

***FIRE AND LACE – LIFE'S SACRED JOURNEY***©

**A TEACHER'S/MENTOR'S GUIDE**

***FIRE AND LACE – LIFE'S SACRED JOURNEY***

**© 2015**

**TRES ANGELI PUBLISHING LLC**

# ***FIRE AND LACE***

## A Study Guide

### Introduction

*Fire and Lace* is a story. It follows the journey of two young adults, Tommy and Aliana, and their relationship from simple casual acquaintances to their first morning as man and wife. Their story concerns itself with definition, respect, dignity, trust, truth, and love; extolling the virtue of Chastity; that profound respect for man's sexual expression – not the simplistic idea of mere abstinence – a truncated concept inhibiting many from attaining a true understanding of human sexual love and its expression as that gift of God sharing with man his great power of creativity.

It is said that it takes a village, or maybe better a parish family, to raise a child. That thought is pertinent in the telling of their story, for it is through the people who populate their lives that Tommy and Aliana learn much of what is necessary to build a strong, healthy, and holy relationship.

This guide is a walk through the chapters of the book. Each begins with an overview and/or the author's observations and proceeds to offer possible questions and discussion points. **The contents are only suggestions intended to create discussion and introspection. As you the teacher or mentor has a better feel for your subject(s), I urge you to be creative in your use of the story and these suggestions. Please use this guide as you see best.**

A final note. Some of the ideas in Tommy and Aliana's story view traditional understandings of Church teaching from a somewhat unique point of view. Please read carefully those texts that are distinctive. No effort is made or intended to contradict any concept of the deposit of faith handed down faithfully for over two thousand years.

So to begin...

## PROLOGUE

A foundational concept, passed down to this day by the writers of the Talmud is explored anew; that of the dignity of woman as seen by the exceptional nature of her creation. A concept that needs to be reemphasized in today's modern world.

## DISCUSSION

It is a belief of both Jewish and Christian scholars that, in the Genesis account, as God created His creation took on a greater dignity. And woman, being the final act of creation – created from the only thing God makes in His own image and likeness, Adam - is God's most precious creation. Do you agree? Why or why not?

The prologue speaks of a malignant relativism existing in society today.

What does relativism mean? Give some examples of where it is can be seen in modern living? Where it can this relativism be seen in many modern relationships?

God created man and woman in His own image and likeness. Name some of the attributes and characteristics of this image and likeness?

Or

A priest once said in a sermon I heard that “wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit - intelligence is not.” I thought the statement profound until it bothered me because God is most certainly intelligent. It eventually occurred to me that there is a difference between a gift and an attribute. What are some of the gifts of God (hint – confirmation teaching)? What are the attributes of God seen in this image and likeness?

## NOTES

# Chapter One

## The Hot Corner

This chapter introduces some of the characters and the environment in which Tommy and Aliana's story develops. It is a chapter for all, but particularly for young men. The emphasis of this chapter is the need for one to develop and maintain an attitude of assertiveness in one's life. This quality, as well as others necessary for the formation of a solid and successful relationship can be seen most clearly if one looks honestly at the character of Jesus Christ as seen in the gospel accounts ... the role model for strong and successful men today.

Rabbi Josh's phrase, "*you're letting the things you don't have hold you back*" is interesting. What does he mean by that? Give some examples of how such thinking might be found in everyday decisions and choices people make.

Rabbi Josh makes the observation that Jesus may have been the most assertive man who ever lived. What does assertive mean? Are assertive and aggressive the same thing? If not, how do they differ?

What assertive characteristics might be necessary in developing a solid, lasting relationships?

Give some examples of an assertive personality? How might such a personality positively or negatively impact a future relationship?

What might be the dangers of being overly assertive? Of being overly unassertive?

(Danger of overly assertive– intransigent, unwilling to see others' viewpoints, becoming selfish in dealings with others, etc.)

(Danger of being overly unassertive – seen as shy or timid, open to being taken advantage of, frustrated by always acquiescing to the desires or dictates of others, etc.)

In what ways do you see assuming an attitude of assertiveness affecting future events in your life? Would a more assertive attitude or nature benefit your future career, marriage, family, and role in society in general? Would it be a hindrance?

*"Ecce Homo"* ("behold the man" in latin) – words Pilate spoke in reference to Jesus. What do those words mean? Where and when did this happen? How do these words apply when others view your actions?

