

THE COMPANION STUDY



# Redeeming Love

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PROOF

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FRANCINE  
RIVERS

WITH ANGELA HUNT

# REDEEMING LOVE

A COMPANION STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION



It has long been a dream of mine to offer a companion Bible study to my novel *Redeeming Love*. The book is based on the biblical story of the prophet Hosea and his wife, Gomer, but bears a similarity to the path many of us take from brokenness to redemption and wholeness in Christ. Our culture portrays love as a feeling, but love is also an action. The primary character in *Redeeming Love* is Michael. His character shows what it means to love as Jesus did. Feelings swell and fade, but true love stands the test of time. It involves commitment and hard work and brings greater, longer-lasting blessings than we can imagine. Michael displayed Christ's love for Angel because he decided to see his wife through eyes of compassion, patience, virtue, and self-sacrifice. He was passionate for her. He took his marriage vows to heart, striving to bless her through their marriage.

This kind of love isn't just the stuff of storybooks. It is possible through the power of God given to every believer. Falling in love with someone is easy, but steadfast, passionate love that lasts for a

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lifetime is a matter of choice.

Angie Hunt and I agreed from the start that this project would not be like other Bible studies. Inside this book you will find three lessons per week, rather than the usual five, because we want you to ponder the concepts presented. We want you to take your time and look up scriptures to see how they apply to your life today.

Michael, Angel, and the other characters from *Redeeming Love* are fictional, but all the other people mentioned in this study lived and walked this earth. They were real people who can inspire us because they endured real trials. The Word of God is living and breathing and cuts to the heart of our lives (Hebrews 4:12). It shows us the blessed way to walk purposefully and with joy. In these lessons you will see that truth in how God worked in individual lives.

This is not a fill-in-the-blank study. We hope you will invest in a notebook and write whatever thoughts, feelings, observations, and prayers come to you as you read. We also hope you underline and highlight passages, jot notes in the margins, and turn your study book into a dog-eared, much-used resource and reference for your journey. Please don't stop with what we've offered. The Bible is full of history, wisdom, and applicable lessons for you. You'll discover victims who became victors, the lost who were found, the hurting who were healed, and the dead who rose to life. The Bible tells God's story through each book of history.

What Angie and I want most is for you to know personally the God who loves you with an all-consuming, cleansing fire, the God who designed you and knows the special plans He has for you (Jeremiah 29:11). Our heartfelt prayer is that you will open your mind and heart to Him. If you do, He will make you new and more alive than you've ever been.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you read His Word. May He shine His face on you, reveal Himself to you, and give you peace (Numbers 6:24–26).

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*One*

# CHILD OF DARKNESS




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**M**Y CHILDHOOD WAS NOT like Angel's. I had loving parents who believed in God. Our family attended church every Sunday. I went to Sunday school, summer camp, and youth group and thought I was a Christian. When I went away to college, I stopped attending church. It was the sixties revolution. No one told me that anything "free" still costs dearly. And so free love cost my innocence, my self-respect, and a baby's life. I thought I could just pick up the pieces of my life and move on.

When I had just about hit rock bottom, I received a letter from an old hometown friend, Rick Rivers, serving in the Marine Corps in Vietnam. We started to correspond. Once he came home, we dated, fell in love, and married a year later. Though Rick came from a solid, loving family, he knew nothing about Christianity other than what his grandmother had taught him: Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer. I didn't know until years later that he had an encounter with God during the 1968 Tet Offensive in Vietnam. It would be many more years until he gave his life to Christ.

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We both had burdens weighing heavily on our hearts and souls, baggage we carried into our marriage. We had high and low times. I suffered from my past mistakes. Rick suffered from war memories and alcohol abuse. We loved and fought each other, and it all came down to one question for both of us individually: Who is in control of my life?

Looking back, I realize God placed many people in our lives to draw us to Him. We kept ignoring the pull, mistakenly believing we could figure things out ourselves. The turning point came when Rick decided to start his own business and we sold our home and moved closer to family. We experienced stressful outer changes but no inner changes. I waited in Southern California until our three young children finished the school year, while Rick moved north, lived with his parents, and set up business in Sebastopol. He hunted for a rental home for our family. Only one was available—situated between two Christian families, both of whom invited us to church within hours of our moving in.

