than ever.

Let's walk this road together, remembering two are better than one, for two have an increased return on their investment. I know your precious time in these pages is an investment of your heart. I thank you for allowing me this special season of your life—to pour out my heart; to help you pour out yours, and then to stand back and be awed by the beauty.

You are cherished.

Jen



Introduction

Welcome to the *Beautiful Lies Study Guide*. While the book *Beautiful Lies* is written for every woman, the study is for a select group of women who want to delve deeper into their identity, value, and assignment as revealed by the Word. There is nothing more powerful than Bible study to give a woman deep convictions about who she is, who God is, and what she is here for. Founding your life on the Word instead of the world will make you a formidable force in the world.

This study is your journey: your pathway to discovering more deeply who God is, and in light of that, who you are and what your impact in the world will look like. There are options for you as you proceed. You can kick up your feet and read all of *Beautiful Lies* first and then review the chapters as you do the study, or you can read the book a chapter at a time and complete the study guide as you go. The important thing is to enjoy it! It matters more to me that you laughed or cried or opened your heart to God than that you just “filled in the blanks.” The goal is to meet God in a new way, to see yourself as he sees you, and to share your journey, when appropriate, with your husband, friends, or daughters. The goal isn’t just to “do a Bible study,” but to relish his Word.

My suggestion, however, is to not take this journey alone. Partner with a friend, a group of friends, or your whole church; do it

with other women. The accountability, friendship, and harmony of women's voices sharing their testimonies and truths holds tremendous power. As you meet with your group, decide on the pace that feels best to you. Take your time with the voyage. Don't feel rushed to complete any one section; instead, apply the Word and probing questions like a salve to the areas of your life which need it most. Soak in all the truths contained herein and go as deep and long and wide as the Spirit leads you. At the same time, however, make a goal to *finish*—and finish well. I would never have completed the writing of this study if I didn't have a date when it needed to be finished. So set the date of your finish line and keep it in mind as you run your race.

As you journey, be in prayer. Prayer and praise are our strongest weapons against the enemy. When trials and distractions come, don't be fooled! The enemy wants to stop you in your tracks, because if you finish well, equipped and ready for battle, you will be a force to be reckoned with! The enemy wants to steal your treasure, your joy, your inheritance, your purpose, your family, and your influence. Don't let him!

Be aware that you will be tested on the subjects we are studying; plan on it! I have been tested on all of it, and by no means do I think my period of testing is over! So be purposeful, returning regularly to your set-apart time with God in prayer, praise, and the Word. The more deeply rooted you are in him, the stronger your core will be.

During each of the ten weeks of our study, we will follow an infused pattern. On Day One, you will read a chapter of the book *Beautiful Lies* and answer some questions about it in your Study Guide. On Days Two, Three, and Four, you will study what the Word says about the topic of that week. Many of the weeks also include a "field trip," usually on Day Four. On that day, you will plan to get out of the house, sometimes by yourself and other times with a friend. So look ahead at the week's activities so you can plan accordingly. Regularly stepping away from the Word and engaging

in the world is often the best way to define the world's lies and compare them to the truths we are embracing. On Day Five, you will meet with your group, watch a short video message from my website, and review the week's study together. Each day of our study, I have highlighted a "jewel for your journey." These are precious verses that lay out our pathway, Scriptures that I treasure, and I hope you will too.

As we journey, we will be looking at five "beautiful lies" and how allowing those lies to reflect our value can distort our God-given identities. Conversely, we will turn to the "gorgeous truth," the Word, where God clarifies for us what we look like in his eyes. Reclaiming our God-given identities is eye-opening, yet it is only the beginning. The real power comes for all of us when we realize how to live out our identity in our day-to-day lives. So take the time to answer the heart-probing questions along the way—they are there to help you walk out the destiny God has in mind for you.

May your journey through these truths be blessed and may you forever remember who you are and what you are worth...in his eyes.



Week 1 The First Lie:

You Are What Man Thinks of You

Day One: The First Lie

—Jewel for Your Journey—

“LORD, what are human beings that you care for them, mere mortals that you think of them? They are like a breath; their days are like a fleeting shadow” (Psalm 144:3-4).