## Chapter Two

### Knock Knock

Aliana turned down Tommy's request for a date. The result, he feels he has ruined the possibility of a further relationship with her. However, his friends and coworkers have a different idea. They try to show him this initial rejection affords an opportunity to show his character is built on self-respect and self-confidence. And what seems like a failure may in reality be an opportunity in disguise.

#### Discussion

Is rejection or failure always a personal attack? Should being turned down for a date be taken as a personal affront? Give some instances why it is. And why it is not.

Give examples of where what seemed like a failure became an opportunity. Maybe in your own life? Can you recall a situation where you were able to bring good out of what initially seemed to be a bad situation?

Do you remember when you were little and were afraid of something (fear of swimming, riding a bicycle, playing a sport, etc.) and you overcame your fear. How did you feel? What character traits were necessary in overcoming your fear?

Joey tells Tommy now that Aliana understands his intentions and feelings, she now can learn something about him. Have you ever been in a situation where you had the chance to learn about someone because that person experienced something negative in their life?

Father Bob points out that how a man deals with adversity says a lot about him. Agree or disagree? Why? Can one learn more about another from their reaction to success or their reaction to failure?

The measure of a man isn't the things he has, but the obstacles he has overcome (to obtain them) Do you agree or disagree? Can you cite instances in your life or someone you know where this statement is true?

## Chapter Three

### Monkeys

Tommy took the guys advice and asked Aliana to dinner. She accepted. In the course of the evening Tommy admits his fear that he insulted Aliana at the ball field and she replies that her rejection wasn't personal, but rather she had a previous obligation she had to honor. The conversation starts out with genial small talk but soon turns into a discussion of trust and the role it plays in good relationships.

#### DISCUSSION

Aliana says that she always considered betrayal as clandestine meetings, secret trysts, that sort of thing. Are the betrayals of trust, while less ominous, as damaging? Have you ever had a trust you shared with someone else, violated? Was it earth shaking or just a mundane slip of the tongue? Did that make it any less hurtful?

In the initial phases of a romantic relationship, people tend to be hesitant to reveal things that are intensely personal and possibly embarrassing. At what point is it incumbent on one to reveal such information. At what point is it imperative to respect those confidences?

What are the benefits of keeping the trust of another? What does a reputation of being trustworthy say about a person? What other benefits might trustworthiness engender?

Tommy's friend Mark has a fear of monkeys; pictures, dolls, figurines, the real thing, etc. Do you think Mark was overreacting or being too sensitive? Is he being irrational, or is his fear something to be respected?

At what point in a relationship should one expect the other to honor that person's need for privacy, for trust with sensitive feelings and thoughts, and other such information?

Two of God's Ten Commandments have to do with trust and honoring the good name of another. What are they? Answer: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.

Thou shalt not bear false witness.

How does the eighth commandment pertain to this discussion of trust?

## Chapter Four

### Hugs and Kisses

This is the first of several “pacing” chapters; a chapter designed to provide a proper pace and timing to the development of the couple’s relationship. This chapter details an impromptu “date” that involves a discussion of the role of fathers in the life of a daughter, and how important loving, engaged, and active fathers are as a young girl grows through her teenage years. This chapter is written primarily for young men to reflect on how the development of one’s character will affect his future possible daughters and how important it is now to develop those character traits and strengths that will allow a man to be a positive and healthy role model of what a good, solid, strong man should be.

**(Note to users) It is unfortunate, but not all readers will have had good or healthy relationships with their fathers. Please modify or even skip discussion of this chapter if you feel it is warranted.**

#### DISCUSSION

How does Aliana’s perception of her father relate to the example Jesus sets for all men in developing healthy and strong character traits?

For young women: What positive traits do you see in a father that you might look for in the young men you date?

For young men: What are the character traits and strengths of good fathers and how are they being determined right now in your lives? Is it important at this time in your life to consider what strengths and character traits you will need to be a good father? Do those traits affect your current relationships with the young women in your life? What should you be doing to develop those strengths and traits right now?