Our marriage was crumbling, and I was desperate enough to try anything—even God—to stop the pain. “Seek, and you will find,” the Scriptures say (Matthew 7:7, NASB), and faith in Jesus came to me in our neighbors’ church. Rick found Christ later, in our home Bible study taught by the pastor.

The gospel of Jesus Christ opened our hearts and poured life into our souls. The book of Hosea opened my eyes to the truth. Whenever I’d had a problem, the Lord was the last one I would seek out for answers. I’d lived as a child of darkness until I was in my late thirties. I had been like Gomer, prostituting myself to worldly ideas and practices that defied God and left deep wounds. Now I recognize His loving hand on me from the time I was born. He was always near. In every tempting and potentially life-damaging situation, God had offered a way of escape. I chose not to take it. Even so, God never stopped loving me. And now that I walk with Jesus, He has used what Satan meant for my destruction for His good pur-

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pose, not only in my life but also in the lives of others. He can do the same for you.

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STUDY 1.1



## *Light and Shadows*

*There are some things that once you've lost,  
you never get back. Innocence is one. Love is another.  
I guess childhood is a third.*

JOHN MARSDEN, *CHECKERS*

ALEX BENT DOWN to Sarah. “I want you to go outside and play,” he said quietly. “I want to talk to your mother alone.” He smiled and patted her cheek.

Sarah smiled, utterly enchanted. Papa had touched her; he wasn’t angry at all. He loved her! Just as Mama said. “Can I come back when you’re done talking?”

Papa straightened stiffly. “Your mother will come and get you when she’s ready. Now, run along as you’ve been told.”

“Yes, Papa.” Sarah wanted to stay, but she wanted to please her father more. She went out of the parlor, skipping through the kitchen to the back door. She picked a few daisies that grew in the garden patch by the door and then headed for the rose trellis. She plucked the petals. “He loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not . . .” She hushed as she came around the corner. She didn’t want to disturb Mama and Papa. She just wanted to be close to them.

Sarah dreamed contentedly. Maybe Papa would put her up on his shoulders. She wondered if he would take her for a ride on his big

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*black horse. She would have to change her dress, of course. He wouldn't want her to soil it. She wished he had let her sit on his lap while he talked to Mama. She would have liked that very much, and she would have been no bother.*

*The parlor window was open, and she could hear voices. Mama loved the smell of roses to fill the parlor. Sarah wanted to sit and listen to her parents. That way she would know just when Papa wanted her to come back again. If she was very quiet, she wouldn't disturb them, and all Mama would have to do was lean out and call her name.*

*"What was I to do, Alex? You've never spent so much as a minute with her. What was I to tell her? That her father doesn't care? That he wishes she had never even been born?"*

*Sarah's lips parted. Deny it, Papa! Deny it!*

*"You know how I feel about her."*

*"How can you say how you feel? You don't even know her. She's a beautiful child, Alex. She's quick and charming and she isn't afraid of anything. She's like you in so many ways. She's someone, Alex. You can't ignore her existence forever. She's your daughter . . ."*

*"I have enough children by my wife. Legitimate children. I told you I didn't want another."*

*"How can you say that? How can you not love your own flesh and blood?"*

*"I told you how I felt from the beginning, but you wouldn't listen. She should never have been born, Mae, but you insisted on having your own way."*

*"Do you think I wanted to get pregnant? Do you think I planned to have her?"*

*"I've often wondered. Especially when I arranged a way out of the situation for you and you refused. The doctor I sent you to would have taken care of the whole mess. He would've gotten rid—"*

*"I couldn't do it. How could you expect me to kill my unborn child? Don't you understand? It's a mortal sin."*

*"You've spent too much time in church," he said derisively. "Have*

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*you ever thought that you wouldn't have the problems you do now if you had gotten rid of her the way I told you. It would've been easy. But you ran out. Did you have her because you thought bearing my child would give you a hold over me you otherwise lacked?"*

*"You can't believe that!" Mama was crying now.*

*"And how much time do I have left with you today? Enough? You've used it up on her. I told you what would happen, didn't I? I wish she had never been born!"*



As the story of Angel opened, we met Sarah, the pretty little girl who lived with her mama in a small house surrounded by flowers. Sarah was not only cute but also bright, brave, and innocent, though her innocence was shattered all too quickly. She knew she had a father, and her mama said he was handsome. She also saw his fabulous gifts, which Mama passed on to Sarah, explaining they came from her papa.

