



Redemption

Karen
KINGSBURY
with Gary Smalley



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Redemption

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Cover designed by Jennifer Ghionzoli

Interior designed by Zandrah Maguigad

Edited by Anne Christian Buchanan and Lynn Vanderzalm

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.alivecommunications.com.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Smalley, Gary.

Redemption / Gary Smalley, Karen Kingsbury.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-8423-5622-0 (sc)

1. Married people—Fiction. 2. Adultery—Fiction. I. Kingsbury, Karen. II. Title.

PS3569.M33 R43 2002

813'.6—dc21

2002002544

New repackage first published in 2009 under ISBN 978-1-4143-3300-7.

Printed in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09

7 6 5 4 3 2 1



What Readers Are Saying about

K A R E N K I N G S B U R Y ' S

Books

"I just finished reading *Redemption*. I couldn't put the book down! I won't regret my lost sleep; the book was worth every minute!"

—Cathy

"*Redemption* is a great book! I read it within two days, finding every moment when I could. I have been through a divorce and could feel Kari's grief. I can't tell you how much women need these types of stories to keep them walking with God and bring them hope when so many relationships are falling apart."

—Linda

"Just when I think Karen Kingsbury can't top her last book, she does! *Redemption* is her best so far."

—Cassie

"I just finished reading *Redemption*, and I just had to write and tell you how much I enjoyed the book. I feel as if I know the characters. . . . I was pleasantly surprised to see the book end how real life ends. Thanks again for making the Baxters so real."

—Debra

"I only started reading Christian fiction a short while ago. The clerk in the store recommended your books above all others. So glad she did! I started reading with *Redemption*, then *Remember*, and can hardly wait for *Return*."

—Barbara

"Since reading [Karen's] book, my husband and I have both been different. Our life together has been more like it used to be many years ago. My husband is so much warmer toward me. We love [Karen's] books and can't wait to read the next one. I have never read books like hers. Keep writing, and we'll keep reading." —Karen and Fred S.

“With the Redemption series I’ve been encouraged to continually give my marriage to God so that He can be the center of it.” —**Karen**

“[Karen has] been such a wonderful godsend. Her books have brought me to God, and have led my husband and I to remarry after a bad divorce.” —**Kathy**

“I recently found your books and have been devouring them ever since. Each time God has spoken into my life through them.” —**Rosemary**

“Until this year . . . I never could get into reading. . . . Well, girl, I love your book with Gary Smalley. I am recommending your books to ALL of my friends and family. All I can say is WOW. Keep up the good work.” —**C.P.**

“Your books changed my life. Thank you for helping me to find God again. I read your last one in one day and bawled like a baby all night and all day today. GREAT, AWESOME BOOKS. I cannot wait for the next ones to come. I am off to read the Bible. Thanks again, Karen. I found GOD!” —**Kelly**

“I have never read an author like you before: You make me laugh and cry within pages of one another!” —**Sarah**



TO OUR FAMILIES,
who dream with us,
challenge us,
and daily remind us
of the reality of
Christ's redemption.

AND TO GOD ALMIGHTY,
who has, for now,
blessed us with these.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The Redemption series is set in Bloomington, Indiana. Some of the landmarks—Indiana University, for example—are accurately placed in their true settings. Other buildings, parks, and establishments will be nothing more than figments of our imaginations. We hope those of you familiar with Bloomington and the surrounding area will have fun distinguishing between the two.



CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE FRONT SEAT of his beat-up Chevy truck, Dirk Bennett stared at his girl's third-story apartment. He watched the shadowy figures of two people come together and stay that way.

A minute passed, then two. Then the apartment lights went out.

Dirk's fingers trembled, and his heart ricocheted against the walls of his chest. He glanced at the revolver on the seat beside him and shuddered. What was wrong with him? He was a nice guy from a nice family. People like him didn't carry guns, didn't lose sleep at night hating a guy for stealing his girl.

Maybe I'm going crazy.

Or maybe it was the pills. They could do that to a person, couldn't they? Make you crazy in the head? No, that was paranoid. Dirk calmed himself down. The pills had nothing to do with the way he felt. They weren't even steroids—not exactly. And they *were* working. He'd packed on ten pounds in the past six weeks—ever since he doubled his regular dosage. Ten pounds of muscle.