## Chapter Five

### Mirage

By accident Aliana and her best friend Denise happen upon Tommy perusing the pictures in a “gentleman’s” magazine. This chapter is a discussion of pornography and the effect it has on the ability to establish a strong relationship. There are those who say pornography is harmless; Tommy initially being one of them. In the course of an awkward discussion, Aliana points out that the real danger in pornography lies, not so much in what is on the surface, but the ideas and lies behind the pictures; a mirage that undermines essential character strengths one needs to establish and maintain a healthy and strong relationship.

#### DISCUSSION

How does indulging in pornography stunt the moral and emotional growth of an individual?

*“... when you were a little boy and you read the superhero comic book, don’t you remember, you pretended to be the superhero...? You lived the fantasy.”* How do Aliana’s words relate to men (and women) who indulge in a fascination with pornography?

Aliana points out to Tommy that his reaction was to feel shame. How does this relate to the story of Adam and Eve in Eden when they disobeyed God? (Ans. They hid themselves because they realized they were naked and they felt shame). Is shame the result of sin? Is it possible to commit a sinful act and not feel shame? Is shame the barometer of the moral nature of an action? Is this what is called conscience?

It is said the damage caused by indulging in the use of pornography is the objectification of another human being. What is meant by objectification?

The desire a man or a woman feels for a member of the opposite sex is normal and natural. It is a God given gift. What then is the difference between a healthy desire or appreciation, and lust which Jesus Himself condemned as sinful? What conditions must be present for normal desire to become an act of lust?

(Suggestion – the presence of malice, intent, and the aforementioned objectification of another)

## Chapter Six

### SAFE

Tommy and Aliana spend the evening at Mike's Place. Tommy's observation about a young lady named Debby engenders a conversation about the nature of relationships and the mistakes people make in trying to establish them. And the understanding of two very important laws of human behavior that impact positively or negatively on a strong, healthy relationship. The Law of Cause and Effect, and the Law of Unintended Consequence.

#### DISCUSSION

Debby makes a very basic mistake in her attempts to establish her relationships with young men - becoming too emotionally involved too soon. What mistake is at the heart of her error? (Ans. - she believes that infatuation plus affection equals love)

Aliana observes that Debby tries to reverse the Law of Cause and Effect. What is the law of Cause and Effect? How does it apply to romantic relationships? How does misapplying this law negatively affect the establishment of one's character?

What is the law of Unintended Consequences? Is it a consequence of breaking the law of Cause and Effect? Can you give examples?

It is stated that all people desire the same thing; to feel safe. Do you agree or disagree? Can a relationship between a man and woman be strong and healthy if one of the partners does not feel safe, emotionally and/or spiritually with the other. (NOTE - No relationship can be healthy if one of the partners does not feel safe physically - spousal physical, verbal, psychological and/or emotional abuse.)

Aliana relates an incident of a dinner date with a young man named Armand who appeared very handsome, rich, and powerful. How do appearances positively affect a relationship? How do they do so negatively?

How important is physical appearance in a relationship between a man and a woman. What does another's appearance tell you?

## Chapter Seven

### A Fine Pair

Aliana drops in on Tommy unexpectedly while he is studying for an upcoming exam. Initially, he tells her that he has to study but asks what she wants to talk about. Her answer, sex, causes him to close his textbook with a thud. This chapter is not so much about chastity as it is about the effects of peer pressure, societal influence, and ultimately respect, dignity, and self-definition. And it also opens a window for Tommy's understanding of the unhealthy nature of his past relationships.

#### DISCUSSION

**Insofar as every group is different in composition, it is left to the teacher/mentor to best ascertain that nature and level of this discussion. There are only two suggested topics.**

Between two strong and healthy people in a committed relationship, the only thing that can be afforded to the other on a mutually exclusive basis is the gift of oneself and one's sexual expression. Do you agree or disagree?

What is meant by mutually exclusive? What other aspects of one's character or personality do you think should be mutually exclusive, if any?

(Alternate topic possibility) In a relationship, if one of the partners demands that the other refrain from sharing other character and personality qualities such as a sense of humor, friendship, understanding, etc., might that be an indication of a personality that is overcontrolling, jealous, or otherwise unhealthy? Should such a relationship be continued?

Much of society through the media extols the virtue of sexual expression outside marriage. How has this idea harmed both the individual and society in general? How did Aliana's conversation with Tommy point to this idea?