Sarah had to wait to meet her father. Finally Mama thought she was old enough, so Sarah donned her loveliest dress and took pains to keep it clean. She tried her best to be charming, polite, and sweet—all to win her father's approval.

But all too quickly she overheard that her father didn't love her, didn't want her, and wished she had never been born. He considered her a mistake.

When we begin our lives, we spring fresh and blameless from the hand of God. We are born with willful human natures, true, but in our early years most of us are loved, carefully supervised, and given all the affection we need to thrive.

The world is a big mystery to us, but we eagerly explore it. And it doesn't take long before we test the limits our parents give us. As toddlers, two of our favorite words are *no* and *mine*. We want what we want. Little do we know we will spend the rest of our lives deal-

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ing with our stubborn, frustrating desires.

The Bible begins with a story of innocence too. In the first chapter, we read that God created the world and filled it with beauty—light and night, heavens above and earth below, the seas and dry land, plants and trees, the sun, the moon, stars to show the seasons, fish, birds, insects, animals, and people—each living thing producing *offspring of the same kind*. Notice how that phrase is repeated several times. God reassures His children that they didn’t come crawling out of the sludge.

God molded man out of the earth, but He created woman from a part of man. Woman is flesh and bone of man. I like that. God breathed life into humankind. Only a breath separates us from Him. He gave us, quite literally, the breath of life. Without breath, we cannot live.

God placed His first humans in the beautiful Eden and taught them how to tend it. Two trees grew in the center of the garden: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “From all the trees of the garden,” God said, “you are most welcome to eat. But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you must not eat” (Genesis 2:16–17, TLV). That command was the *only* law God gave them.

Those first two people, Adam and Eve, thrived in their innocence. They reveled in the beauty of nature; they explored their new bodies; they talked with God and learned how to care for their amazing home. Naked before Him and each other, they had no shame. They had nothing to hide from God or from each other.

And then . . . evil reared its head in the form of a serpent. This was an old evil, a fallen angel who had rebelled against God. He took on the form of a snake and slithered into the garden, daring to approach Eve. His subtle questioning made her doubt God’s intent, and in that moment she stopped believing that God’s way was the best. As Adam stood close by, silent, she trusted the serpent’s word over God’s single command and ate from the forbidden tree. When

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she offered the forbidden fruit to her husband, Adam took and ate it. Eve was deceived, and Adam chose to follow her lead.

That evening, God went into the garden to walk and talk in fellowship with the man and woman. Adam and Eve understood why He had told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The moment they disregarded God's protective command in favor of Satan's lies, their innocence disappeared. And now they hid from the One who loved them. When He called, they went reluctantly, inhabited by sin, guilty and ashamed, willing to offer excuses, unwilling to confess. By their choice, they had separated themselves from God.

"Then the LORD God said, 'Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!'" (3:22).

God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden so they would not eat of the tree that gave eternal life—probably because He didn't want them to live eternally in a sinful state. Adam lived 930 years, but now seventy years are allotted to humankind, even longer if we are especially blessed (Psalm 90:10). Perhaps our shorter life span is a mercy. As I grow older, I know I'm getting closer to going home, and I'm okay with that.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherited their nature, including their inclination to make decisions that separate us from God and continue to cause us, as well as others, great suffering. One decision separated us, but one decision can also reestablish that love relationship, though not yet in the same physical way Adam and Eve experienced it in the garden.

Little Sarah's innocence vanished the moment she realized her mother's word could not be trusted. Mama had implied that Sarah's father loved her, and Sarah had dreamed of him for as long as she could remember. What a shattering moment to learn that Alex not only despised her but also had wanted to destroy her before birth.

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Alex's admission rocked Sarah's world, and his dark heart continued to bear destructive fruit in his innocent daughter's life.

### TO THINK ABOUT

1. Can you remember a moment in your life when your innocence was destroyed? What was the situation? How did you feel afterward? In that moment did you learn that someone you loved was untrustworthy?

