

BEVERLY LEWIS'  
The SHUNNING

A FILM BY MICHAEL LANDON JR.



**STUDY GUIDE**

## Crew Overview

Michael Landon Jr. (Director)  
Chris Easterly (Writer: teleplay)  
Beverly Lewis (Writer: novel)

## Cast Overview

Danielle Panabaker (Katie Lapp)  
Sherry Stringfield (Laura Mayfield-Bennett)  
Bill Oberst Jr. (Samuel Lapp)  
Sandra W. Van Natta (Rebecca Lapp)  
Jason Loughlin (Benjamin Lapp)  
Burgess Jenkins (Bishop John Beiler)  
Nancy Saunders (Ella Mae Zook)  
David Topp (Daniel Fisher)  
Tim Holt (Dylan Bennett)

## Using This Discussion Guide

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for biblically based discussion of various themes found in *Beverly Lewis' The Shunning*. The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or can focus on one or two themes at a time.

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## Film Overview/Note to Group

Adapted from the acclaimed novel, *Beverly Lewis' The Shunning* tells the compelling story of Katie Lapp (played by Danielle Panabaker), a young Amish woman wrestling with her allegiance to her faith community: She knows she ought to commit fully to the Plain lifestyle, but she also feels drawn inexplicably to the outside “English” (modern American) world. When Katie finally learns the reason for her disjointed loyalties, she feels confused and betrayed, uncertain as to her future. In the process of seeking answers, Katie comes to a greater understanding of identity, secrecy and sacrifice.



As the film opens, a sleek limousine winds its way through the sweeping pastures of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, establishing a visual juxtaposition of the struggle so central to the film. Inside the car are two women who appear to be searching, their purpose as yet unknown. Nearby, at her family's farm, Katie completes her chores and escapes to the barn to play her beloved – and contraband – guitar. For Katie, English music is both a forbidden passion and a sentimental connection to Daniel Fisher (David Topp), her childhood sweetheart presumed to have drowned.

Katie's musical tendencies lead to strained familial and social situations, forcing her to confess her sin to Bishop John Beiler (Burgess Jenkins), a widower to whom Katie is betrothed. Meanwhile, the English women ask Ella Mae Zook (Nancy Saunders) to deliver an urgent letter to Katie's parents, Samuel (Bill Oberst Jr.) and Rebecca (Sandra W. Van Natta). The letter, a threat to a standing family secret, is promptly burned. But, Katie gathers clues – a charred scrap of the letter, an English infant dress among her keepsakes – and forces her parents to reveal the truth.

(Warning – spoilers mentioned below.)

Katie's parents confirm that she is adopted, but they don't disclose much else. As the news sinks in, Katie wrestles with questions of identity; she even purchases English clothes, but her Amish roots call to her. Still, she is hurt and confused, evidenced by her decision to flee her wedding ceremony, effectively jeopardizing her standing within the community. Hoping to temper the storm, Rebecca visits Laura Mayfield-Bennett's (Sherry Stringfield) hotel room and begs the Englisher to leave. But, Laura is battling cancer and she wants to see her biological daughter.

Refusing to confess her sins this time, Katie is officially shunned. No one will acknowledge her until she makes a kneeling confession before the church. Katie endures the shunning, but her father's distance is especially hurtful. Out of love for her daughter, Rebecca violates the shunning and tells Katie everything. Laura, back in New York State and recovering from surgery, shares a similar story with her husband, Dylan (Tim Holt). Realizing that Katie's needs should come before her own, Laura accepts that her search is done. Katie's search, though, is just beginning; she reconciles briefly with her father and boards a bus to seek her English identity.



# Theme One: Identity

Guiding Scripture: John 1:12 (NLT): “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.”

## Scriptures Referenced

- John 1:12 (NLT): “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.”
- John 3:16 (NIV): “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT): “All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.”
- Ephesians 2:10 (NLT): “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”
- Philippians 1:6 (NIV): “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
- Hebrews 4:16 (NIV): “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
- James 1:17 (NIV): “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”
- 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV): “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”
- 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT): “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.”