(Invitation to a discussion of peer pressure and the necessity of developing a strong and independent character)

## Chapter Eight

### Faith

Tommy has a night off and is enjoying a ball game on the TV. Aliana's dad appears suddenly and tells Tommy that he is looking for him. Why? Nick thinks Tommy has hurt Aliana. The misunderstanding is brought to light and cleared up, but it leads to a conversation about having faith in oneself and one's values when the future is unclear and significant obstacles lie in one's path.

#### DISCUSSION

*"Conscience often gets credit for what really belongs to cold feet?"* What does Nick mean by this? Where in your life or the lives of others (other than your classmates) have you encountered this concept?

Nick tells Tommy that simple unselfish, caring gestures are more impressive to Aliana than fancy cars, ball gowns, and trips around the world. What does such a character trait portend for a future romantic relationship?

Is being totally selfless a healthy thing? Is being totally selfish? Is there a healthy balance?

*"They could look Clark Kent straight in the eye ... and not see their superman,"* Nick's observation about many young women today. What character flaw is he referring to? (the inability or unwillingness to see the essence of a person and not simply the surface)

The crux of what Nick is saying is that opportunity often knocks at inopportune times. What quality or character trait is most important at such times – Faith? Trust? Patience? All three?

## Chapter Nine

### Girl Talk

The girls stop in a favorite neighborhood tavern after softball practice. The conversation turns to a mutual friend who, while living with her boyfriend before marriage, is dumped. She requested that they slow the relationship down so their marriage would be something special. The boyfriend doesn't agree and ends the relationship. The girls discuss their friend's situation with the conversation addressing the influences young women are subjected to by the media today. A not so subtle form of peer pressure and its damaging effects.

#### DISCUSSION

Holly's agreeing to live with her boyfriend even though she had misgivings illustrates something that might be called "moral jaywalking." (Going against one's values or better judgment) What other forms of moral jaywalking in a relationship can you think of, and what might be the consequences?

In Holly and Randy's relationship, how do the Laws of Cause and Effect and Unintended Consequences come into play?

Do you think the relationship between Holly and Randy would have ended differently had Holly not agreed to live together before marriage? Why? Why not?

Aliana's words, "*a foregone conclusion.*" What does she mean by this? Is thinking of another in such a manner healthy for the success of such a relationship? Should either partner ever be relegated to such a status?

If one partner in a relationship requests something important to their core beliefs and the other refuses to grant it, what does that say about the refusing partner? What might it say about the health of the relationship and its long term implications?

## Chapter Ten

### Cohabitation

It's a quiet morning at Stationhouse #5. Tommy and his boss "Crazy Pat" are attending to routine chores when Tommy asks Pat his opinion about living together before marriage. Pat chuckles at the question but when he realizes the question isn't frivolous, the conversation turns serious. Pat's experience proves enlightening, and Tommy comes away with a new and different perspective.

NOTE – cohabitation for this discussion means living as husband and wife prior to marriage, not merely roommates - sharing an apartment or house and having separate bedrooms.

#### DISCUSSION

Crazy Pat makes an interesting comment that "*people can't remain what they are not to begin with...*" What does he mean by this?

While dating, people edit their behavior, trying to put a best foot forward. Pat makes the observation that people in a cohabitating relationship do the same thing. How might such behavior be detrimental to establishing a strong, healthy marriage?

Trust is very important to Tommy. How is trust affected by learning another is not who they presented themselves to be in a cohabitation situation?

Pat says you cannot duplicate a lifelong relationship with a short term imitation. Agree or disagree? Do you think one would learn more about another's character by not living together before marriage, or by doing so?

What are the important things one must learn about another before marriage? What words of Pat's indicate that living together is not necessary to do so? (page 96 – "*Because the things we built our marriage on ... trust, honesty, shared values ... qualities that were there from the beginning...*")

## Chapter Eleven

### Bad boys

In the sanctuary of St. Gregory's Greek Orthodox Church, Aliana's lifelong best friend, Denise, has just stood Godmother for her niece. The service has ended and Denise lingers in the back of the sanctuary, the look on her face and tone of her voice telling Aliana she needs to talk. The conversation centers on Denise's past history of poor choices of men and Aliana's relationship with Tommy. Denise realizes she has to change but when Aliana offers the idea of dating Christian men, Denise is cold to the idea. She finds too many Christian men ... nice ... and not in a good way.

#### DISCUSSION

Can a man be too nice? Do you agree with Denise? Where might the balance be between being considerate and caring toward another, and assertive as we see in the personality of Jesus?