2. How did you feel about Sarah after reading this part of the prologue? She had so many positive qualities: brightness, beauty, and bravery. She sought to please her mother and father. She yearned for a complete family. How did this scene make you root for this little girl?

3. Milton wrote his famous work *Paradise Lost* about the Garden of Eden. Have you ever thought of the Adam and Eve account (found in Genesis 3) as a tale of innocence lost?

4. The John Marsden quote says innocence, love, and childhood can never be regained. Speaking of childhood, the old song "Toyland" says, "Once you pass its borders, you can ne'er return again."<sup>1</sup> Can innocence be regained?

5. Today's children, even babies, are often subjected to sounds, images, and experiences that were not commonly encountered by children of past generations. Children are losing their innocence at increasingly younger ages. What can we do to reverse this unfortunate situation?

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*One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him.*



*Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:15–17)*



*Children love openly and honestly. Sarah felt that way about her papa, even though she’d never met him face to face. We come to Jesus in the same manner, with open and honest hearts, with no pretense and no hidden motives. He knows all about us and loves us anyway. He forgives our wrongdoings and enfolds us in His grace.*

*As you go through the rest of your day, talk to Jesus as simply as a child would. No need for fancy theological words or traditional phrases with Him. Just speak from your heart and listen for His reply.*



*Come close to God, and God will come close to you. (James 4:8)*

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## STUDY 1.2



### *Darkness and Despair*

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., *STRENGTH TO LOVE*

WHEN THEY ARRIVED *home*, Mama pretended everything was fine, but Sarah knew something was terribly wrong. There were boxes out, and Mama was packing her things.

“We’re going to visit your grandmother and grandfather,” Mama said brightly, but her eyes looked dull and dead. “They’ve never seen you.” She told Cleo she was sorry to dismiss her, and Cleo said that was fine. She had decided to marry Bob, the butcher, after all. Mama said she hoped Cleo would be very happy, and Cleo went away.

Sarah awakened in the middle of the night. Mama wasn’t in the bed, but Sarah could hear her. She followed the sound of her mother’s stricken voice and went into the parlor. The window was open, and she went to look out. What was Mama doing outside in the middle of the night?

Moonlight flowed over the flower garden and Sarah saw her mother kneeling in her thin white nightgown. She was ripping all the flowers out. Handful after handful, she yanked the plants up and flung them in all directions, weeping and talking to herself as she did. She picked

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*up a knife and came to her feet. She went down again on her knees beside her beloved rose bushes. One after another, she cut the roots. Every last one of them.*

*Then she bent forward and sobbed, rocking herself back and forth, back and forth, the knife still in her hand.*



*SHE DIED IN the morning, the first sunlight of spring on her face and her rosary beads in her dead-white hands. Rab wept violently, but Sarah had no tears. The heaviness inside her seemed almost too great to bear. When Rab went out for a while, she lay down beside Mama and put her arms around her.*

*Mama was so cold and stiff. Sarah wanted to warm her. Sarah's eyes felt gritty and hot. She closed them and whispered over and over, "Wake up, Mama. Wake up. Please, wake up." When she didn't, Sarah couldn't stop the tears. "I want to go with you. Take me, too. God, please, I want to go with my mama." She wept until exhaustion overtook her and only awakened when Rab lifted her away from the bed. Men were with him.*

*The men talked as though she weren't there. Maybe she wasn't anymore. Maybe she was different, the way Mama once said.*

*"I bet Mae was real pretty once," one said as he began sewing the shroud closed over Mama's face.*

*"She's better off dead," Rab said, crying again. "At least now she's not unhappy. She's free."*

*Free, Sarah thought. Free of me. If I hadn't been born, Mama would live in a nice cottage in the country with flowers all around. Mama would be happy. Mama would be alive.*

*"Wait a minute," said one, and pried the rosary from Mama's fingers and dropped it in Sarah's lap. "I bet she woulda wanted you to have that, honey." He finished the stitching while Sarah ran the beads through her cold fingers and stared at nothing.*

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*She remembered Mama's going to the big church and talking to the man in black. He talked a long time, and Mama had listened, her head bowed, tears running down her cheeks. Mama never went back, but sometimes she would still sift the beads through her slender fingers while the rain spat on the window.*

