



Readers Group Guide
A LASTING IMPRESSION
a Belmont Mansion novel
by Tamera Alexander

Warning! The discussion questions contain spoilers. If you haven't read or finished reading the book, the discussion questions will ruin a few plot surprises.

Dear friends,

I'm thrilled you've chosen *A Lasting Impression* as your reading group selection, and I hope you enjoyed Sutton and Claire's story, and the lovely setting of the Belmont Mansion. Christ drew me closer to Him as I wrote this story, and my prayer is that somewhere along the way as you read, you took a step closer to Him too.

I'd love to join your group discussion! If you're interested, email me at tameraalexander@ymail.com and inquire about Virtual Book Club Meetings. I'll also send you a Book Club Packet with goodies to distribute to your group. Also, if you're ever in Nashville, please make a point to see the Belmont Mansion! See www.belmontmansion.com for details.

Continued blessings,
Tamera

1. Has anyone ever said something to you that made you question yourself? Or your talent? In Ch 1, what was said to Claire that made her question her talent? Who said it? How would you have reacted to this kind of criticism? Discuss the ramifications that statement had in Claire's life. Have things been said (or done) to you that have made that kind of negative impression?
2. Claire runs away--literally and figuratively--after the incident that night in New Orleans and winds up in Nashville. Was that a realistic response from her? Have you ever wished you could run away from something in your life? A person? A circumstance? If you could have given Claire advice when she first stepped off the train in Nashville, what would it have been?
3. Sutton is fighting his own demons--ones of guilt and remorse. What were Sutton's issues from the war, and have you ever borne that kind of guilt over something you've said or done? Or over something you *wish* you could have said, but the person to whom you need to say it...is gone?

4. Adelia Acklen was a “real” person, meaning that her character in the novel is based on a woman that actually lived, as well as her many true-life events. Adelia was an extraordinary woman who really was “born before her time.” What did you think of her character? And about her relationship with Claire? Did you sympathize with Adelia’s past losses? Does it make you want to learn more about her? You can do just that at www.belmontmansion.com.
5. Madame LeVert and her daughters were also “real” people, and Adelia really did hold a reception for her. How did you feel about Cara Netta LeVert and her “claim” on Sutton? Have you ever known someone who was kind to your face and yet acted differently behind your back? Have *you* ever acted this way? [And a note on Cara Netta. . . . From everything I’ve read, she really was a very nice person. But hey, can’t we all get a little riled when another woman is after our man? <grin>)]
6. Claire longs to be more authentic in her life, in her faith. At the outset, she questions God’s trustworthiness. How have you struggled with giving God your full trust? How does learning to trust God go hand-in-hand with learning to be authentic within yourself? And with others?
7. In Ch 33, Claire has a recurring dream (that is actually one Tamera experienced as a young girl). What was that recurring dream and what do you think it represented in Claire’s life? Have you ever had recurring dreams like that? Do you know what fears or apprehensions they represent?
8. Also in Ch 33, Claire has moments when she doesn’t doubt, in the least, that God led her to Belmont, and yet feels God isn’t using her talent to paint in the way she thought He would. And she begins to question *why* He’s brought her there if it’s not to paint. Have you ever followed God’s lead in your life only to wonder what on earth you were doing in a certain situation, after all? Reflect on Isaiah 55:9. How does that Scripture help us to make sense of those times in our lives?
9. In Ch 36, find the paragraph that begins with “Oftentimes, through the years, Miss Laurent...” What do you think about Mrs. Acklen’s perspective on life and death in this passage? Do you agree? Disagree?
An interesting tidbit: The dialogue from Mrs. Acklen in this paragraph was taken *word-for-word* from a letter Adelia wrote to her sister in the 1860s. As Tamera was writing late one night, about 2:30 in the morning, she was writing this scene, trying to get Adelia’s words just right, when she remembered a letter she’d read from the family’s personal files. She went back to the letter and found that Adelia’s words fit the context and meaning perfectly! A God moment, for sure!
10. In Ch 38, Sutton is teaching Claire to jump a horse. Search for the paragraph beginning with, “And this may sound simple” --he smiled in hopes of lightening the mood--“but remember to breathe.” Read the rest of that paragraph, then read Hebrews 12:1-2 and discuss the similarities between Sutton’s instructions to Claire and learning to keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

