

Bad Faith

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INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT CLOSET- DAY

A tape winds to the sound of Marilyn Manson's version of *Personal Jesus*.

A makeshift wiring job leads from the back of a boom box and up the wall of a cleaning closet.

INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

The wire exits the closet and works it's way up through the bowels of an empty church.

The wire runs up a stairwell-

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

-and into a large sanctuary.

It runs along the wall and to the base of a mic stand.

The wire runs up the mic stand, past a sizable gut which protrudes through a white robe, and up to the mouth of Pastor PAUL STERNWELL, 48.

Pastor Sternwell's mouth moves to the music.

A small congregation, made up mostly of middle-aged and elderly white people, watch dispassionately.

Except for one boy, ISAIAH STERNWELL, 15, who nods his head ever so slightly to the beat.

Sitting next to him, his mother, AUDREY STERNWELL, 39, trim and obsessively well-put-together, notices her son's movement and elbows him.

Isaiah guiltily shuts off his ipod.

Paul preaches in a steady monotonous tone.

PAUL

So if Joseph had lost his faith-

Isaiah makes eye-contact across the sanctuary with LUKE, 17, lean and muscular.

Next to him sits his father DICK, 45, boyish looking still at his age, and Dick's girlfriend, BARB, 42, the mothering type. With them sits MADDY, 7, the obedient type.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-if he had given up hope-

Luke smirks, and Isaiah suppresses a grin.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then he would have never realized
God's plan for him.

CYNTHIA, 46, watches the exchange disapprovingly from the balcony above.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Instead, for thirteen years he
sustained his faith in jail. For
thirteen years.

Audrey glares at Isaiah and extends her hand.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Imagine that next time you have a
bad day.

Isaiah surrenders the ipod.

Paul pauses for dramatic effect.

The only person to react is Audrey, who smiles approvingly at Paul as she shoves the ipod into her purse.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He couldn't have known during all
those years of imprisonment-

Isaiah sulks as he notices DEAN, 39, writing out a check across the isle.

Dean's son, SAM, 5, stares at a ceiling fan high above in a hypnotic trance.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-would lead to him becoming the
savior of Egypt-

Sitting with the choir, NAN, 72, makes a shopping list on the back of her sheet music.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 - he couldn't have know because God
 is greater than our wildest dreams.

An elderly woman, EDNA, 97, wearing headphones plugged into the pew, sleeps.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 We can't always see his plan, but
 we have to have faith that God has
 one for each and every one of us.

Dean sticks his check into a church offering envelope and licks it shut.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Faith, despite all obstacles, is
 the most important thing.

Paul ends dramatically, but no one breaks their trance.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATER

Paul stands at the back of the sanctuary shaking hands with a line of people as they exit through a large doorway.

PAUL
 Peace be with you this week.
 (beat)
 My love to you and your family.
 (beat)
 I'll be praying for you.
 (beat)
 God watch over you.

INT. CHURCH - MEMORIAL ROOM - DAY

The doors to the memorial room are opened.

The congregation descend upon a table of cookies and coffee.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul takes off his robe revealing a suit underneath, and more than one taut shirt button.

He hangs up the robe in a closet and puts on a floral tie.

He looks at himself in the mirror- he approves.

He exits his office.

INT. CHURCH - MEMORIAL ROOM - DAY

Paul walks through the memorial room, exchanging a few pleasantries and pats-on-the-back with the now sedated congregation.

PAUL
Great job today Warren.
(beat)
Nan, your voice melts my heart...

A couple of kids bang on a piano.

GAIL, 42, a woman who likes her food, wearing a matching 80's style magenta pant suit, sees Paul and weaves her way through the crowd toward him.

Paul is about to walk out of the room when Gail reaches him.

GAIL
Paul!

PAUL
God almighty, Gail, you look
stunning today.

GAIL
Thanks- Listen, I was just speaking
to Jean Messiger about the blessing
of the animals next week-

PAUL
Ahh, yes, my favorite time of year.

GAIL
-and she wants to bring her sheep.

PAUL
A sheep. The kids will love it, God
bless her! Tell her I'm very excited
for me, will you?

Paul puts a hand on Gail's shoulder and gives her a wink.

Paul starts to walk out. Gail follows.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul walks through the almost deserted sanctuary, Gail following closely behind.

Kids run between pews and up to the balcony to hide as another counts aloud.

GAIL
Not a sheep, sheep plural.

Sam pushes past them and runs ahead through a door leading down to the basement.

PAUL
(calmly)
How many are we talking?

GAIL
Twelve.

PAUL
Good number. Wouldn't it be fun if they were named after the apostles?

Paul chuckles to himself as he reaches a door to the side of the altar.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Suggest that to her for me, will you?

Paul walks through the door.

Gail rolls her eyes.

INT. CHURCH - STAIRCASE - DAY

Gail follows Paul down a staircase.

GAIL
You think this is funny, but I'll be the one who has to clean up. Remember the ferret?

PAUL
Remember the goat! Ate it's way from Genesis right through to Second Samuel before I got three words out.

Gail looks at him: 'exactly'.

INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

Paul and Gail enter the basement.