Dirk gripped his forehead and tried to remember what his trainer had told him when he sold him the bottle. *Get the formula right. Too little and the lifting would be worthless. Too much and . . .*

Rage, depression, irrational behavior.

Was that what this was, this constant buzzing in his head? Too many pills? Dirk tapped his fist against his forehead. It was impossible. The pills were completely natural; that's what everyone said. Half the guys at school were on them, and no one else was having any kind of reaction.

He stared at the gun again.

It's what anyone would do. He wasn't going to hurt Professor Jacobs, after all—just scare him. Then Dirk and Angela Manning could be together the way they should have been all along.

He had known from the beginning that Angela was the one, the only woman he could ever love. She'd felt it, too, at first, before she met the professor. Dirk shifted his gaze to Angela's apartment. What could she possibly see in that guy? He was at least ten years older than she was, with thinning hair and gray in his beard and the beginnings of a paunch.

Besides, Professor Jacobs was married.

Dirk had seen the man's wife up in the journalism department a time or two, a beautiful, dark-haired woman who laughed and smiled and seemed to be in love with her husband. The whole thing didn't make sense—an old man like the professor with *two* gorgeous women. Dirk bit the inside of his lip. That part would change soon if he had anything to do with it.

In the glow of a streetlight he glanced at his watch and saw it was after ten o'clock. If he wanted to pass history, he'd better get home and write the paper on Civil War generals. It was due tomorrow. Dirk worked the muscles in his jaw as he grabbed the gun and tucked it underneath his seat.

He'd have to scare Professor Jacobs another time.

Then, just as he started his engine, he got an idea—an idea so sound and strong it caused a surge of hope to rise in his heart. Maybe he wouldn't have to use the gun. Maybe there was another way to scare the professor into backing off his girl.

He chuckled out loud as he pulled away from the curb.

Ten minutes later he sat on the floor of his Indiana University

dormitory room, staring at a single entry in the Bloomington white pages as his fingers began punching the numbers.



Not many blocks away, Professor Tim Jacobs lay awake in his girlfriend's off-campus apartment, wondering what was happening to him.

He was used to the guilt and insomnia. But the tears were something new.

Since he'd begun violating his wedding vows, there had been too many times when he was supposed to be at work reading student papers or at one conference or another but instead had been sharing a bed with Angela Manning, possibly the most promising student ever to grace Tim's advanced newswriting class. She was young and idealistic and achingly beautiful, and Tim knew their affair was more than a passing distraction.

Sometimes the realization caused the guilt to grow so loud that it almost took on a voice—a voice that kept Tim awake even when he was dead tired.

The voice was not audible, but many nights it woke him all the same. Tim would be nestled against Angela, intoxicated by the kind of sin he'd never even dreamed about, when from out of nowhere the voice would come.

Repent! Flee immorality. I stand at the door of your heart and knock! Flee . . .

Tim would roll over, hoping to find his way back to sleep, to the imaginary place where his wife, Kari, would not be waiting at home alone, trusting him to be faithful. But the voice of guilt would come again and again—persistent, relentless, tirelessly calling him home regardless of his lack of response.

His lack of worth.

Tim shifted onto his side, trying not to waken Angela. He stared at her plain white apartment wall, and a memory came

to mind—the day Angela Manning first visited him at his office and made her intentions clear.

They had talked for fifteen minutes, teasing and laughing and sharing sentiments of mutual admiration while Tim twisted his wedding ring, hiding it behind the fingers of his right hand.

When Angela left the room, a scent of musky jasmine remained. And enough heat to warm the building. Tim spent the minutes before his next class savoring the way she made him feel. But as he left his office that day his eyes settled on a plaque Kari had given him for their first anniversary. It bore the engraved image of an eagle in flight and words he remembered even now: *The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth . . . to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.*

In that moment everything about serving the Lord had felt binding and restrictive. Without too much thought he swept up the plaque, dropped it in the nearest file drawer, and strode out of his office.

It remained hidden in the drawer to this day.

Tim blinked as the memory faded. The plaque no longer applied to his life; it was best left out of sight. His strength didn't come from having a heart committed to God. Not anymore.