11. In Ch 40, after Claire and Mrs. Acklen return to Belmont, Claire is reminded of how blessed she is to live at Belmont, and how undeserving she is. Can you describe a time in your life you've felt that way? Thankful for your circumstances and yet knowing you don't deserve them? What did God teach you during that time? What did Claire finally learn about being *deserving*?
12. Also in Ch 40, Eli assures Claire by saying, "The way I see things, Miss Laurent, you *do* belong here at Belmont. Because if you didn't, the good Lord wouldn't have brought you here. He knows what you're doing here, even if you don't." Do you believe what Eli is saying is right? How did you feel about Eli's character in the novel? And about Cordina? What kind of influence did they have over Claire's life? Have you ever had an Eli or Cordina in your life?
13. At the end of Ch 44, Sutton makes a decision to leave. How did you feel about the way he left? Did you understand the reasons behind his motivation? Would you have handled the situation differently? Has "distance" from someone or something ever given you clarity? If yes, please share that situation with the group.
14. In Ch 46, Claire hears a *whisper* during worship. If you've read the Author Note at the end of the novel, you know that this is something that Tamera experienced. Have you ever experienced a word from the Lord like this? If yes, what did He tell you? What did you think of Claire's hesitance to say "yes" immediately? Would you have acted any differently? And what of being clay in the Potter's hand? Have you ever tried to tell God what you wanted Him to make of you, or to accomplish in your life? How did that turn out for you? :)
15. In Ch 54, Claire has the thought that "every step changes the view." What do you think she meant by that? And how does that phrase describe your life right now? Is God using your present circumstance (or a character's circumstance in this book) to change your view?
16. In Ch 54, find the paragraph beginning "God had given the gift and vision of that painting to Francois-Narcisse Brissaud. Not to her." Claire is coming to grips with the fact that--as she copied those paintings--she was, in essence, stealing not only from the other artist, but from God, and also from herself. How was this so? Have you ever struggled with that lack of authenticity in your life? In what venues do we see this lack of authenticity in our society today?
17. This novel contains many relationships, conversations, and moments of tension and reconciliation. Take a few moments to discuss some of your favorite scenes and tell why you were touched or challenged by them.
18. In this story, a character from a novel in a previous series had a "cameo mention." Who was it? (Hint: He was mentioned in Ch 44)
19. What was your favorite scene in *A Lasting Impression*, and why? What was your favorite passage?

20. Through your eyes, what was the take-away message of this story, and what events/characters in the book led you to that conclusion?

Tamera's website: www.tameraalexander.com
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Recipe Ideas for Group Gatherings--

Cordina's Tennessee Tea Cakes

1 cup butter or margarine
1 cup sugar
3 eggs
3 1/2 cup self rising flour
1 teaspoon vanilla

Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs and mix again. Add vanilla and flour and mix well. Roll thin (on floured board, cut with cookie or biscuit cutter. Bake at 350 for ten minutes. Don't overcook! Sprinkle with sugar while warm or ice with simple icing. Or, like a beignet, cover with powdered sugar while warm.

Note: If you want more cake-like cookies, roll thicker, about 1/2 inch in thickness. The thinner the dough, the more like crisp cookies they'll be.

Simple Icing

2 tablespoon softened butter or margarine
1/2 cup confectioner's sugar
2 tablespoons milk (can add another if needed)
1 teaspoon vanilla
Few drops food coloring, if desired

Cut butter into confectioner's sugar. Add milk and stir until lumps are gone. Add one teaspoon of vanilla and a few drops of food coloring, stir until combined. Spoon onto cookies or tea cakes and spread with back of spoon. Top with sprinkles while still wet, if desired. Let dry before stacking.

Claire's New Orleans Beignets

1 1/2 cups lukewarm water
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 envelope active dry yeast

2 eggs, beaten
1 1/4 teaspoons salt
1 cup evaporated milk
7 cups bread flour (plain flour will suffice)
1/4 cup shortening
Nonstick spray
Oil, for deep-frying
3 cups confectioners' sugar

Mix water, sugar, and yeast in a large bowl and let sit for 10 minutes. In another bowl, beat the eggs, salt, and evaporated milk together. Mix egg mixture to the yeast mixture. In a separate bowl, measure out the bread flour. Add 3 cups of the flour to the yeast mixture and stir to combine. Don't overstir. Add the shortening and continue to stir while adding the remaining flour. Remove dough from the bowl, place onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth. Spray a large bowl with nonstick spray. Put dough into the bowl and cover with plastic wrap or a towel. Let rise in a warm place for at least 2 hours.

Preheat oil in a deep-fryer to 350 degrees F. Add the confectioners' sugar to a paper or plastic bag and set aside.

Roll the dough out to about 1/4-inch thickness and cut into 1-inch squares. Deep-fry, flipping constantly, until they become a golden color. After beignets are fried, drain them for a few seconds on paper towels, and then toss them into the bag of confectioners' sugar. Hold bag closed and shake to coat evenly.

Tamera's Complete Book List--

Rekindled, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 1, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0108-0)

Revealed, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 2, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0109-7)

Remembered, Fountain Creek Chronicles, Book 3, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0110-3)

Fountain Creek Chronicles Trilogy, Books 1-3 in one volume, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0736-5)

From a Distance, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 1, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0389-3)

Beyond This Moment, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 2, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0-7642-0390-9)

Within My Heart, Timber Ridge Reflections, Book 3, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 0-7642-0391-6)

The Inheritance, Women of Faith Fiction, Thomas Nelson Publishers (ISBN 978-1-59554-632-6)

A Lasting Impression, a Belmont Mansion novel, Bethany House Publishers (ISBN 978-0764206221)