## Scenes to Review

- Flashback (00:27:55–00:31:52, Chapter 6)
- Friendly Advice (00:21:07–00:23:26, Chapter 5)
- A New Wardrobe (00:40:30–00:44:02, Chapter 9)
- Visiting Ella Mae (01:16:37–01:20:10, Chapter 16)

## Discussion Questions

The Guiding Scripture for this theme (John 1:12; see Scriptures Referenced) beautifully addresses the question of identity; John writes that those who believe and accept Christ become “children of God.” Yet – even with the promise of this amazing truth – identity is still a process, a universally human struggle to grow and establish a sense of purpose, ability and belonging.

For Katie Lapp, the question of identity evolves and intensifies throughout the course of *Beverly Lewis’ The Shunning*. At first, toward the beginning of the film and prior to the startling news of her adoption, Katie wrestles with her love for and attachment to English music, feeling compelled to nurture that aspect of her identity despite the potential consequences of doing so.



## Scenes to Review

### Flashback (00:27:55–00:31:52, Chapter 6)

### Friendly Advice (00:21:07–00:23:26, Chapter 5)

- What do these two scenes, especially the flashback with Daniel, reveal in terms of backstory? How do the scenes foster character development?
- How does Katie's relationship with Daniel complicate her decision to forsake English music? Specifically, what promise does Daniel ask of Katie?
- Based on what you've seen, explain how Katie's identity has been established up to this point. How has she been influenced in both Amish and English ways?
- Katie says, "I don't understand why [God would] put music in your heart and not let you sing it." What do you think of this statement? How would you answer Katie?

### Take a moment and read James 1:17 and 1 Peter 4:10 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does James 1:17 say about gifts? What does it say about God's character? Does this verse address Katie's concern about having music in her heart? Why or why not?
- 1 Peter 4:10 has a very specific command in regard to spiritual gifts. How are they meant to be used? What does this verse suggest about incorporating gifts into our identity?

The adoption news confirms Katie's suspicions that she has (or had, at one point) a place in the English world, and that the English world, in turn, has a place in her overall identity. Suddenly, the line between the Amish and English cultures is simultaneously clearer and more ambiguous, a paradox that further complicates Katie's attempts to establish a sense of belonging.



## Scene to Review

### A New Wardrobe (00:40:30–00:44:02, Chapter 9)

- What is the significance of Katie's new clothes? How do they demonstrate the difference between her Amish heritage and the English culture that surrounds her?
- Katie doesn't say much during this scene, but what message(s) does her body language convey? What do you think it's like for her to change her appearance so suddenly?
- How do people's responses to Katie change throughout the scene? How might these responses shape the way Katie views both her Amish and (new) English cultures?
- What happens when Katie sees the Amish mother and daughter in the taxi? How does that visual further confuse Katie in terms of identity? In terms of belonging?

### Read 1 Corinthians 12:27 and Hebrews 4:16 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How do these verses relate to the theme of identity? What do they have to say about God's part in establishing and developing identity?
- How might these verses offer comfort, encouragement and hope to people who struggle with purpose, ability or belonging?

Katie learns that Laura Mayfield-Bennett is dying, hence the urgency of her request. Faced with the decision to visit her birth mother, Katie seeks counsel from Ella Mae, an elderly Amish woman comprised of equal parts compassion, wisdom and tough love. Ella Mae speaks to Katie's confusion, telling her that the "miracle ain't the life you missed...it's the life you got."



## Scene to Review

### Visiting Ella Mae (01:16:37–01:20:10, Chapter 16)

- What do you think of Ella Mae's willingness to break the ban and speak to Katie? How does this compassionate gesture make a difference in Katie's life?
- What does Ella Mae tell Katie when the latter says that she may never find out who she really is if she doesn't go to Laura and find her English identity?
- Despite everything that Katie has endured, Ella Mae reminds her that *love* brought her to Hickory Hollow that night. Why does Katie need to remember that specific point?
- Can you relate to Katie's situation? Have you ever experienced confusion as to your next step or your future plans? Have you ever been hindered by fear of the unknown?

