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Bible as Literature

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### Does Unwavering Faith Prove Unwarranted Faith?

A single bed, table, and chair accompany Franz Jägerstätter in a small concrete cell that is lined with cracking paint and a small window hole barely large enough to let light in. Four men in police uniforms barge into this inhumane enclosure while removing their batons but in unwavering faith, Franz's lips curl into a smile and he merely prays to God for strength as his body is abused. The film *A Hidden Life* illustrates how life is a pursuit of blind faith in oneself: therefore, as stated in the Bible, faith in God and belief in one's spouse must prevail. In *A Hidden Life*, hills represent faith in God and faith in oneself, throughout the film the visibility of these hills alters. While in the Bible it's stated the bond between a man and wife is as a body is to a head meaning one needs the other to survive. In the modern age portrayal of these concepts of self-belief and reliance on others hold foremost value as inauthenticity and mistrust have popularized in congruence to the rise of the internet.

Franz swings a scythe to the contrast of valleys below him being filled with fog and to sunlight bleaching the rolling fields of lush grass and white wildflowers he stands with (Terrence, 4:00). The mountains are present in this picture which means Franz's faith is present as well because in the Bible hills are a metaphor for faith. Derived directly from the bible it's stated, "I WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved" (Psalms 121:1-3). Hills are

grandiose structures that demand attention. With so much power and mass contained in these structures, a person is physically required to look up to them. In doing so it relates to how humans look up to their parents and teachers from a young age because elders have experienced more growth and contain more wisdom. The same concept applies when looking for God. A person will look up to the sky or look up into hills in a way that they would do when they were younger because of the brain's association with receiving knowledge and wisdom when looking up. Franz embraces his wife, Franziska, later in the film when they are laying on the rolling fields with the mountains continuing to serve as a backdrop (Terrence, 45:52). Franziska's head faces down to represent her lack of faith in how things will play out for her and her husband. While Franz's head faces the sky to showcase his optimism. One of the most interesting details in this film is the mountains are foggy in the direction Franziska faces but there's no fog in the direction Franz is looking at. The placement of fog is a perfect correlation to the levels of faith each has. Franziska was experiencing great fear since understood that "people had already been arrested in many places'... She tried to persuade Franz to vote after all, and even threatened (this was the only occasion that she ever did so, as she emphasizes) to stop loving him if he would not listen to her. Naturally, this upset her husband, and they were able to talk the whole thing over together. Franziska was sorry that she had put him under such pressure, and this incident helped her to understand that there was a certain sphere of life within which she had to respect her husband's conscientious stance" (Putz, 45). In the 1940s the Third Reich had immense power and used fear to recruit soldiers. With arrests happening in small villages around Austria like the one Franziska and Franz lived in it was fair for her to feel a deep anxiety. However, instead of following the ways of the lord and looking to the "hills", she shut her eyes to faith. Which led to her threatening "to stop loving him" (Putz, 45). Believing in something greater would have

prevented her from ever uttering such repulsively harsh words to the person closest to her. Faith is allowing oneself to be blind to negative thoughts and to allow God to guide a person towards their destination. Franz understood that even if other people don't agree with him he knew his core values and would follow them as life is pretty simple. Everyone knows what their true desires and aspirations are, the only thing that is holding them back is the negative voices a lack of faith lets in.

In a dainty chapel, Franz is berated by a weathered Austrian man while small glimpses of the surrounding mountains are shown through a hexagonal wire-mesh window and an open old wooden door. After their conversation, Franz finds himself alone in a field with fog covering the mountains now (Terrence, 57:16). Franz's faith is in direct correlation to the visibility of the mountains in perfect reference to Psalms 121:1: "I WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." The hills are a beacon of faith that continues to get less visible as new challenges force Franz to consider his stance on complying with the Nazis whom he deems evil. The weathered old man tells Franz to his face that his cause is not worth dying for. And he's not the only one saying it, many villagers fear what the Nazis will do to their village if they resist. Going against what everyone else is saying to do is something he must reconcile. Even though it seemed like he had no support, the loudest voice he heard was God's (the personification of positive energy) who told him it was ok to walk the path of resistance. He followed a voice of positivity and ended up being hated by his village and became imprisoned. Why would anyone want to blindly follow faith after hearing that? Well, Franz believed that "God has given us free will. Therefore, no one has the right to say, 'I cannot believe.' Instead the person should say, 'I shall not believe.' No human being can remain exempted from the doubts of faith. However, we

must defend ourselves from and fight against evil. Heaven will be sent to no one. Even if we ponder and study, what can our weak human understanding grasp of the supernatural?"

