

***The Brethren* Discussion Questions**

The Brethren by Beverly Lewis
Readers' Discussion Questions

1. In the prologue, Annie says the People are holding their breath about Zeke because what one person may be found guilty of affects us all. How is the Amish view of wrongdoing different from that of other communities? What might the effects of this be on the community? the victim? the perpetrator?
2. Like Annie, have you ever broken off a relationship to please your parents? Even Ben wonders at one point if he should walk away from Annie because her father objected to him. How important do you think parental approval is to a marriage relationship?
3. A brokenhearted Ben ponders why Annie kept her artistry a secret from him. What do you believe were her reasons?
4. Why do you think Louisa accepts her former fiancé's advances when she returns home? Is Michael any different from how you imagined him based on descriptions in the previous books?
5. What do you think of the brethren's renaming Daniel Hochstetler Ichabod ("the spirit of God has departed")? Do you think the People's response to Daniel's refusal of the divine lot played any role in the events that followed? Does it seem as if God indeed cursed Daniel for his refusal, or do you think that, given his spiritual state, he was right to decline?
6. When Mrs. Stratford begins to pry about the appeal to her daughter of Amish life, Louisa responds by asking if her mother has "ever experienced the incredible feeling of community--neighbor caring for neighbor?" Have you ever experienced a strong feeling of community? If so, when and where?
7. Describe the reactions of Jesse, Annie, and Esther to the police visits to their homes and neighborhood following Zeke's arrest. What do their responses tell us about the relationship between the Amish and outsiders, particularly those in authority?
8. Ben Martin doesn't learn that he was adopted until he is an adult. Can you understand why his parents came to that decision? What would you have done in their situation?
9. Annie doesn't waste any time persuading Yonie to rehang the swing she and

Isaac played on as children. Why do you think this is? What does the swing seem to represent to her? to her father?

10. Essie tells Annie, "We can keep giving even if the gift is refused," knowing full well that, as a shunned woman, such an outcome is likely. What do you think of this? Are there ways or times you have been hesitant to give for fear of how the gift might be received, perhaps even refused?

11. Zeke's reaction to learning the long-buried bones are not Isaac's and he is being set free is one of confusion and fear. Why do you suppose this is? Can you think of some other lies people tell themselves that might be hard to let go of?

12. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." How do you see Romans 8:28 playing out in Ben's life? In Annie's?

13. Louisa muses on how the "simple" life could be complex. No matter where one lived, life was stressful. Even for those who chose a less hectic pace, it was impossible to escape the pitfalls of human emotion. Are you sometimes tempted to imagine your life would be less stressful or better if only you lived somewhere else, etc.? What are the traps of if-only thinking?

14. In nearly everything she does, Annie is reminded of her unique position within the Amish community as the preacher's daughter. Do you think it is fair she is scrutinized in this way? Does the careful examination the children of preachers and other authority figures face influence their behavior? If so, how?

15. In the case of the wayward Yonie, Jesse Zook plans to keep his peace, bite his lip, and trust for the best, yet he has always pushed Annie into doing the right thing. How do you account for the difference in his approach? If you were in his place, which tactic would you favor?

16. For Jesse, the knowledge that he was the Lord God's second choice for preacher was ever before him. Jesse believes his own inadequacy is part of the reason he's been unable "to rein in" Annie and Yonie. Do you think we can sometimes use our perceived inadequacies as an excuse? What should we as Christians do in such a circumstance?

17. Ichabod confesses to Jesse Zook, "The Lord God has dealt bitterly with me." The Daniel who returns to Paradise, desiring to repent, is nothing like the man Jesse once knew. Contrast the Daniel of sixteen years ago with the Daniel of The Brethren. In what ways has suffering changed him?

18. After his many years of exile, Daniel is assured by Jesse that he will "without

question find mercy amongst the People." That same "no questions asked" spirit of forgiveness is also readily extended to Zeke. What can we learn from the Amish community's willingness to forgive? In what ways is this ingrained culture of forgiveness unlike our own?

19. Ben ultimately decides he wants "to give my life back" to the family he once lost by becoming Plain. Can you imagine giving up modern life for the life of the Amish? What do you think would be the most difficult thing for you to give up or adjust to? the easiest?

20. Through her brother Yonie's struggles, Annie comes to see the stupidity of demanding one's way at any cost, and she decides to lay aside her art. If you were in her place, would you have made the same choice? Why or why not? Are there parts of your life where you have stubbornly insisted on your own way?

21. Annie and Ben choose to reside among the Amish as "silent believers," a choice they make not out of cowardice but out of respect. Do you agree that being a silent believer can fulfill an important role? Contrast this approach with Essie's and Zeke's more outspoken faith. Which route would you take?