Since the hot August night when he and Angela first slept together, Tim's strength had come from being with her. And from his professional accomplishments, of course. Tim had devoted his career to excellence in print, first as a working journalist, then as a teacher of the craft, training a yearly crop of reporters who would carry on America's devotion to preserving a free press. In relatively little time, he had become a respected professor who also wrote a regular column for the *Indianapolis Star*. In the most influential circles of the discipline, Tim's name was gaining recognition.

That was a kind of strength that made a difference in life.

Another reason for his power was his absolute commitment to journalistic integrity both in the field and in the classroom. Back when he was reporting, he had never revealed a source. And even though he was a churchgoer—well, he *used* to be a churchgoer—

he had never let his religious faith stand in the way of his ability to practice objective journalism. Religious bias had no place either in the newsroom or in the educational process—not when a reporter could do his best work only with an open mind.

Kari had always struggled a bit with Tim's thoughts about faith and the press. But not Angela.

She treasured the fact that Tim was a "man of faith," as she put it. But she also admired him for his ability to put aside his personal beliefs when he wrote a column or lectured to a class. "We never knew exactly where you stood on issues," Angela had told him later, transfixing him with her electric blue eyes. "But we always knew you stood for good journalism. We knew you'd never cave, never give in. Do you know how rare that is these days?"

He was Angela's hero, no doubt. It was something he'd known from that first day when she had showed up at his desk after class the spring of her junior year and had asked him out.

"Professors can't date their students," he told her, stifling a smile.

She simply held his gaze, her directness both disconcerting and alluring. "Can they have lunch together?"

They had lunch. The office visit happened a week later.

After that, month after month after month, he fought the temptation. After all, it truly was policy that a professor couldn't date a student currently in his classes, though the university's Ethics and Harassment Department had long since agreed that there was nothing wrong with a mutually consenting relationship once the shared class had officially ended.

So Tim had held back, flirting with Angela, enjoying lunches and study times with her, but refusing to cross the line. When summer came and Angela returned to her hometown of Boston, Tim felt relieved, glad to be free from the guilt of their flirtation. He tried to put Angela behind him, to focus on his marriage. But Kari was gone nearly every day, too busy to spend time with him, often too tired to respond lovingly to him at the end of the day.

When Angela returned to school, Tim finally had to admit the truth to himself, even if he wasn't ready to admit it to his wife.

He was in love with Angela Manning. Deeply, completely in love. It was wrong, no doubt. But he couldn't deny his feelings or the way she left him unable to choose anything but time with her.

And it was since that realization that the voice of guilt had been nothing short of relentless.

Repent. . . . The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

The voice spouted Bible verses at him, passages he'd memorized as a boy but hadn't read in years.

I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.

Tim liked that one least of all. *Life to the full*. As if reading a Bible or going to church every time he earned a day off could possibly compare with the way Angela made him feel.

Life to the full?

The Bible was obviously mistaken on that point. In Angela's arms life had never been more full. So Tim had gradually let go of the beliefs that had once been the foundation of his life—a foundation that now seemed flawed and almost ridiculous.

He'd doubted some of the details for a long time, of course. A world made in six days? An ark with hundreds of animals, floating above a world of water? People cured of diseases by simply taking a bath or having their eyes covered with mud? Tim had long ago written off such events as either symbolic or simply irrelevant.

But recently he had started to ask even more fundamental questions. What if God didn't exist after all? What if the Bible had been made up by a group of religious leaders intent on dictating the moral fiber of a society gone bad? What if real life, real truth, lay in the finding of one's soul mate? Someone whose soul seemed like a missing piece to one's own?

Someone like Angela.

In the weeks since he and Angela had begun sleeping together, the questions had gradually become statements in his mind, until now

he was ready to let go of the crutch of religious tradition entirely, ready to embrace the reality of new life with his new love.

What he wasn't ready to do was tell his wife, and therein lay the struggle. He knew that the only right thing was to confess the affair. But when Kari met him at the door each evening, he couldn't bring himself to look her in the eye and tell her the truth. That he wanted a divorce. That he was in love with another woman—a student, no less.

It did not take a psychiatrist to figure out the most likely source of the guilt that interrupted his days and kept him awake at night. And it wasn't hard for Tim to convince himself that the whispered flashes of Scripture were figments of his imagination, a consequence of confused brain signals or perhaps the manifestation of an overactive conscience.