They head over to a closet door.

PAUL
Arrange a home visit then.

GAIL
I don't know... you're schedule's
pretty packed...

PAUL
I'm sure I can squeeze sheep in.

Paul opens the closet and sees Sam sitting there.

Gail screams, and Sam runs out.

GAIL
(yelling after Sam)
Go find your mother, you shouldn't
be wandering around here.

Paul laughs as he takes a tape out of the boom-box and pockets it.

GAIL (CONT'D)
(to Paul)
They shouldn't be wandering around
here, some of these doors self-lock
when they close. Imagine if they
got-

Paul grabs Gail by the shoulders.

PAUL
Gail. Today is the Lord's day!

Paul pats her on the back.

PAUL (CONT'D)
God bless you.

Paul crosses the basement floor to a small door and exits to the outside world, leaving Gail behind, flustered and frustrated.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Paul exits the church into a sunny summer day, humming Handel's 'And the Glory of the Lord'.

He walks past Edna who is pushing a bright purple walker onto a platform connected to a small yellow bus.

He rushes over to give her a hand.

PAUL
Edna, you look stunning in that
color.

EDNA
What?

PAUL
(yelling)
Nice color.

EDNA
(serious)
Why should old people be boring?

The platform begins to raise up and into the bus.

PAUL
I didn't say they should.

EDNA
What?

Paul puts on a false smile and waves.

PAUL
Bye!

Edna flicks her wrist as if waving away a fly and gets onto the bus.

Paul shrugs and continues humming as he walks past the church and into a small brick house next door; the Parsonage.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVINGROOM - DAY

Paul enters the house, but stops mid-hum when he sees Audrey sitting on the couch next to a moping Isaiah.

AUDREY

Guess who I caught listening to
music during the sermon today?
I don't think anyone saw, but...

PAUL

Isaiah?

Isaiah looks down.

AUDREY

Well?

Isaiah shrugs.

PAUL

You don't know why you were
behaving disrespectfully?

Audrey stands up and crosses her arms.

They both stand over Isaiah and stare at him, but he is
resolute in his muteness.

AUDREY

It's not just your father you're
disrespecting, you know; it's God.

Paul, guides Audrey aside and gives her a confident 'I'll
handle this' look.

PAUL

"For the love of God is this, that
we obey his commandments. And his
commandments are not burdensome,
for whatever is born of God--"

ISAIAH

(still looking down)
Can I go to my room now?

AUDREY

Isaiah!

Paul places a hand on Audrey's shoulder. She backs down
immediately.

PAUL

I'm going to have to take your ipod
away.

Audrey holds it up, already confiscated.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I see.

Isaiah looks at him for the first time: 'now can I go?'

Audrey looks at Paul. Paul gives her a nod with his eyes and he gives Isaiah a nod with her head to get out of there.

Isaiah takes off up the stairs.

Paul looks after him. He turns to Audrey for an explanation. She shakes her head: 'he's your kid too'.

Angry music erupts from upstairs.

AUDREY

You want me to-

PAUL

(shakes his head)

If God's allowed to rest today,
then so can we.

(beat)

I'll talk to him later.

Audrey drops the ipod in Paul's hands: 'suit yourself'.

INT. PARSONAGE - ISAIAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Isaiah lies on his bed intently reading a book as he listens to his music.

The book is the Bible.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVINGROOM - DAY

The sound of electronic organ clashes with Isaiah's distant music, as Audrey sits at a keyboard making up a children's choir song.

AUDREY

(singing)

Always obey your parents, for that
is what God commands, so when you
give your Mom a great big hug, God
will start to dance...

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - DAY

Fighting against both Audrey's and Isaiah's music, Paul listens to the same Handel he was humming before as he intently puts the finishing touches on a bright purple miniature walker.

He puts the walker next to a miniature Edna in an exact model of the church.

INT. PARSONAGE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Paul, Isaiah, and Audrey sit around the dinner table as Audrey finishes serving them.

Paul extends his hands. Audrey eagerly accepts, but Paul has to extend his hand a second time before Isaiah begrudgingly takes it.

PAUL

Thank you for the food we eat.

AUDREY

Thank you for the world so sweet.

Paul and Audrey look at Isaiah.

ISAIAH

(unenthusiastically)

Thank you for the birds that sing.

PAUL

Thank you God for everything.

AUDREY

Thank you God for everything.

PAUL

Amen.

AUDREY

Amen.

Audrey squeezes Isaiah's hand.

ISAIAH

Amen.

Isaiah pulls his hands away and concentrates on his food.

Paul looks from him to Audrey, who smiles sympathetically.

INT. PARSONAGE - PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul and Audrey lie in bed.

PAUL
You're his mother.

AUDREY
If I remember correctly he wasn't
exactly a virgin birth.

Paul smirks.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
You don't think he's having sex do
you?

PAUL
I don't even want to think about
it, tell you the truth.

They both sit in silence and think about it.

INT. PARSONAGE - ISAIAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Isaiah backs away from the wall.

INT. PARSONAGE - PAUL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The RINGING of a cell phone wakes a sleeping Paul.