### Read Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 1:6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does Ephesians 2:10 say about the scope and breadth of God's love for us? Of His plan to give our lives meaning and identity according to His purpose?
- How does Philippians 1:6 offer comfort for those who are in the midst of uncertainty? What promise are we given? How does that promise relate to identity?

In concluding this theme discussion, read John 1:12, John 3:16 and 1 Peter 2:9 (see Scriptures Referenced). Consider the amazing promises contained in these passages and think about how each verse addresses the theme of identity in its own way, yet also points to a greater narrative. Spend time, too, thinking about ways that your identity has been established, shaped and grown.



# Theme Two: Secrecy

Guiding Scripture: John 8:32 (NLT): “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

## Scriptures Referenced

- Psalm 86:11 (NIV): “Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”
- Proverbs 15:1 (NIV): “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
- Zechariah 8:16 (NLT): “But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace.”
- Luke 6:31 (NLT): “Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”
- John 8:32 (NLT): “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- 2 Corinthians 4:2 (NLT): “We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don’t try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this.”
- 2 Corinthians 8:21 (NIV): “For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.”
- Ephesians 4:25 (NIV): “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”
- Ephesians 4:29 (NIV): “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
- Philippians 4:8 (NIV): “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”
- James 3:5–6 (NLT): “In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.”
- 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV): “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

## Scenes to Review

- The Letter Arrives (00:14:22–00:17:34, Chapter 3)
- The Discovery (00:31:53–00:40:29, Chapter 7)
- A Wedding Interrupted (00:44:03–00:48:45, Chapter 9)
- Forgiveness (01:20:12–01:22:41, Chapter 17)

## Discussion Questions

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Beverly Lewis’ The Shunning* is the element of secrecy, and the film raises several important questions regarding this concept: What motivates people to keep secrets? Should secrets be categorically forbidden, or do they serve a purpose? What are the consequences of secrecy? How and where does secrecy intersect with truth and honesty?

One day, while Katie and Rebecca are scrubbing the floors, Ella Mae delivers a letter to the Lapp household, and the letter’s mere presence is enough to significantly alter Rebecca’s demeanor. This is the viewer’s first glimpse of Rebecca’s part in the secret, and it’s a demonstration of secrecy’s power to keep people captive, even if the secret is motivated by a fierce love.

## Scene to Review

### The Letter Arrives (00:14:22–00:17:34, Chapter 3)

- Describe the way Rebecca changes when the letter arrives. Consider her body language, her voice and her interactions with both Ella Mae and Katie – what happens?
- Katie senses a shift in the easy rapport that she and her mother were previously enjoying. How does this change demonstrate secrecy's power to influence relationships?
- Rebecca and Katie have a custom of saying, "Never far away," when they part company. What is the irony of that phrase in light of Rebecca's decision to maintain the secret?
- How has secrecy affected your life? Have you ever been in either Rebecca's or Katie's place? What did it feel like to keep the secret? To have something kept from you?

### Read Luke 6:31 and 2 Corinthians 8:21 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How does Luke 6:31 relate to the theme of secrecy? What about in Rebecca's case, when a secret is meant to protect a loved one from emotional pain – does this verse apply?
- Discuss 2 Corinthians 8:21 in relation to this scene. How does the verse capture Rebecca's turmoil in trying to live her faith amidst the pain of keeping a weighty secret?

With a charred scrap of paper, a hushed conversation between her parents, an English infant dress hidden among her keepsakes in the attic and an English name – all clues pointing to an impossible scenario. When the truth surfaces for the first time in 20 years, Katie is shocked and betrayed. Despite her parents' sincerest intentions, Katie suffers the consequences of secrecy.

## Scene to Review

### The Discovery (00:31:53–00:40:29, Chapter 7)

- How does Rebecca's injury (she cuts her hand when Katie finds the scrap of letter) symbolize the way in which the secret is escalating toward a reveal?
- After Katie overhears her parents' hushed conversation, how does their secrecy prompt Katie's suspicions that she is at the center of the issue? What happens next?
- Describe Katie's reaction to Samuel's revelation that the infant dress is hers, that she is (or was) Katherine Mayfield and that she is Amish by adoption.

Ella Mae suggests that Katie's parents are trying to do what's best for her. Katie replies, "They kept [the adoption] a secret from me my whole life. How is that what's best for me?"