So he chose not to dwell on the fact. The guilt would pass in time, once he acted on his decision to leave Kari, once the stress of a double life was behind him. The voices would eventually stop, though for the time being they made sleeping almost impossible.

And that's where things were different now. For weeks the guilt had awakened him with gently persistent preachy sentiments about truth and repentance.

But lately, that same guilt had been waking him with something else.

Tears.

These thoughts, all of them, came in the time it took to realize it had happened again. In the midst of a perfectly good night's sleep next to a woman who had captured his heart and intoxicated his senses, Tim Jacobs, respected professor and ace columnist, was crying.

Weeping quietly as if someone had died.

Tim blinked to clear his vision, and suddenly he knew that someone had indeed ceased to exist. Himself.

Quietly, discreetly, he silenced the sobs and wiped his tears, but none of that erased the sadness in his soul, a sadness so deep and true he ached from the power of it. As if a veil had been lifted

from his heart, he saw everything he'd once been—the idealistic boy, the energetic teenager, the God-centered college student, the hardworking journalist, the romantic groom. The loyal husband.

That man was dead.

His betrayal of Kari had fired a final, fatal bullet into what remained of the man he'd once been.

There in the darkness, with Angela curled up beside him, lost in sleep, the sadness within him grew. He cried for Kari, the sweet young woman to whom he'd promised a lifetime. He cried for the children they'd never have and for the growing old they'd never do together.

Tim swallowed back a lump in his throat and tried again to clear the tears from his eyes. Where were these feelings coming from? Why were they hitting him now? His love for Kari had cooled long before he met Angela. Still, Kari was his wife. As much as he longed to be with Angela, Kari deserved better.

Why have I let things get so bad? What's happened to me? What have I become?

The answers were ugly and came as quickly as the questions, forming a stranglehold on Tim's heart. As strong and capable as Tim thought himself to be, the depth of sorrow that surrounded him now was enough to destroy him. It was a moment that would normally be accompanied by the voice of guilt, assuring him that even now redemption was his for the asking.

But as Tim cried quietly into Angela's pillow, mourning for the first time the man he'd once been, the marriage he was about to lose, and the fact that he had no intention of changing his mind, he realized something that was more heartbreaking than the other losses combined.

The words on the plaque Kari had given him were right. Without God he wasn't as strong as he'd thought. Not at all. And that's why the tears flowed so easily these days. Because in its hardened state, his brittle heart had done something he'd never expected when he first took up with Angela Manning.

It had broken in two.

A WORD FROM KAREN KINGSBURY



WHEN GARY SMALLEY contacted me about writing fiction with him, I was thrilled.

When he said, “Think series,” I went blank.

For weeks I prayed about the series idea, asking God to show me a group of plots that would best exemplify relational truths taught by Gary Smalley and the staff at the Smalley Relationship Center.

Ideas would come, but they seemed too small for something as big and life-changing as the dream Gary and I had come to share.

Then one day I was on a flight home from Colorado Springs when God literally gave me the Redemption series—titles, plots, characters, themes, story lines, and all. All of it poured out into my notebook while goose bumps flashed up and down my spine.

Generally I don’t find myself crying when I write a synopsis for a novel. I can imagine the tears it might bring. I know where the story will most affect my heart. But I don’t actually weep.

On that flight, though, the tears came steadily. I could literally see the Baxter family, each person, and in those hours I came to know them—their fears and desires, their strengths and weaknesses, the things that would devastate them and the things that would give them hope. I cried for all this series would put the Baxter family through. But I also cried for the ways they would emerge victorious because of their understanding of love—and because of God’s merciful redemption.

In some ways, the books in the Redemption series will read like many of my other novels. The characters will be flawed, their problems the same ones you and I face despite our faith. Normally I do not leave my readers wondering what happened to the characters. But in the case of the Redemption series some questions will always be left unanswered, some issues unresolved until the very end. In some ways I wish I could tell you now

what will become of John and Elizabeth, Brooke, Kari, Ashley, Erin, and Luke.

But I can't.

The books that lie ahead are written on the pages of Gary's heart and mine, but they have yet to be typed across the pages of my computer screen. As they emerge, we will bring them to you.

