

Discussion Guide

Isobel's Hidden Melody: Bound for Canaan

Book Two of the Faith & Fiddle Series

By Daryl Lott

Welcome, Readers

Thank you for choosing *Isobel's Hidden Melody: Bound for Canaan* for your book club, church group, classroom, or personal study.

Set against the turbulent years before the American Civil War, this novel follows Isobel MacDonald as she navigates a world divided by slavery, politics, and competing loyalties. As danger grows around her, Isobel discovers that faith is not merely something professed on Sunday morning. It is a path walked daily, often at great personal cost.

Through hidden routes, unlikely friendships, and acts of extraordinary courage, the story explores what it means to follow God's leading when the road ahead is uncertain. Along the way, readers encounter real historical figures, pivotal events, and the ordinary men and women whose quiet sacrifices helped shape history.

Whether you are reading for historical insight, spiritual reflection, or the simple joy of a good story, I hope this guide encourages meaningful conversations and deeper exploration of the themes woven throughout the novel.

May the hidden melody of faith, hope, and courage continue long after the final page is turned.

—Daryl Lott

How to Use This Guide

The questions and activities in this guide are designed to encourage thoughtful discussion rather than test comprehension. There are no right or wrong answers.

Groups may choose to work through every question or select those most relevant to their interests. Many of the questions invite readers to consider both the historical circumstances of the novel and the timeless issues it raises about faith, freedom, justice, and personal responsibility.

This guide is organized into four sections:

Discussion Questions

Questions focused on characters, relationships, and major themes.

Faith and Reflection

Questions that explore the spiritual themes of the novel and encourage personal application.

Historical Context

Questions examining the historical events, people, and issues that shaped the story.

Take your time. Listen respectfully to one another. The most rewarding conversations often come from differing perspectives and experiences.

Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of the novel, how has Isobel changed since the events of *Isobel's Song*? In what ways does she remain the same?

Consider both her spiritual growth and her understanding of her place in the world.

2. The title *Isobel's Hidden Melody* suggests that some truths are heard more by the heart than by the ears. What do you think the "hidden melody" symbolizes throughout the story?

Did your understanding of its meaning change as the novel progressed?

3. Several characters are forced to make difficult choices between safety and doing what they believe is right. Which character's decision impressed you most, and why?

4. Althea's journey is one of the central stories in the novel. What obstacles did she face, and what qualities helped her endure them?

What did her story teach you about courage and hope?

5. The novel introduces people from different backgrounds, cultures, and nations who work together toward a common purpose. Why do you think these unlikely alliances were important to the story?

Can you think of modern examples where cooperation across differences remains important?

6. Roberto Capitan and Althea represent two very different paths to freedom. What strengths and risks did each path present?

Why do you think the novel explores both paths?

7. Family plays an important role throughout the story. How does Isobel balance her responsibilities to her family with the risks involved in helping others?

Would you have made the same choices she did?

8. Many characters in the novel must decide whether obedience to God requires them to challenge the customs, laws, or expectations of their society. What examples stood out to you?

What can readers learn from their choices?

9. Fear is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Which characters allow fear to control them, and which characters overcome it?

What makes the difference?

10. Several characters perform acts of courage that may never be publicly recognized. Why do you think the author emphasizes quiet acts of faithfulness rather than famous heroic deeds?

11. Throughout the story, Isobel often acts without knowing how events will ultimately turn out. Have you ever faced a situation where you had to move forward without knowing the outcome?

How does the novel portray the relationship between faith and uncertainty?

12. The novel presents freedom as both a political reality and a spiritual idea. In what ways are those two forms of freedom connected?

Are they ever different?

13. Which secondary character did you find most memorable, and why?

How did that character contribute to the novel's message?

14. Looking back on the story as a whole, what do you think was the greatest sacrifice made by any character?

Was the sacrifice worth the cost?

15. By the end of the novel, what do you think Isobel has learned about God's providence?

How has her understanding of faith changed from the beginning of the story?

Faith & Reflection

16. Throughout the novel, Isobel often acts without seeing the full path ahead. Have you ever felt God leading you to take a step of faith before you understood where it would lead?

What happened, and what did you learn from the experience?

17. Several characters risk comfort, security, and even their lives to help others. What do their actions reveal about the relationship between faith and obedience?