- What are your thoughts on Katie's response? Is her anger justified? Describe her sense of betrayal; articulate your guess as to what she might be thinking and feeling.

### Take some time to read Zechariah 8:16 and Ephesians 4:25 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- These verses draw a parallel between telling the truth and promoting peace. How does secrecy complicate a person's ability to obey these biblical mandates?
- What are your thoughts on Samuel and Rebecca's decision to keep Katie's true identity a secret? Are there times when it's appropriate or necessary to omit important information?

Relationships are an essential part of the Amish lifestyle, and part of the reason that the adoption revelation wounds Katie so deeply is because it single-handedly alters her perception of family and community. Suddenly, her family isn't *her* family; the only people she's ever known seem like strangers. And the consequences of secrecy settle in as Katie further isolates herself.

## Scene to Review

### A Wedding Interrupted (00:44:03–00:48:45, Chapter 9)

- During the wedding ceremony, Katie is clearly struggling to maintain her composure. Put yourself in her place for a moment; what thoughts are racing through your head?

When Katie finally comes home that night, she tells her father, “All my life I trusted you to know what was best for me, but you never trusted me enough to tell me the truth about myself!”

- What do you think of Katie's statement? How does her anger reflect the consequences of her parents' secrecy? Can you relate to her frustration? Why or why not?

Toward the end of this intense argument, Katie's anger culminates in her harsh words: “You are not my father!” Samuel is visibly shaken – stunned even – at his daughter's callousness.

- After Katie delivers her verbal strike, the argument stops abruptly. Does Katie realize how her words have impacted her parents? Does she seem to care? Why or why not?

### Read through Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 4:29; and James 3:5–6 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What do these verses say about the power of the tongue (speech)?
- How do these verses apply to the argument between Katie and her dad? Where do you see evidence of the tongue's ability to destroy? Point to specific moments in the scene.
- What can we learn from these verses? What are some practical ways to discipline our speech so that our words might be edifying rather than destructive?

### Take a few moments to read Philippians 4:8 and 1 Peter 4:8 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- When we are devastated by our circumstances, how can the message of Philippians 4:8 change our perspective and teach us to focus on the blessings at hand?
- What does 1 Peter 4:8 say about the importance of relationships? What advice does the verse offer about mending and sustaining relationships amidst betrayal or hurt?

### As you conclude this theme discussion, read Psalm 86:11, John 8:32 and 2 Corinthians 4:2 (see Scriptures Referenced), and watch the following Scene to Review: Forgiveness (01:20:12–01:22:41, Chapter 17).

The scene features a conversation between Katie and Rebecca just prior to Katie leaving for the bus station. In a moment of wonderful reconciliation, the bond between mother and daughter is repaired and strengthened, restoring Katie to her true family.



# Theme Three: sacrifice

Guiding Scripture: Mark 8:34 (NIV): “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

## Scriptures Referenced

- Psalm 94:12 (NIV): “Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, the man you teach from your law.”
- Matthew 22:37–39 (NIV): “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- Mark 8:34 (NIV): “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”
- John 15:13 (NLT): “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”
- Romans 12:10 (NLT): “Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.”
- Ephesians 5:2 (NLT): “Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”
- Philippians 2:3–4 (NIV): “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
- Philippians 2:6–8 (NLT): “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”

## Scenes to Review

- The Shunning (00:51:20–00:59:37, Chapter 11)
- Buggy Ride (01:03:26–01:05:22, Chapter 13)
- The Truth (01:09:03–01:16:36, Chapter 14)

## Discussion Questions

Throughout *Beverly Lewis’ The Shunning*, several characters endure the cost of sacrificial living. Laura Mayfield-Bennett’s sacrifice is two-fold: First, she gives her newborn a chance at a better life through adoption. Second, she risks her life to meet that daughter 20 years later. For Samuel and Rebecca Lapp, sacrifice means raising someone else’s child as their own, and then handling the emotional and psychological fallout when the child learns that she isn’t theirs.