Define meek when it comes to men? Does meek mean timid, weak, or does it mean something else ... and what might that be? How does that idea relate to Jesus' words about the meek shall inherit the earth, turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, etc.?

Is being meek as Jesus meant it, an act of strength? Does it take courage to do so? And are the terms meek as understood in its proper context, and assertive, as Christ showed us, contradictory ... or complimentary?

Society today, especially via the popular media, portrays "real" men as never backing down from a fight; that settling things with violence is the proper response of strong men. How does this relate to Jesus beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers...."

Is making peace, not war, a greater act of courage and strength? Are men who seek peace to be admired? Are such men more able to build a strong, happy, and successful marriage?

What has Denise come to understand by her exposure to Aliana's relationship with Tommy?  
(ans. Character is more attractive than physical appearance)

## Chapter Twelve

### A Bad Idea

Another pacing chapter. This conversation occurs after softball practice at and is a discussion about equality between the sexes. At first Aliana is taken back by Tommy's words and thoughts, but eventually comes to understand and appreciate his point of view. And in the end, agree with the fundamental principle on which Tommy bases his position.

#### DISCUSSION

Tommy's reaction to Aliana's question about equality between men and women is interesting. He states: "*No, Al. No woman is my equal ... I don't see you as my equal, Al. And I don't want you to be. I'm not looking for an alter ego in a skirt ...*"

How are men and women equal? How are they not? Is equality between the sexes in Creator's plan? Does a Christian understanding of equality differ from society's concept?

Tommy states that all women have at least one talent or ability superior to his. Many have more. Is this your own experience? How does recognizing and respecting the talents and abilities of others contribute to strong and healthy relationships?

Do you agree with Tommy that current laws, particularly regarding divorce, in their quest to achieve an unrealistic sense of equality have seriously harmed much of society?

Tommy contends the biblical passage; "wives be submissive to your husbands" is a good and proper relationship when understood in the context of Paul's entire passage. Agree or disagree? When is submission healthy? When is it not?

What is meant by submissive? (Note - New American Bible uses the term subordinate) Are women naturally submissive to men? Culturally? Should they be?

What strengths and qualities are particular to men? What strengths and qualities are particular to women? How do they positively affect a healthy marriage?

## Chapter Thirteen

### Words

Tommy's parents are in town for a convention and they have arranged a dinner for the purpose of seeing Tommy and meeting Aliana. Naturally nervous, Aliana wants to know as much about Tom's folks as possible. Tommy relates a number of instances where his dad showed his mother how much he loved her. And this leads to Tommy's understanding of his own feeling and his need to express them.

### DISCUSSION

What is love? How would you define the term? What special qualities define love for a partner or spouse?

At its most basic, love is an expression of value and an act of will – Christian love for all men. What characteristics are common to this basic form of love, and what are particular to committed, romantic, and love between a man and a woman? How does love progress?

In the three words, "I love you" which is the most important?

(Suggestion – I. If one does not fully understand oneself - the word I – has not developed a solid character, and does not fully understand the power and responsibility of the emotion one is expressing, the other two words are meaningless) Agree or Disagree?

Often the words "I love you" mean "I'll love you if you love me." What do you think the future of a relationship based on such a concept of love will be?

What is a sacrifice? Do you agree with Tommy's idea that something one chooses out of love is not a sacrifice but a deeper expression of love? Is something freely chosen a sacrifice?

For an act to be a sacrifice, does it depend on the concept of proportionality?

For instance – while Christ chooses to accept the cross, (Tommy's idea that something chosen is not a sacrifice) the proportion of the action does constitute a sacrifice. An all loving God, giving His life to redeem a sinful creation that, of its own volition, does not warrant or merit such an action by its Creator, must be considered a sacrifice. Agree or Disagree?

## Chapter Fourteen

### Wisdom

Fire and Lace is a work of fiction. This chapter certainly qualifies. I have never encountered a situation where a group of men would engage in such an extensive conversation about their individual understandings of the love they have for their wives. It is a big group discussion, one that doesn't happen in real life. This chapter is a compilation of snippets I have heard over fifty years of listening to the thoughts of friends and acquaintances. I have worked in the jewelry industry, even owning my own store, and words I have heard spoken in moments of unguarded reverie of men and their thoughts and feelings appear here. This chapter is constructed to give them cohesion, life, and vitality.