*"What good are you?!" Sarah screamed again. "Tell me!"*



*WHEN THE MAN let go of her, she ran to the farthest corner of the room and cowered there. He stood in the middle of the room looking at her for a long time. Then he went to the marble stand and poured water into the porcelain bowl. He wrung out a white cloth and walked toward her. She pressed back as far as she could. He hunkered down and grasped her chin.*

*"You're much too pretty for paint," he said and began to wash her face.*

*She shuddered violently at his touch. She looked at the place where Rab had lain. The man tipped her chin back.*

*"I don't think that drunken lout was your father. You don't look anything like him, and there's intelligence in your eyes." He finished washing the rouge from her cheeks and mouth and tossed the cloth aside. "Look at me, little one."*

*When Sarah did, her heart pounded until her whole body shook with terror.*

*He held her face so she couldn't look away. "As long as you do exactly what I tell you to do, we're going to get along fine." He smiled faintly and stroked her cheek, his eyes glowing strangely. "What's your name?"*

*Sarah couldn't answer.*

*He touched her hair, her throat, her arm. "It doesn't matter. I think I'm going to call you Angel." Straightening, he took her hand. "Come on now, Angel. I have things to teach you." He lifted her and*

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*sat her on the big bed. “You can call me Duke, when you get your tongue back.” He took off his black silk coat. “Which you will. Shortly.” He smiled again as he removed his tie and slowly began to unbutton his shirt.*

*And by morning, Sarah knew that Cleo had told her God’s truth about everything.*



When Sarah’s father abandoned Mae because she would not disown her daughter, Mae was forced to earn a living any way she could. She sold her belongings, moved to cheaper housing, and finally resorted to prostitution. She then took up with Rab, an alcoholic who had a kind heart but could not cope with the responsibilities of parenthood when Mae died. After hearing that a wealthy man was looking for a young girl to adopt, Rab took Sarah to meet the man, despite a stern warning from the madam at the brothel where Rab was to meet the mysterious Duke.

Duke had Rab murdered and proceeded to “teach” Sarah—while shattering her innocence and breaking her spirit.

Duke annihilated Sarah’s joyful childhood, leaving her in emotional and spiritual darkness. By the time the sun rose again, Sarah was no more, and the broken girl on the bed had a new name, Angel, and a far different future than her mama had imagined for her.

Throughout history, other young girls have had their dreams destroyed in an instant. In ancient Persia, during the reign of King Xerxes, a young Jewish girl, Hadassah, lived with her cousin. She was not unacquainted with sorrow, for her parents had died, but she fully expected to marry a young Jewish man, raise children, and follow the customs of her people. Like Sarah, Hadassah was exceptionally beautiful.

In 483 BC, King Xerxes threw a massive party that lasted half a

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year. On the final night, his wife, Vashti, refused to appear at his command, and he removed her as queen. History tells us that a few years later, he suffered a disastrous defeat in the war against the Greeks. When he returned to his palace and yearned for a woman's comfort, he remembered Vashti, and what he had done. Some of his advisers suggested he take a new wife, perhaps to distract him from despair. Instead of searching for lovely young girls among the Persian nobility, they threw out a larger net, conducting a search-and-seize campaign for beauties to add to the king's harem. Some have described this event as a royal beauty pageant, but it was not voluntary. Attractive young girls were taken, willing or not, confined to the royal palace, and considered the king's property.

Hadassah was one of the captive girls. Taken from her cousin's home, she was placed in the royal palace and forced to endure a year of beauty treatments. The House of the Virgins may not sound like a tough gig, but slavery in a gilded cage is still slavery. The Persians worshipped a pagan god named Ahura Mazdā, while the Jews worshipped Adonai and kept a strict religious law given to them by Moses. Hadassah, a devout young woman, had been warned by her cousin to keep quiet about her religious heritage, so she could not always avoid forbidden foods or practices. She was also given a new name: Hadassah became known as Esther, a Persian word for "star."

The girl who had likely dreamed of marrying a Jewish man and raising a family learned that her entire life pivoted around one night. Once the eunuch in charge of the House of the Virgins decided it was her turn to visit the king's bedchamber, she would have to sleep with Xerxes whether she wanted to or not. If she did not provide him with a positive experience—memorable enough that he would ask for her by name—she would spend the rest of her life in the royal House of the Women, never to see the king again or rejoin her family.