Read the introduction and chapter 1. Use this space to journal your response. What did this chapter stir up in you? How did it make you feel? What or who did it make you think of and why?

Day Two: Defined

—Jewel for Your Journey—

“Do you see this woman?... I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown” (Luke 7:44,47).

I'm excited today to dig into the Word, because the Word always puts our life into perspective. We are going to start our study today by taking a look at the woman of Luke 7. This woman is nameless—the only name the Word gives her is “a woman...who lived a sinful life.” I can imagine myself slipping right into her tattered dress and doing exactly what she does. I bet you can imagine yourself in her place too.

* Read Luke 7:36-50 and describe this woman's actions.

* What do you think her actions are expressing?

* Describe the Pharisee's response to her.

* Describe Jesus's response to her.

Jesus is obviously more endeared by the humble, contrite woman than he is with the prideful Pharisee. Everything she does lacks etiquette. My guess is her mascara is a mess. Her hair, which she uses as a mop for his feet, is dirty and infused with oil from the perfume. As she kisses his feet, her lipstick must be smeared, and as she cries, she can't possibly match the outward righteousness of those surrounding her.

Despite the Pharisee's rude thoughts, Jesus is very kind to him. Instead of rebuking him outright, Jesus teaches him a lesson couched in a parable. The story about the debtors illustrates that none of us can make up for our own sin: "There is no difference... 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" (Romans 3:22-24).

Forgiveness is free, and the more lavish the forgiveness, the greater the gratitude.

Jesus follows the parable with a probing question for the Pharisee: "Now which of them will love him more?" What do you think is Jesus's highest value, as expressed in this passage? Circle one:

Faith Repentance Love Forgiveness

- * Leave a bookmark in Luke 7 and read 1 John 4:7-12. Fill in the blank: God is _____.
- * How does John define love in verse 10?
- * How does Jesus's treatment of the sinful woman match up with this passage of Scripture from 1 John?

- * How does this passage convict the attitude of the Pharisee?

The Pharisee responds in judgment instead of love. I don't know about you, but I can jump into the robe of the Pharisee just as easily as I can wear the dress of the sinful woman. Somehow, the longer we are Christians, the easier it is to forget that we first came crawling to Jesus's feet in utter desperation. At least I did. When I came to Christ, I was broken and shamed, a living mess. I had made a mess of my life, and I carried such emotional wounds that I couldn't possibly hide them from God. And since that day, I have come before him broken and longing more times than I care to count.

Yet something insidious can happen to us. Instead of granting others the kind of grace we received, we can easily narrow our eyes at their frailty, their impropriety, their utter lack of etiquette in light of our perceived greatness.

- * In what way do you see yourself in the Pharisee in this passage?

- * What would happen if you jumped out of the Pharisee's rigid robe and into the soft tunic of Jesus? How would you look at and treat others differently?

Keep reading 1 John 4:13-19. These verses give me hope. They say that the love Jesus had for the sinful woman is the love that lives in us. We can love as Jesus did. And if we can love like that, people won't fear rejection from us. Perfect love creates an atmosphere of

acceptance, and people are not afraid to be themselves in the presence of this kind of love.

- * How does verse 18 define the essence of the interaction between the sinful woman and Jesus?

Turn back to Luke 7 now. The Pharisee labeled the woman a sinner. An evildoer. A wrongdoer. I can't tell you how many times in my life I've felt those words describe me. I seem to always mess up. But in Jesus's eyes, our actions, our past, and other people's labels don't define us. He does.

- * What words does Jesus use to define the woman? Circle three:

Forgiven Loved Saved Sinful

You got that right, sister! Jesus defines the woman by her love for him and his love for her. Her sin does not define her.

- * What would be the result in this woman's life if she allowed Jesus's definition of her to be her identity?

- * What would be the result in this woman's life if she allowed the Pharisee's definition of her to be her identity?

One of the biggest mistakes I made in my life was believing the first lie: "You are what man thinks of you." I wouldn't be surprised if this was the very lie that led the sinful woman to fall at Jesus's feet in the first place. Yet even when we are seeking forgiveness, even when

we are pursuing a life of faith, even when we are pursuing God with all our hearts, people can try to define us in ways that are out of sync with Christ's definition of us.