#### DISCUSSION

*"... if you want to know whether you're compatible with someone, get on a bus to somewhere a hundred miles away. If fifty miles down the road the two of you have nothing left to talk about, one of you should get off and buy a ticket home."* Do you think Ace's idea is valid? Why? Why not?

Bobby "Pretzels" explains the difference between being compatible and simply being in sync, simpatico. What is the difference? Are both important in a future marriage?

Mike the Russia says the words "I love you" are empty and meaningless unless something important accompanies them. What is it? (dynamic – action) Do you agree? Can love for a spouse only be a static feeling? Can love ever be a static feeling? What did Jesus teach?

Again the concept of sacrifice is raised in relation to its necessity in a marriage relationship. How does the idea relate to Tommy's earlier thoughts on sacrifice? How important is sacrifice in a loving relationship. How does a willingness to put another's needs and desires first, relate to the future success of a marriage? Is this willingness a sacrifice?

What is more important in a loving relationship, occasional grand gestures of affection, or small, humble, yet constant ones on a continual basis? Are they both important?

## Chapter Fifteen

### Crossing the Rubicon

Tommy's made his decision ... almost. He wants to ask Aliana to be his bride, but first he has a few questions and who better to ask than Crazy Pat, his boss. Pat has a solid marriage and family, something Tommy admires. It's a quiet summer morning, chores are being attended to at the firehouse and in the course of the morning's activity Tommy raises some questions and the boss shares with him the wisdom of his years.

#### DISCUSSION

How important is physical appearance in a relationship?

As a relationship grows and matures, should the emphasis on, or importance of, physical appearance diminish?

A woman completes a man. Is there a danger in that statement? If so, what is it?? What word might be better than complete? Why?

Do you think man possesses instinct? Is instinct the same as making a choice?

Tommy brings up the idea of a person using sex to trap another into a relationship. Is this a possibility? A reality? Is it any basis for a marriage? What might be the long term effect on a marriage once this condition is discovered?

How might engaging in an intimate sexual relationship prior to marriage transgress The Law of Cause and Effect? The Law of Unintended Consequences?

Tommy confides he has come to the conclusion a person might have a better chance of finding a lifelong partner if one does not engage in sexual intercourse before marriage. That engaging in sex can obscure the nature of a relationship. Is this a realistic idea? Is it possible to mistake physical intimacy for a strong and healthy love for another?

## Chapter Sixteen

### Revelation

Tommy and Aliana are invited by the Andy and his dad to attend a church service at Mt. Nebo Baptist Assembly to celebrate the yearly blessing of the married couples. In the course of the afternoon, Aliana is introduced to several ladies of the congregation and in the course of their conversation; Aliana comes to realize the exact nature of her feelings.

#### DISCUSSION

Much of society today is dedicated to the idea that people function best when relying only on themselves to understand life's situations and make wise and healthy choices. Do you believe this to be true as a general rule?

Observing the successes, mistakes, and failures of others and applying the lessons learned is a healthy way to learn and grow. Agree or disagree? How would such an approach aid in learning to establish a healthy relationship with a member of the opposite sex?

Often, others do aid in one's attaining a more mature understanding of life's circumstances. How have others played a part in your understanding of your life's goals and choices?

The opposite of relying only on oneself is to blindly follow the crowd, surrendering responsibility for making one's own choices and decisions to the whims and dictates of others. Where do you see this kind of thinking operative in today's society? When would you go along with the crowd? When would you never go along with the crowd?

Are others sometimes a better barometer of a person's values than one's own feelings? When might this be true in your life?

## Chapter Seventeen

### An Unexpected Lesson

Tommy has made up his mind and heads to Uncle Joey's jewelry store to purchase an engagement ring for Aliana. In the course of the transaction, Joey offers several thoughts about the meaning of a diamond engagement ring and the attitude surrounding its purchase that Tommy had not previously considered. Tommy leaves with a treasure in hand and a deeper appreciation for the meaning of the morning's transaction.

This chapter was originally intended as lighthearted and simply another pacing chapter. However the dialogue raises some interesting points, so I have included a few ideas that might be fertile ground for discussion.