(Jägerstätter, 246). In essence, Franz does not feel the need to question God since he knows whatever path god takes him on it will lead him to one of fulfillment. Believing in God is an option. God is within all people, (remember God is the personification of positive energy so, in essence, God is just positive energy) believing in God is believing in oneself. Not believing in God (or in oneself) is a concise decision according to Franz. It's natural to have doubt at times but at the end of the day, the only thing keeping him from heaven is himself. He talks about heaven in a supernatural sense but it may be more simple than that. Heaven could be the ability to die happy. Dying at ease with life instead of fear is a reflection of a person's entire existence. If Franz decided to be like everyone else and follow the Nazi regime there would be the possibility he would never attain heaven to its truest form. By rejecting others' truths and seeing the "hills" he can reach peace.

To properly understand the following scene, think of the pain of a first heartbreak; the creeping sadness that eventually engulfs a person, and the tightened grip on what was left as it begins to fade away. Franz slowly forces himself onto a train and then rushes to reach through a window to hold Franziska's hands, but the inevitable passage of the train has already started. She won't let go, she runs as fast as she can reaching lamp posts near the end of the platform but eventually, they must let go; she can only watch as her husband leaves her. The separation between Franz and Franziska is an experience that mirrors losing a body part. An extremely insightful verse in the Bible details the relationship between husband and wife and how "the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians

5: 23). If the husband acts as a head and the wife acts as a body they will die if not together.

When the relationship is disbanded a part of each person dies. In the instance, between Franz and Franziska they are only injured at first by their separation. But the later death of Franz also impacts Franziska in the same way one would feel if they lost their head. A key part of her life, an essential aspect of her existence, is now gone. But she continued to hold strong faith in her husband, even after his death. Knowing that everything that was happening to them was for a reason. Even if she could not see it, a bigger picture was at play.

Light dances around the innards of a church decorated with golden sculptures and depictions of Christian icons while Franz and his wife sit on a wooden bench (Terrence, 32:00). By including actual moments in history *A Hidden Life* becomes a more realistic experience providing an emotional connection to the viewer. In 1941 Nazis were silencing all people speaking against them, including a strict oversight of the Church. However, Von Galen did not want to comply. He was “a German count, Bishop of Münster, and cardinal of the Catholic Church” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Instead, he delivered one of the most famous sermons of all time. He shared that “the anvil cannot and need not strike back: it must only be firm, only be hard! However hard the hammer strikes, the anvil stands firmly and silently in place and will long continue to shape the objects forged upon it” (*First Parish Bedford*). That is an actual speech used in the movie word for word. Von Galen is explaining to Christian followers that with all the evil in the world they must know they are anvils. He could not specifically say that Nazis were evil because that would lead to him being silenced himself but it was heavily implied. Since Christians were anvils that meant Nazis were hammers. A hammer can hit an anvil as many times and as hard as it wants but eventually the hammer will break. The harder a hammer hits the anvil the more damage the anvil

will receive but the hammer will also weaken faster. It's a metaphor for faith where awful things may happen, some almost too painful to bear, but things will be alright. Some things may be so horrific that it seems God has abandoned his followers but by maintaining a strong faith things will work out.

Franziska is barely able to walk down an old gravel road nauseous in disbelief and heartbreak with her sister distantly scampering towards her. She can't take it anymore and Franziska collapses into a muddy puddle breaking the reflection of an overhanging oak tree. The mountains have disappeared behind a thick blanket of fog that has swallowed everything (Terrence, 2:37:00). Franziska's faith is being pushed to the extreme after her husband was executed and it's exceptionally hard for her to see clearly. A little more time passes and after some thought Franziska powerfully announces to her sister, "time will come and it will know all this is for" (Terrence, 2:46:00). A new energy takes over Franziska as she uses a handheld scythe to prop herself up and look at the surrounding mountains. But with the cover from the forest trees and the misty spell over the mountains, it's hard for her to see very far. Even after just experiencing a gut-wrenching heartbreak she was able to hold onto her faith. She has learned an extremely valuable lesson about faith from her husband's unfortunate death: even when one cannot see the mountains ahead, the more persistent you stare for them, the more likely they are to be revealed. It's just like in the Bible where it's said, "I WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Psalms 121:1). Franziska willed herself to look up and keep going. Forced herself to see a brighter future even in the absence of light. Her unwavering was finally rewarded on December 13th, 2019– the day *A Hidden Life* came out. A film that has garnered 10 very prestigious awards and 24 nominations equally prestigious (*IMDb*). Franz Jägerstätter's

unrelenting faith in God and himself is now a globally recognized story. A man who chose to die rather than have his morals altered proved to be in the right this whole time. All the villagers who blindly obeyed out of fear are obsolete in the scope of history. Franz Jägerstätter is a name that will live on forever. He may not have been alive to father his daughters but he is present in the lives of more people than he ever could have imagined. He influenced multiple books, articles, and a widely recognized film that further spread the concepts of Christianity to all. All the negativity that tried to remove him from his path of truth proved unsuccessful.

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