

Discussion Guide: *A Hidden Life*

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS SOOILERS

This guide is designed for a discussion of Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life*, based on the true story of Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer who conscientiously objected to fighting for the Nazi regime during World War II. This film invites us to examine the reality of a sometimes hidden God and the cost of following Jesus.

Highlights

As you watch, consider these elements:

- Pay close attention to how Malick uses the landscape, including the breathtaking Alpine mountains, the rivers, and the shifting seasons. Notice the characters physically struggling against the slippery, steep slopes. How does this visual tension between earth and sky mirror the spiritual gravity of their choices?
- Watch how the local community, village neighbors, and church leadership (such as the bishop citing Romans 13) pressure Franz to compromise with the Nazis. What justifications do they use?
- Observe Fanni's life back on the farm as she faces ostracization, heavy labor, and isolation while raising their children alone. How is her silent endurance, and continued fidelity to Franz, an example of following in the way of Jesus?

Discussion Questions

While Franz faces imprisonment for a seemingly fruitless act of conscience, Fanni is left praying to a God who feels completely silent and absent.

- The film is ultimately about three hidden lives: Franz's unheralded sacrifice, Fanni's life at home while Franz is in prison, and the hiddenness of God. How do we carry on in faith when we can neither see nor hear God?

Throughout the film, figures of authority insist that Franz's internal beliefs are what matter, and that he should just sign the paper and take the oath to save his life and family, arguing that God doesn't care about outward actions if the heart is "right."

- How does this conflict expose the trap of nominal Christianity? What does it mean to follow a Christ who "bids a man come and die," and where do we seek a comfortable faith in our own daily lives?

The film heavily relies on the imagery of marriage and covenant. Fanni shares in Franz's suffering, ridicule, and separation, functioning as a living reflection of the Bride of Christ waiting for her Groom in an unredeemed world.

- How does Fanni's experience of waiting, working the land, and carrying the burden alone mirror the current condition of the church? How does viewing marriage through this eschatological lens change how we perceive hardship and fidelity?

To his neighbors, the mayor, and even his friends, Franz seems like a madman, making a sacrifice that changes no macro-political outcomes.

Why does the Christian faith so often look foolish to the world? How do we balance a desire for visible impact with a calling to the sometimes quiet work of hidden obedience?

Scripture Connections

- **On the Unseen Reality:** *Hebrews 11:1* ("Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.")
- **On the Cost of Discipleship:** *Matthew 10:39* ("Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.")
- **On Looking to the Hills:** *Psalms 121:1–2* ("I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.")
- **On the Waiting Bride:** *Revelation 19:7–8* ("...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready...")