Bookstore shelves are filled with all sorts of novels, but my favorite ones always contain a love story. Not the lighthearted boy-meets-girl tale, but the story of heartrending, unforgettable love. Real love. I believe that's what God gave me that day on the plane—a series of real love stories that have the power to change the way we feel and think and love.

My prayer and Gary's is that as you enjoy the Redemption series, you will gain a deeper understanding of how God can redeem broken relationships, how love shines its brightest in the shadow of his presence. Perhaps in riding out the next few years with the Baxters, you'll find yourself expressing your new understanding in your own relationships.

And maybe, just maybe, the Redemption series will help change the way you live together. The way you love.

I leave you with the message of *Redemption*—that no matter who you are or where you've been, no matter the roads you've traveled, God loves you and wants to be in a deep relationship with you. The Bible tells us that God “is passionate about his relationship with you” (Exodus 34:14, NLT). He cares so much about restoring your relationship with him that he sent his own Son to the cross to redeem you. The Bible says that accepting God's gift of redemption is the first step toward a restored relationship with him.

If you need to know more about the redemption God has for you, I urge you to contact your local Bible-believing church and talk to a pastor—someone like Pastor Mark at Clear Creek Community Church. Then make a decision to accept that redemption while God's salvation can still deeply affect your life.

But don't wait. The truth is, we often don't have much time to

make things right. If we ignore God's redemption here and now, tomorrow might be too late. The best time to say yes to God, yes to a restored relationship with him and others in your life, is always now.

Thank you for traveling the pages of *Redemption* with us. I hope you'll pass this book on to someone else, then keep your eyes open for *Remember*, book two in the Redemption series.

In the meantime, may this find you walking close to God, enjoying the journey of life, and celebrating his gift of redemption.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. Please write to me at Karen@KarenKingsbury.com or visit www.KarenKingsbury.com.

Blessings to you and yours, humbly,

Karen Kingsbury

A WORD FROM GARY SMALLEY



FOR SEVERAL YEARS I've been dreaming about creating fiction, putting together a series of novels that would illustrate what I believe God teaches about relationships. During the past thirty years, I've written many books about how to restore broken relationships. But nothing touches the heart, nothing fleshes out the truth quite like a good story.

A DREAM COME TRUE

A few years ago I came across a novel by Karen Kingsbury and read it on a long flight. Halfway through the flight, my son Greg elbowed me in the ribs. "Dad . . ." He looked nervously around to see if anyone was looking. "You're crying pretty loudly there. Everything okay?"

I had no words. I simply pointed to the book and kept weeping.

Karen's books were the first ones that ever really made me cry. Since then I have read everything she has written. It is clear to me that God has given her a special gift, an ability to create stories that not only touch hearts but also change lives.

In no time at all Karen became my favorite fiction author. She also gave me an idea. As I came to know her, suddenly I could see my dream of collaborating with a fiction writer taking shape. My themes and lessons about relationships . . . her storytelling. We had a meeting that summer, and God gave us the ideas for our Redemption series.

The series will follow the lives of John and Elizabeth Baxter and their five adult children, each of whom is trying to find his or her way in life—sometimes with God, sometimes without. The series will follow the paths of pain and pleasure, tragedy and tears that take place in the lives of Brooke, Kari, Ashley, Erin, and Luke.

The Baxters, their spouses, and friends experience the same struggles each of us faces—the longing for lasting love, the hurt of broken relationships, the fear of the unknown, questions about the future, the sorrow of loss, and the joy of restored relationships. Over time you'll come to know the Baxter family as if they were your neighbors or members of your own family. My guess is you'll even see yourself in one or more of them.

At the end of each book Karen and I will provide questions that can be used for book clubs, small groups, or as a guide for your own personal reflection.

The bottom line is this: The Redemption series is my dream come true, fiction that will teach and touch our longing hearts. I am convinced these books will make you laugh and cry. I know they will leave you with a deeper understanding of how you can build rich relationships with the people in your life.

I hope you enjoy the ride.

REFLECTIONS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Most of us are like the Baxters: We want intimate relationships, but we often go through life dazed—hurting and being hurt by those we love. In the process we end up with broken, fractured, distant relationships.