Before we close today's lesson, I want you to think about some incorrect definitions people—or even the enemy—have assigned to you. I remember hearing words spoken by men that made me feel stupid, worthless, and unlovable. In fact, those were the words that led me to weep at Jesus's feet. I hear words like “failure” in my mind. No one has to speak them to me; I'm guilty of speaking them to myself.

* What about you? What incorrect definition have people (or even yourself) spoken over you that have impacted you negatively? How have those words affected you?

* Just as the sinful woman has a choice which voice to listen to, so do we. As we close today's study, use the space below to put yourself in the place of the woman falling unabashedly at Jesus's feet. Pour out your heart to him and listen closely for his words spoken back to you, writing them down here:

My friend, plant his words in your heart like seeds in fertile soil. Allow his view of you to grow. Like a vine of fragrant flowers, the way he sees you can change who you are, how you walk, how you look at others, and even the words you say to yourself.

* You are forgiven. Loved. Saved. Add other words God has added just for you:

Day Three: The Mirror of Man

—Jewel for Your Journey—

“God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind” (Numbers 23:19 NLT).

It is quite appropriate that we started our study together by taking an up-close look at a messy woman. You are reading a study written by such a woman. In fact, I so identify with the sinful woman that one time I introduced myself as her to a crowd of proper Southern women. I had just moved from California to Texas when I was invited to speak at a famous Baptist church in Dallas. Showing up at the church, I could hardly believe the wealth—the facility alone rivaled the finest university in my mind! Looking out at the large crowd of well-dressed women who had just finished their delectable luncheon, I spoke into the microphone as I walked up on the stage: “Well, the sinful woman just came to your church. I hope she’ll find acceptance here!” I believe this may have caught the women off guard, and anyone secretly wearing a Pharisee’s robe had no choice but to shed it in an instant—after all, they were in church! Judgment’s not allowed! The good news is, they accepted, embraced, and loved me—and I felt the same for them.

I still don’t know how it is people invite me to speak on their stage; I always marvel at how I got there. Maybe it’s their fascination with the modeling world. Maybe it’s the romance of my story—of how God met me in faraway places, through unlikely people. Or maybe, just maybe, it’s my unashamed poured-out passion for Jesus.

The woman who lived a sinful life was an emotional wreck, but she was also fantastically in love with Jesus—and he *so* loved her back. I believe the words he spoke to her—“Your faith has saved you; go in peace”—were foundational stones upon which she based her future steps.

When God planted salvation, forgiveness, and love in my heart, I was still living in Europe, modeling. I felt him telling me to “go in peace,” and I did. Without hesitation I walked away from a lifetime invested in modeling because I longed to live free of man’s demands. I wanted to be accepted in all my frailty, all my imperfection, and to find a destiny based on how I looked in his eyes and none other.

But man had planted lots of poisonous seeds in my heart, and they had taken deep roots I knew nothing about back then. Eventually, the poison ivy would be uprooted.

Over the course of the next two days, you and I will study man and his influence upon us. The Word makes some profound statements about men—meaning human beings, women included—and their lack of power to make us or break us. Don’t mistake me: These are not “man-hating” verses. They are truth to set us free, meant to honor both God’s and man’s rightful place in our lives.

* Let’s begin by looking at God and the comparison he draws between himself and man. Turn to Numbers 23:19, and write it here:

* What distinctions does God make between himself and man here?

* Now turn to Malachi 3:6 and write the first sentence here:

I love the simplicity of God. He states things so clearly: “I am not a man.” “I do not change.” “I do not lie.” “I keep my promises.” You don’t get any simpler than that. Man, on the other hand, might change his mind—girl, I’ve been known to change my mind! I can flip-flop back and forth on something for longer than is healthy. I might even promise something and not deliver. I am fallen, imperfect, human, and fallible. In this verse, God is making that very point. He is not like man. Man might make an oath and then break it, a covenant and cancel it. Man might lie. God, however, never breaks his oath and cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). He is faithful forever; he is the same forever. And here’s the kicker: he doesn’t change his mind about you. In a world that is constantly changing, this is one of my greatest comforts. I know God’s not going to change his mind about me or about my destiny no matter how many times I fall. He might correct me in something, he might even rebuke me or severely discipline me, but he’s not going to withdraw his love for me.