#### DISCUSSION

Pat points out that although Tommy has been thinking about this for a few weeks or so; Aliana has been thinking about it since she was a little girl. What important aspect of a relationship is he referring to by this question? (the necessity of seeing something through someone else's eyes).

How important is it to try to understand the nature of something that, while unfamiliar to you, may be vitally important to another? How important do you think it is in marriage?

Pat points out that Tommy's attitude toward buying Aliana's ring may be an indicator of how he will approach other important situations or decisions in life. Agree or disagree? How is one's attitude toward a given situation a mirror on one's values and behavior?

Joey makes a very interesting point that in the creation of a diamond, God takes something very common and transforms it into a brilliant and valuable gem. God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Can you think of other examples where this occurs?

## **Chapters Eighteen through Twenty Two**

These chapters as a whole are pacing chapters. They are written to give space and time for the relationship between Tommy and Aliana to grow. I admit it a bit formulaic, but it allowed me to put some time and distance into the developing relationship, and explore a few diverse points.

For the purposes of discussion, I encourage you the teacher to utilize the ideas in these chapters in your own way, as you best see fit.

### **Chapter Eighteen - Film at Eleven**

Tommy is injured severely fighting a fire. The main point I wanted to examine was the question of crime and sin being considered victimless. The idea that sin is like throwing a pebble in a pond. Its initial effect may be seemingly insignificant (the small splash of the pebble), but the ultimately it can have far reaching effects (the ever expanding waves the splash makes)

### **Chapter Nineteen – A Strange Day**

The major theme is the effect of prayer, reliance on a loving God, the nature of the interplay between man and God, and the necessity of being thankful for all God does. Including thanking God for that of which we have no idea.

Does God speak in the little ways, the quiet whisper, and not necessarily a magnificent event? When trying to see where God is active in our lives, do we look for the big event, and not see the grace of God right in front of us? How does this rely to people; to romantic relationships?

### **Chapter Twenty – A Special Angel**

This chapter explores a healthy understanding of God and His relation to unfortunate events in the lives of his people. And it speaks of the effect of simple faith professed by simple and humble people. That grace often comes through unexpected sources.

## **Chapter Twenty One – Smudge**

This was the original pacing chapter. But as I wrote it occurred that I needed to amplify a particular point. Aliana is described early on as classically beautiful and Tommy as rugged and strong but not one would consider “hot” or sexy. This was intended for young men to understand there are much more important things in a relationship besides simply physical appearance. However, a concern grew in my mind as the story progressed, that younger female readers might not identify with the classically beautiful Aliana. (the “this doesn’t apply to me” impression I was afraid might come across). “Smudge” is a character introduced to counter that idea. She is “the girl next door” a young teenage girl growing up to be a beautiful young woman in all the right ways. Something that Aliana and Joey see and understand. And in the end, make Smudge understand it too.

Discussion of the chapter may best lend itself to the importance and effect of personal appearance in relationships between men and women. The virtue of patience in young people as they grow to adulthood. And, the wisdom of looking beyond the obvious.

Discussion of the idea of unexpected beauty – that beauty is not always on the surface. That God hides beauty and one must seek it out.

The wisdom of looking beyond what others dictate is valuable, desirable or beautiful.

Do too many people just settle for what others tell them and miss out on something new and grand? Do you?

## **Chapter Twenty Two – Party Hearty**

This is just a fun chapter. Oh and I had to get a marriage proposal in here somewhere. Possible discussion is the idea of the importance of community in today’s life.

## Chapter Twenty Three

### Say What

Tommy is on the mend. The wedding is several weeks away and the couple is out for a quiet evening at their favorite restaurant. It seems though that something significant is bothering Aliana and it leads to a discussion of the unique and sacred nature of the sacrament of matrimony. And the two happen onto an impromptu party. After all, the girls all need to know all about the upcoming events.

### DISCUSSION

In his discussion with Aliana, Tommy brings up the idea of marriage as a trinity, the union of man, woman, and God. That the sacrament, like all the other sacraments, is a place where God lives and directly interacts with us. Do you agree with Tommy?

The main point in the first part of the chapter is the question; how do one's mistakes and sins follow one in life? Can you give examples from things you've read or experienced?

Aliana's past comes back to haunt her (as does Tommy's). A good reason to carefully choose one's actions? How do other bad choices haunt one in the future? (i.e. present actions dictate future repercussions – lying, abusing trusts, lack of respect, etc.)