In Kari's case, her relationship with her husband—the man with whom she wanted the deepest, most intimate relationship—was battered and broken. She had a decision to make: Would she stay with him and love him no matter what, or would she do what most people thought she should do—give him the divorce he demanded?

Kari made a tough choice. She decided to love Tim unconditionally.

Love is a decision. Not always an easy one.

You may be facing a similar situation in your life. Maybe your marriage is distant or even broken, and you need to decide what to do. Maybe you are like several of the Baxter children and feel disconnected from family members. Maybe you've been hurt by

a friend and have to decide whether or not you will stay in the relationship.

Whatever your situation, there is hope. God can redeem our broken relationships and restore them to wholeness. God can give us the strength and grace to love in the midst of difficult circumstances.

If you are struggling with a difficult marriage, I am concerned for you. I pray that God will redeem and restore that relationship. As you recall, one of the tools God used to restore Kari and Tim's marriage was something called a marriage intensive, an intensive counseling experience that helped Tim and Kari understand how they were hurting each other and how they could rebuild their marriage. That same help is available to you. If you would like to attend a marriage intensive or if you need other relational help, I urge you to contact us at:

The Smalley Relationship Center

1482 Lakeshore Drive

Branson, MO 65616

Phone: (800) 84-TODAY (848-6329)

FAX: (417) 336-3515

E-mail: family@smalleyonline.com

Web site: www.smalleyonline.com

Discussion Questions

Use these questions for individual reflection or for discussion with a book club or other small group.

1. Which character did you most closely relate to in the book? Why?
2. What character would you most want to be like? Why?
3. Where did you see the redemption theme playing out in the book? Which characters in this book dealt with issues of redemption, and how were those issues different for different characters? Describe how redemption was played out in the lives of key characters.
4. Where have you seen redemption in your life? Reflect on a time when you were in need of God's redemption and found it. How did that happen?
5. What characters best exemplified the type of love you would like to have in your relationships? How did those people express their love?
6. *Redemption* dealt with a variety of relational struggles. Which one did you most relate to? How is your struggle similar? How is it different? What do you feel causes you to stay stuck in your struggle? What will it take for you to move beyond your struggle?
7. What did you think of Kari's resolve to stay married? How did she demonstrate that resolve? Was it something that came easily for her? What threatened her resolve?
8. List some of the attributes that might describe the love Kari had for her husband. How can those same attributes be helpful—or even possible—in your life?
9. What finally turned Tim around? What kept Tim from loving Kari as he had promised to love her? Which of those hindrances do you see in your life? What can you do about it?

10. How did you feel about Ryan Taylor? Describe the kind of love he had for Kari during the first half of the book. How did that love change? In what relationships do you love people the way Ryan initially loved Kari? What can you do to change?
11. Many people gave Kari advice about her situation. If Kari had asked you for advice, what would you have told her? Why?
12. If Tim had come to you for advice, what would you have told him? Why?
13. If Ryan had come to you for advice, what would you have told him? Why?
14. Kari's siblings are important to her. Describe the relationship she has with each one. Describe the relationship you have with your siblings.
15. Describe the relationship between John and Elizabeth Baxter. What were some of the subtle signs and practical ways they showed their love for each other? What are the practical ways you do or could show your love to the people in your relationships?
16. How did John and Elizabeth's marriage affect Kari and Tim's marriage? What impact does your marriage (or your other close relationships) have on the people around you?
17. Clear Creek Community Church played a significant role in the lives of several of the Baxter family members. What positive influence did the church people have on various family members? Was the church's involvement with the family effective, or would you have wanted Christians to handle things differently? Explain. What role do your church friends or leaders play in your relationships?
18. The counselors at the marriage intensive told Kari and Tim about their personal dance. This involved recognizing their deepest fears, analyzing their coping behaviors,

and recognizing how this pattern was causing distance between them. See if you can identify your own dance and the way it plays out in your closest relationships. Are the steps of your dance bringing you closer to the people you love or putting distance between you?

19. What relationships in the Baxter family still need restoration and redemption? What relationships in your life need redemption? Where and how will you find that redemption?
20. Throughout *Redemption* God found creative ways to speak to the people in the story. How does God speak to you? At the same time consider the ways of the enemy and his distracting voice. In what ways is the enemy trying to distract you?