* Deuteronomy 31:8 says the Lord will “never leave you nor forsake you.” What do these words mean to you personally?

The Beautiful Lie we are looking at this week is “You are what man thinks of you.” In other words, man holds your destiny. Man reflects your beauty, value, and purpose. On the surface, we may not even know we have believed this lie. But beneath the surface, allowing man to be our mirror can poison our hearts and minds. Whether we are praised by men or insulted by them, we are not defined by

what humans do or don't do, think or don't think, and say or don't say about us.

Let's take a look at a series of verses that answer the question "What is man?" for us.

First, turn to Psalm 144 and read verses 3-4. The Bible asks the simplest questions and gives us the clearest answers. Here, the Word asks the question, "What is man?" The answer likens man to a "breath." Other versions call man "a puff of air," "a passing shadow." (MSG, NKJV).

- * Leave your bookmark in Psalm 144 because we will be coming back to it. Turn to James 4:14. What does James say about man here?

James so poignantly drives the point home by putting things in the second person: "You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." No doubt James was familiar with Psalm 144 as well as Isaiah 40:6-8:

All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.

So not only are we but a breath, but we are also grass. We have our time of growth and beauty, but all God has to do is blow his breath on us and we are gone. The apostle Peter quoted these verses in 1 Peter 1:24-25. My guess is guys like James and Peter had to keep in mind that man didn't have the final verdict in their lives. As apostles after Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, they dealt with continual opposition from men, and I'm sure they had to remind

themselves often that men and their opinions about them were not mirrors. The only mirror they had to fix their gaze on was Jesus.

- * Read Isaiah 2:22. What argument is God making here against putting your hope in man? Circle your answer:

Man is evil Man is impermanent Man is a liar

- * Turn back now to the Psalms and read 146:3-6. What is the psalmist saying about putting your trust in man?

- * What is the psalmist saying about putting your hope in God?

Both Genesis 3:19 and Ecclesiastes 3:20 say that man came from dust and to dust he shall return. But we know that God is forever.

- * Turn now to some powerful words of Scripture, in Jeremiah 17:5-6. Describe the state of one who depends on man for his strength.

- * Have you ever felt like you have depended on man for your strength, identity, and worth? Circle your answer:

Yes No

- * Our verse says that when we do that, we will suffer want. Has that ever been true in your life? How so or how not?

- * Continue reading Jeremiah 17:7-8. Describe the state of the one who depends on God for his confidence.

- * What is the effect on your soul when you put your hope in God instead of man?

- * Name a time when you chose to put your hope in God over man. Where did that choice lead you?

- * As a way to close your time of reflection today, take the space below to explore the ways you have looked to man to be a mirror for you, how that has affected you, and what you want to change in your perceptions.

Day Four: The Impact of Man

—Jewel for Your Journey—

“Test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NLT).

Today is “field trip” day. Don’t be disappointed, but you’re not leaving your seat. Today we are taking a trip into the spheres of our hearts to check on the impact man has had on us. I promise you it’s worth the trip—but you might want to wear your seat belt!

While yesterday’s study emphasized the impermanence and fallibility of man, the truth is, man can have huge personal impact on us, both good and bad.

One of my favorite things to do is speak in public schools. Recently I spoke my “You Are More” message at a junior high school. As I was speaking I told the girls it’s hard to believe “you are more” when men in your own home—especially your father—send you a “You Are Less” message. The moment I said this, a girl in the audience quickly got up and ran out crying. Later, when all the kids were gone, she and I huddled together on the gym floor and talked. She said her father had just left her family, and the last words he spoke to her were, “You are such a disappointment.” This thirteen-year-old girl’s chin began to quiver and her eyes rushed with stinging tears.

I looked her square in the eyes and told her she was not a disappointment; rather, he was. His words were reflections of his heart, not hers. I told her how beautiful and powerful she was, and how God loved her and had a plan for her life. I asked her what she loved to do, and she said she was a boxer. A fighter. I told her she had been knocked out—what was she going to do now? Bow out of the fight and believe she’d always stay down? No! She would get up and fight again, but first she had to decide her father was wrong about her. She had to believe God’s voice above his. God says this girl has potential and promise, and no one can take that away from her. You

should have seen her eyes light up with hope when she realized she had a future beyond the stinging blow of her father's words.