Is God's law restrictive of one's fun and enjoyment of life, or do you think it serves to protect one from making mistakes that will come back to negatively affect one in the future?

Tommy makes the interesting point about putting the word 'obey' back into the wedding vows. That its inclusion is his ultimate statement of his trust in Aliana. Do you agree or not?

## Chapter Twenty Four

### Second Thoughts

Spending an evening together just a few days before the wedding, Aliana finds herself wondering if Tommy is having second thoughts. He surprises her by saying he is. Startled, Aliana assumes that the second thoughts might be his questioning his decision to marry. His answers lead her in a completely different direction.

This was written very late in the process of composing *Fire and Lace*. It is an attempt to put a final touch on Tommy's transformation from a lukewarm, casual believer to his understanding and embrace of the tenets of the Church. It is also an attempt to correct a misconception commonly held and taught by many.

#### DISCUSSION

Tommy relates to Aliana his understanding that the creation of a new human life is an attempt by God to share with mankind maybe His greatest attribute - that of Creator. Do you agree with Tommy's idea? Why or Why not?

God created human sexual expression and saw it to be good. Might this be the fundamental reason why any act that transgresses the generosity of God and the beauty of sharing in His ability to create, is considered an affront to God; a sin? Agree or Disagree?

Tommy also expressed his dissatisfaction with the teaching of many in positions of authority and responsibility for the faith formation of people when they parrot the phrase that man is a sinner by nature. Tommy says that a person's nature is what he or she is, not what they do. Agree or disagree? Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God. Is sin a part of that condition?

Tommy also indicates he believes that teachers do great damage by defining people by their worst moments, not their best. Agree or disagree? Do you find yourself defining both yourself and others by faults and failures, rather than values, virtues and successes?

How does this idea relate to the creation of a strong, healthy relationship and marriage?

## Chapter Twenty Five

### In My Father's House

This chapter is the wedding ceremony performed by five clergymen of various faith traditions. It is designed to simply express the happiness and joy of two people uniting their lives in the presence of God and man. It is a chapter that is written for the fun of completing the journey of the young couple. No great philosophical or theological points of view are expressed or intended although a discussion of the concept of the danger and damage of moral relativism (as stated in the prologue) may be warranted.

#### DISCUSSION

Father Bob's sermon brings up the interesting idea of the fallacy of many today who try to live their lives by whatever current and transient idea or concept passes for modern wisdom. Something called moral relativism.

How do you see this in different areas of modern society? Where have standard accepted truths been replaced by "whatever feels good at the moment?"

Where has modern society done harm to the individual, family, and community by abandoning accepted moral truths?

How might you see this happening in your life or among your peers?

## **Chapter Twenty Six**

### **The Beginning**

This chapter simply ends the story. Like the preceding chapter, it is designed to express the happiness of the day's events and the joyful completion of Tommy and Aliana's journey. Again, no deep theological or philosophical points are intended or expressed.

#### **DISCUSSION**

An interesting point is made by Aliana while her two nieces are admiring her engagement ring. That her wedding ring, though it costs less monetarily, is more valuable to her than the diamond ring adjacent to it.

Can you think of a similar instance where something that appears to have less monetary value, might in the end be more valuable?

## Epilogue and Deleted Scenes

The Epilogue puts a finishing touch on the story. It is designed as a complement to the Prologue as expressed in the ending quote from Genesis – “And God saw that it was (very) good.”

The deleted scenes portion was something I added for the fun of doing it. As I wrote *Fire and Lace*, I would edit for content, pace, and direction as well as style, keeping everything in a separate file with the idea I might reintroduce portions if warranted. Reading over the file as the story neared completion, I realized I wanted to include some of the ideas but not be heavy handed or bog down the story. The idea of using deleted scenes came when watching a DVD and hearing the filmmaker’s comments on his process. I thought it might be an interesting way to offer the content yet not slow down the pace of the story.

### DISCUSSION

Rather than list possible discussion points and questions, I will simply leave that to you, the teacher, to determine what might merit discussion. There might be some points to examine in Doc and Tommy’s discussion of the existence of God, in Pat and Doc’s thoughts on the moral and emotional violence done to women by the self-indulgent actions of men, the portion that deals with moral courage or the sanctity of matrimony.

I trust that to your good judgment and discretion.

## NOTES