For Katie, sacrifice goes hand-in-hand with conviction. After the news of her adoption, she battles uncertainty, trying – in vain – to commit to the Amish lifestyle through marriage with Bishop John Beiler. Her conviction is relentless, and she leaves a startled man at the altar, realizing she’d rather sacrifice her social standing than pretend to be something she’s not.

## Scene to Review

### The Shunning (00:51:20–00:59:37, Chapter 11)

- As you witness the Amish elders discussing Katie and her potential shunning, do you sense that the punishment is a sacrificial act on the community's part in any way?
- Considering that the community doesn't know the details of Katie's birth, does the shunning punishment seem unfair? Why doesn't Katie reveal her circumstances?
- What does Katie sacrifice to avoid confession? How does she handle the pressure of being socially alienated at every turn, with people intentionally looking away?
- In your own words, explain what the shunning process is and why the Amish (and other religious groups) use this method to reform members of the community.

### Take a look at Psalm 94:12 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- What does this verse say about discipline?
- How does discipline relate to sacrifice? Have you ever experienced this relationship in your own life? If so, what did you have to surrender as you experienced discipline?

The shunning drives Katie to a crisis of faith. Isolated and alone, she takes a midnight buggy ride, hoping desperately to reconnect with Daniel. His form briefly reappears, perhaps the product of Katie's wishful thinking, and he listens as Katie pours out her heart. She's lost her family, the community and her social standing, and she doesn't know where to turn for help.

## Scene to Review

### Buggy Ride (01:03:26–01:05:22, Chapter 13)

Katie says, "The people have always been there for me, Daniel. When you drowned, they gave me the strength to go on. Now, I've lost them, too. Is this what my faith has been about? Being banned the rest of my life? I don't even know who I am anymore."

- How do Katie's words demonstrate the importance of community among the Amish? Why are their relationships integral to the health and maintenance of their society?
- In what ways does Katie's crisis of faith represent the sacrifices in her life? Thus far, what has Katie's conviction cost her?
- Though Katie is in her darkest hour, what encouragement does Daniel offer? When Katie says she has no one left, who does Daniel prompt her to locate?

### Read Mark 8:34 and Philipians 2:3–4 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How is Katie denying herself and taking up her cross (Mark 8:34)? Can you think of some of the crosses that you've willingly accepted in your life? If so, what happened?
- Even though the Amish community looked upon Katie's behavior as selfish, proud or insolent, how did she actually spare John Beiler from disappointment (Philipians 2:3–4)?

In one of the most moving sequences of the film, Rebecca and Laura share the details of Katie's birth through parallel narratives. Despite the differences between the two women, their mothers' hearts understand that mutual sacrifices provided a loving home for Katie.