Do you believe genuine faith always requires action? Why or why not?

18. The "hidden melody" serves as a symbol of God's guidance throughout the story. How do you recognize God's direction in your own life?

Are there times when His leading seems clear? Times when it seems hidden?

19. The novel repeatedly confronts the issue of human dignity. What biblical truths support the belief that every person possesses inherent worth and value?

How should that belief influence the way Christians treat others today?

20. Many of the characters must choose between what is easy and what is right. Describe a time when doing the right thing carried a personal cost.

Looking back, would you make the same choice again?

21. Fear and faith often appear side by side in the novel. Which characters demonstrate this tension most clearly?

What encouragement does Scripture offer when fear threatens to overwhelm us?

22. Isobel learns that God's providence does not always prevent hardship, but often works through it. How does this understanding compare with your own view of God's involvement in human events?

Has your perspective changed through difficult experiences?

23. Near the end of the novel, readers are left with the sense that God is working through countless ordinary acts of courage and kindness. Why do you think God often chooses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes?

How does that idea affect the way you view your own opportunities to serve?

Optional Scripture Reflection

For groups that wish to incorporate Bible study, consider reading and discussing one or more of the following passages:

- Micah 6:8
- Isaiah 58:6–12
- Psalm 46
- Matthew 25:31–40
- Hebrews 11:1–40
- James 2:14–26

Discussion leaders may wish to ask:

- Which passage best reflects the themes of the novel?
- Which character most clearly embodies the principles found in these verses?
- What practical application can we draw from these Scriptures today?

Historical Context Questions

24. Before reading this novel, how familiar were you with the Underground Railroad?

Did anything in the story challenge or expand your understanding of how freedom seekers escaped slavery?

25. Many Americans are familiar with escape routes leading north into free states and Canada. Were you surprised to learn that thousands of enslaved people also sought freedom by traveling south into Mexico?

Why do you think this part of history is less widely known?

26. The novel portrays ordinary citizens who secretly aided freedom seekers. What risks did these individuals face?

Would you have been willing to accept those risks if you had lived during that time?

27. New Bedford, Massachusetts, plays an important role in the story. Why do you think communities like New Bedford became important destinations for formerly enslaved people?

What qualities made such communities places of opportunity and refuge?

28. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 intensified tensions throughout the United States. How did that law affect both enslaved people and those who sought to help them?

Why do you think it became such a controversial issue?

29. Several historical figures appear in the novel alongside fictional characters. How did their inclusion affect your reading experience?

Did it make the story feel more authentic? Why or why not?

30. The novel highlights the role of churches, ministers, and people of faith on different sides of the slavery debate. Were you surprised by the variety of viewpoints represented?

What does this reveal about the moral and religious conflicts of the period?

31. Communication, travel, and transportation in the mid-nineteenth century were far slower and more dangerous than they are today. How did those limitations influence the decisions and risks faced by the characters?

32. The story presents freedom seekers as individuals with names, families, hopes, fears, and dreams rather than as statistics. How does historical fiction help readers connect with the human side of history in ways that textbooks sometimes cannot?

33. One of the recurring themes of the novel is that history is often shaped by ordinary people whose names never appear in history books. Do you agree?

Can you identify examples from the novel—or from real history—where seemingly ordinary individuals made an extraordinary difference?

34. The years leading up to the Civil War were marked by growing sectional tension and political division. As you read the novel, what signs did you notice that the nation was moving toward a larger conflict?

35. After finishing the novel, what historical topic would you most like to learn more about?

- The Underground Railroad
- Mexico as a destination for freedom seekers
- New Bedford's abolitionist community
- The Fugitive Slave Act
- The lives of free Black Americans before the Civil War
- The role of churches in the abolition movement
- Another topic discussed in the novel

Why does that subject interest you?

Author Q&A

Why did you write *Isobel's Hidden Melody*?

When I began writing the Faith & Fiddle Series, I wanted to explore how ordinary people of faith respond to extraordinary moments in history. The years leading up to the Civil War presented one of the greatest moral challenges in American history. Through Isobel's story, I wanted to examine what happens when faith moves beyond belief and demands action. Fiction allows us to present historical events as they unfold in a person's heart. I believe that the vast majority of Americans were people of faith.