Man can wound us, but ultimately, it's up to us if we walk wounded. I, for one, walked wounded for too long. I allowed man's hurtful words and actions to embed themselves in my heart and grow nasty vines. Those vines shackled my heart, even years after I left the modeling industry. Often, my husband's words, which were not meant to hurt me, were filtered through the negative messages other men planted in my heart, and that became difficult for both of us. I had to identify the lies I had believed and embrace God's truth for me.

I don't know where you've been, my friend, but if your heart is beating, you've been hurt by man. It could be a mother who spoke scathing words to you or a father who abandoned, abused, or ignored you. It could be a former husband or boyfriend or boss or stranger who wounded you at one time or another. You may even be in a relationship with someone who is hurting you now.

* Have you ever been deeply hurt by man? Take the space below to describe that hurt. If there are many incidences of pain inflicted by others in your life, I want you to choose one that still hurts when you think about it.

* What would God say to you now about that hurt? Listen for his voice, and let him write to you here.

- * How much do you allow man to be a measure of your value? Put an X on the line below:

I let man measure my value I do not let man measure my value

- * How have you allowed man's words or actions to twist your sense of self-worth?

- * What are some of the lies you've believed about yourself that have come from man?

- * What impact does that lie have on your life now?

- * What does God say to you about the lie(s)?

Identifying the lie you've believed, recognizing its impact, and replacing the lie with God's truth is essential to being free from it. The other key is forgiveness. Refusing to forgive man for his or her actions, words, and impact on us is a way to carry their sin forward. Their sin becomes a burdensome weight on our shoulders, wrecking our peace and joy. The load of other men's sin was never meant

for us to carry. That's where Jesus comes in. He died for all sins for all men—including the one who hurt you.

- * Use the space below to name areas of hurt that you want to forgive and commit them to the cross, where Jesus took on all men's sin. Trust that God can handle man. You don't need to carry his burden anymore.

- * How do you think letting go of the offenses of the men in your life will affect your relationships?

I'd like to close out this day with another one of those straightforward Scriptures. Look back at today's Jewel for Your Journey. When we test the impact of man on our lives, we have to test it all. And while there has no doubt been some measure of pain, there is also a measure of goodness. This verse tells us not to hold on to the bad! It says we should hold on to the good! Many of us have people who have helped shape who we are in a wonderfully positive way. So I'd like to take a moment to focus on the good things man has brought into our lives and remember to hold onto truth rather than lies.

The best kind of people to surround ourselves with are those who reflect faith, hope, and love. They don't expect us to fill their cups and they don't try to fill ours either. God often speaks through these people messages of empowerment and even conviction. But ultimately, these people point us toward the Father for our strength.

- * Think of a man or woman who has shaped your sense of value in a positive way. Recall some words or phrases that he or she spoke that instilled value in you.

- * Name an action that a man or woman in your life has taken that has shown you how valuable you are.

- * Now, record the impact of that person on your sense of value, identity, and purpose.

I encourage you to pray for the people who have seen the “more” and not the “less” in you. Thank God for them and thank them personally for their impact on your life as well.

It is my hope today that we turn away any fixed gaze we have on man and fix our eyes on God. In allowing him to be our strength and allowing him to declare our worth, we can love our fellow humans as Jesus did. Despite the rejection, accusations, and betrayal of man, he looked to the Father and found an unchanging reflection of his worth.

Lord, we pray that we too can look to you for our value. Thank you for the good people in our lives who have taught us what we look like in your eyes.

Day Five: The Prince and the Princess

—Jewel for Your Journey—

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in people. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (Psalm 118:8-9).

I am so excited for you to meet with your girlfriend(s) today! Please keep in mind that this study can raise very sensitive subjects for other group members. Confidentiality is essential, and judgment is not allowed in church, remember? If someone in your group cries a living mess, think of Jesus and how he treated the sinful woman: He defended her, comforted her, and assured her of his presence and his promise.

Watch the video “The First Lie: You Are What Man Thinks of You” at www.jenniferstrickland.net. Use the space below for notes.