## Scene to Review

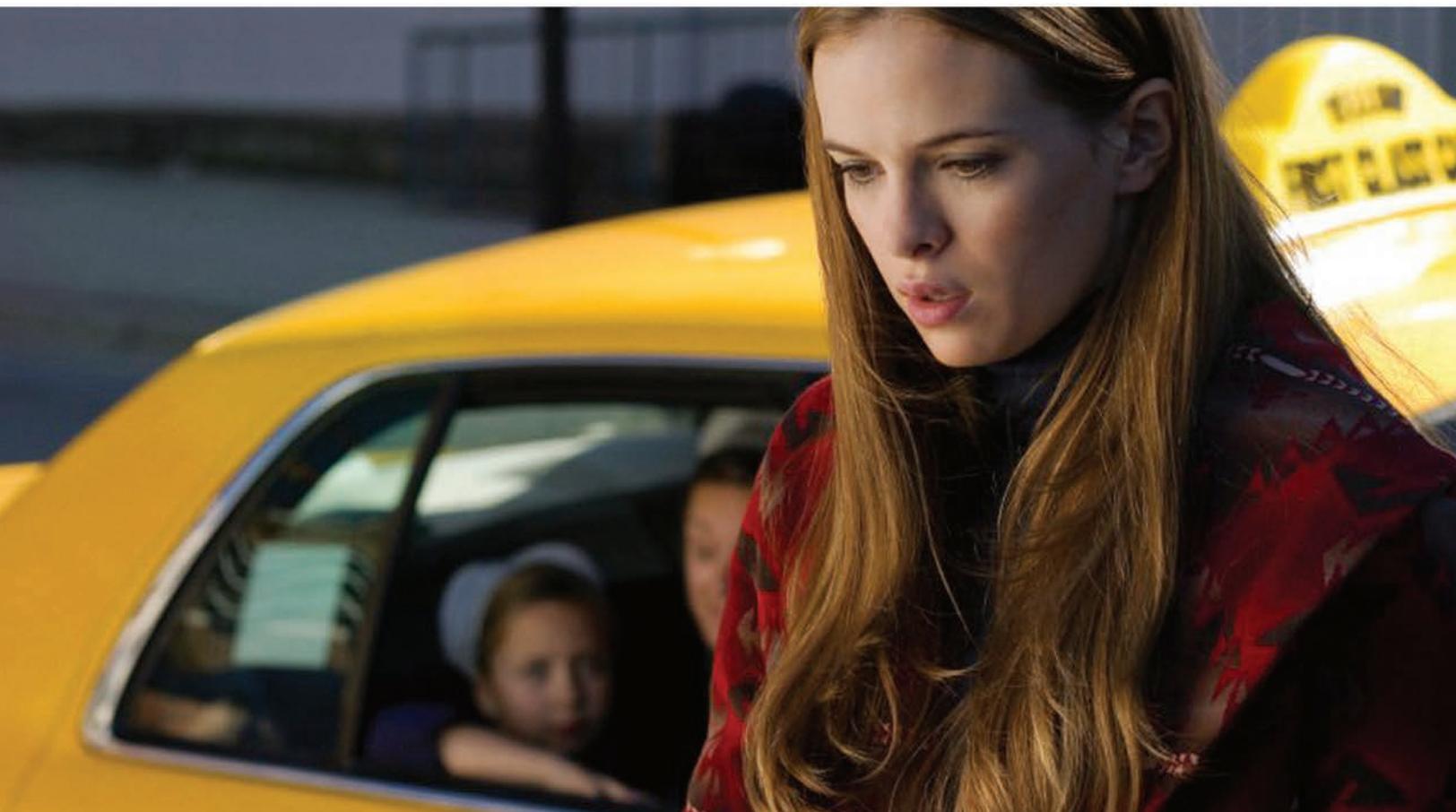
### The Truth (01:09:03–01:16:36, Chapter 14)

- How does this scene highlight the love that brought Katie to the Lapp household? In what ways do Laura and Rebecca demonstrate their respective love for Katie?
- Laura says, “I realized that’s the greatest gift a mother could ever give her daughter – putting her needs before her own.” How does this testify to sacrificial living?
- How does Katie respond to Rebecca’s honesty? How does Dylan respond to Laura’s?
- What other aspects of this scene speak to the theme of sacrifice? How does this sequence display the beauty of sacrifice that is motivated by love?

### Take a moment to read John 15:13 and Ephesians 5:2 (see Scriptures Referenced).

- How do these verses relate to the theme of sacrifice?
- In Ephesians 5:2, who is our ultimate example of a life filled with love and offered as a sacrifice for others? What are some ways that we can model His example in our lives?

In concluding this theme discussion, read Matthew 22:37–39, Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:6–8 (see Scriptures Referenced). Discuss how these verses relate to the theme and consider any additional examples of sacrificial living found in the film. Spend some time with Philippians 2:6–8 in particular, studying the example that Christ set for us.





## Final Thoughts

- What are your thoughts on the way the filmmakers brought the Amish culture to life on screen? Discuss the sets, costumes, dialogue, cinematography, props, etc.
- Does this film give you a better understanding of the Amish faith? If so, how?
- What do you think of the importance of relationships and community within the Amish culture? What does community look like in your life?
- Did you see any additional themes in the film? If so, what scenes stood out to you?

Feel free to watch the following Scene to Review and discuss the question that follows.

## Scenes to Review

### At the Bus Stop (01:22:43–END, Chapter 17)

- What do you think of Samuel and Katie's brief, but meaningful, reconciliation?
- Why is it significant that Samuel gave his daughter both her dowry and the music?
- What are your thoughts on the ending?

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