Thousands of women like Hadassah and Angel have been viewed as commodities, not people. At this moment, women are being kid-

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napped as spoils of war and forcibly impregnated. Others are being held against their wills and sold into sex trafficking. Sex crimes are nothing new. They are driven by lust, an old evil that results in darkness and despair.

But this kind of evil does not have to result in *permanent* despair. Light can drive out darkness. Love can drive out hate. Esther found hope and light, and her story has been preserved in the Bible.

Likewise, young Sarah, abused and abandoned on that brothel bed, had not been forgotten by her Creator.

### TO THINK ABOUT

1. Have you ever been made to feel like an object rather than a person? Did you do anything about it, or were you helpless in the situation? What were your feelings afterward, and how did you address them?

2. Were you familiar with the story of Hadassah/Esther before reading the summary? Had you heard that her situation was similar to a beauty pageant, or were you aware of the actual context? If you had been in Hadassah's situation, how would you have reacted to being forced to live in a king's harem? You can read Esther's complete story in the biblical book of Esther—it's a short book and well worth savoring.

3. Esther *did* sleep with the king, and he loved her so much he made her his queen. Later, when the king was conned into authorizing a decree that would give everyone in Persia the right to go out and murder Jews (*and* confiscate their property), Esther's cousin sent her a message: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die."

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Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13–14). His message reminded Esther that God is always watching and always working . . . sometimes in ways we least expect.

God placed Esther in a strategic position to help her people. Where has God positioned you so you can have a positive impact on others? How might God want to use the trials of your past for a good purpose in your future as well as others’?

4. Recent years have brought a new awareness of sexual intimidation and abuse. Women are speaking out about situations ranging from social discomfort to rape, but what Angel and Esther endured could easily be considered worse than rape. They were captured for one purpose: to satisfy a man’s pleasure. Esther was intended for an unstable, powerful king, and Angel for a succession of men who cared nothing about the little girl behind the pretty face. Why do you think women historically have been used and abused? Is it because we are usually physically weaker than most men? Or does our emotional makeup make us vulnerable?

5. God does not condone war between the sexes. We have already seen that God created Adam, then Eve. They were both given dominion over the earth. The wife is not inferior to the husband but equal to him before God. But in a marriage, because a two-headed creature will struggle to survive, the wife is to submit to the husband when they cannot agree (Ephesians 5:22). In all situations, public and private, we are to “be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10, NKJV).

God’s bottom line is this: “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Why do some women find it difficult to accept the idea that God wants men to lead in a marriage? (Lead—not demand. We’re

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not talking about subjugation.) Why do some men think that husbandly leadership is husbandly lordship?

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*David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant." . . .*

*So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed." So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy's strongest men were fighting. And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers. . . .*

*When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the LORD was displeased with what David had done. (2 Samuel 11:2–5, 14–17, 26–27)*



*Bathsheba was another beautiful woman seen, coveted, and taken by a powerful man, forced into a disaster engineered by*

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*someone else. She lost her husband and the child born to her and David. She knew long days of darkness and despair.*

*But God was not finished with Bathsheba, and later she gave birth to Solomon, arguably Israel's wisest and wealthiest king.*

*If you ever find yourself facing darkness and despair, know this: God is still watching and working. Your story is not finished.*

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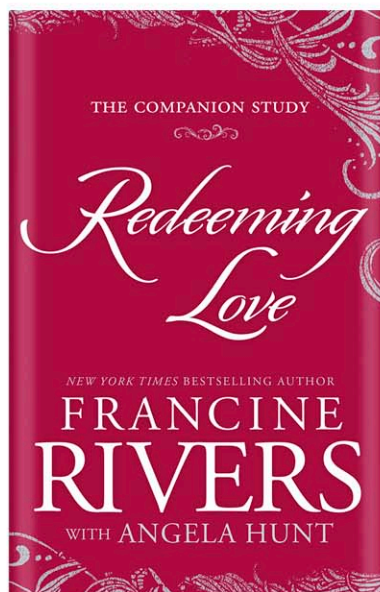
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