Is Isobel based on a real person?

No. Isobel is a fictional character, but she was inspired by the many courageous women who helped shape nineteenth-century America. While her experiences are fictional, the challenges she faces reflect the very real choices confronted by countless women on the frontier and within the abolition movement. Some of these events came from my own genealogical research. I realized that my own mother and grandmothers all the way to the American Revolution were courageous and geniuses in a practical manner. Your ancestors were no different.

How much of the novel is historically accurate?

The major historical events, locations, laws, and many of the public figures appearing in the novel are real. I strive to place fictional characters within authentic historical settings whenever possible. While some conversations and personal interactions are imagined, they are intended to reflect the historical realities of the time.

The character "Roberto Capitan" is based on a real person. His origin story is true. "Roberto" is not his real first name.

"Juan Martinez" is a synthesis of Mexican survivors of San Jacinto. I believe the reactions of Isobel and Juan upon first meeting is authentic. Modern readers will be able to diagnose PTSD and other disorders as the series develops.

Why did you choose to include both northern and southern routes to freedom?

Many readers are familiar with the Underground Railroad leading north to free states and Canada. Fewer realize that thousands of enslaved people also escaped south into Mexico, where slavery had been abolished. I wanted to highlight both routes because they reveal the complexity of the struggle for freedom and the many ways courageous individuals sought liberty. Modern scholars are just now putting together details of the southern route from Galveston. It's a difficult task due to the secrecy of the venture and the fact that those taking the southern route remained

hidden in Mexico avoiding attention. They did not go on lecture tours sponsored by northern abolitionists.

Why is faith such an important part of the story?

Faith has always been central to Isobel's journey. Throughout the series, she wrestles with questions of purpose, suffering, courage, and God's providence. I believe faith was a powerful influence in the lives of most people during this period, and it would be impossible to tell an honest story about the era without acknowledging that reality.

What does the "hidden melody" represent?

The hidden melody represents God's guidance and providence. Like many believers, Isobel does not always understand where God is leading her or why certain events unfold as they do. Yet she learns to trust the One who hears the entire song when she can hear only a few notes at a time. The "hidden" part of the title refers to the clandestine mission of getting people to freedom.

Which character was the most challenging to write?

The most challenging characters are often those who are struggling between competing loyalties. People are rarely entirely good or entirely evil. Many characters in the novel wrestle with fear, uncertainty, and difficult choices. Isobel is very challenging to write. In addition to the issues above, I cannot make her into a "white savior."

She has difficulty in knowing when to stop and let others take over. That's a crucial boundary for all of us. She often pushes herself to the point of exhaustion before realizing that others are both worthy and called to share the burden. A story like this must show that people of color have their own institutions and mentors who can "save the damsel in distress." The most difficult part is showing that everyone is called to lend a helping hand. Sometimes, all a person needs is a hand up to assist them. Separating a "hand up" and "saviorism" is most difficult.

What do you hope readers take away from this story?

More than anything, I hope readers come away with a renewed appreciation for courage, faith, and human dignity. History is often shaped by ordinary people who choose to do the right thing when it would be easier to do nothing. My hope is that readers will be inspired by those examples and encouraged to live faithfully in their own time and place.

Will Isobel's story continue?

Yes. *Isobel's Hidden Melody* is the second book in the Faith & Fiddle Series. The story continues in *Isobel's Fateful Lightning*, where the growing divisions that have been building throughout the series erupt into the American Civil War, bringing new challenges, sacrifices, and tests of faith for Isobel and those she loves.

What is the one thing that readers can do to help get the message of the book out?

That's an easy one. Leave an honest review at Amazon or on Audible.

Can I leave an Amazon review if I didn't purchase the book on Amazon?

Yes. If you got it at a library, if a friend loaned it to you, or if you bought it at a book signing, you can still leave a review if you have an Amazon account.

How long does the review have to be?

One sentence. Amazon wants the review system to be honest and helpful to their customers. The Amazon business model rests on this truth. The review needs to be "helpful." Tell one thing you liked about the book that another reader would appreciate as they consider the purchase. The review, even a one-sentence review, needs to reveal that you actually read the book. That's it. Simple, but it is the most valuable tool in the Amazon arsenal and one of the most coveted gifts an author can receive.

Connect with the Author

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