Paul groggily grabs the phone from his side table and answers
it without even looking to see who it is.

PAUL
Good morning Gail.

Audrey groans as she throws the covers over her head.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Gail meets Paul at the door and hands him a mug of coffee and
a piece of paper.

Paul sips the coffee and walks toward his office.

Gail walks beside him reading from an agenda.

GAIL

New Men's lunch group 'Sharing Sandwiches with God' is meeting at noon, needs blessing. Opening prayer for diner at 6. Staff-Parish relations committee is holding a vote on the new treasurer at 7:30, you need to be there to approve the appointment. Um... and I need to know if we can give Nan the go ahead on the choir robe cleaning?

Paul nods his approval as they reach his office door.

GAIL (CONT'D)

Oh, and Eileen Hunt is waiting in your-

Paul opens the door to see EILEEN, 56, a slight woman with a timid voice, sitting there.

GAIL (CONT'D)

-office.

Gail gives her a little wave from behind Paul.

Paul gives Eileen a huge smile then turns and looks at Gail: 'thanks for the warning'.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul sits across from Eileen. She looks tiny in his large leather chair.

PAUL

You have three-hundred thousand funeral programs?

EILEEN

And obituary cards.

(beat)

It just seems so disrespectful to throw them away. Recently I've been going to funerals of people I don't even know and taking the cards out of the trash. I miss work, dates, even... even church.

(beat)

Saving the dead from the dust-bin has ruined my life.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - LATER

PAUL

So what your telling me is you're a compulsive giver.

Dean sits in Eileen's place, fidgeting.

DEAN

I told myself hurricane Helen would be the last... but then I heard about the turtles. Ann's working weekends now to help pay off the debt, but now that she's pregnant...

(beat)

I tried to tell her that Jesus would have wanted to save the turtles, but now she wont even talk to me.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - LATER

PAUL

Go on.

Now instead of Dean sits Cynthia, a complete mess.

CYNTHIA

Well, when I see them sitting there front and center like they want to show off to everyone how happy they are and how miserable I am, and he puts his arm around her and pulls the little hairs on the back of her neck like he did with me... I imagine that giant light above them coming crashing down and just pulverizing them.

(beat)

Sometimes I think that if God really cared he'd loosen a bolt or two.

PAUL

I see.

Paul looks at a clock on his wall, Cynthia sees him looking.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Tell you what: I'll have a little chat with God and let you know what ideas we come up with to help you cast out that jealousy of yours.

CYNTHIA

Oh. OK- well, thanks.

Paul get's up.

PAUL

Your welcome.

Cynthia gets up too.

CYNTHIA

Well, I guess I'll be going, I'm sure you've got a lot to do.

PAUL

Yes. Even the divinely inspired have to add a touch of elbow grease now and again to produce a good sermon.

CYNTHIA

I can't wait, you're sermons are what see me through, I don't know what I'd-

Paul opens the office door for Cynthia.

PAUL

Not a problem. Take care Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

You too, you too.

Cynthia walks out. Paul closes his office door and locks it.

He sits down at his desk and takes out a fill-in-the-blank outline for a sermon.

Paul starts with a title: Patience.

Paul concentrates on the page- drip, a drop of water lands right on the title.

Paul looks up at the ceiling.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - LATER

A bucket collects water on the desk.

Paul stands next to a PLUMBER.

PLUMBER

Looks like I'm gonna have to get up
in there and see what's goin' on
with that pipe.

PAUL

And break a hole in the ceiling.

PLUMBER

Looks like it.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - DAY

Paul sits down at his desk. He places the outline with the
smeared sermon title in front of him.

He looks at the blank lines.

He hears the sound of the front door opening and closing.

AUDREY (V.O.)

Here he is! Mr. First day of High
School. So, how was it?

(beat)

Well, did you make any new friends?

Footsteps come up the stairs and another door is opened and
slammed shut.

Paul puts his pen to the paper-

-music starts up from Isaiah's room.

PAUL

Isaiah.

(beat)

Isaiah! Turn that down!

The music remains at volume. Paul gets up and heads to the
door, but before he can get there, his cell phone RINGS.

Paul answers the phone.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Hello?

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul and the plumber stare at ceiling where there is now a big gaping hole.

PLUMBER

Yup. It's definitely not the pipe.

PAUL

The roof.

PLUMBER

Looks like it. Had yourself a pool up there fit for a trout from last night's rain.

PAUL

Lucky me.

PLUMBER

Yup. I'd get you a roof repair man. Fast.

INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

Paul, Dick, Dean, Warren, HAROLD, 65, and PETE, 45, sit around a long wooden table in a forgotten basement room.

Paul heads up the table.

Warren looks in a large accounting book.

WARREN

We could ask people to volunteer their own toilet paper rolls. That would save us... seven-hundred and thirteen dollars.

PAUL

That's an idea, but-

DICK

It's no twenty thousand.

HAROLD

We could let that cult rent out the chapel, their willing to pay more than anyone else.

PETE

People have been complaining about
the cigarette-butts left by the AA-

DICK

I thought we all agreed not to go
there.

DEAN

I still think it's worth it to
change all the light-bulbs to the
energy saving kind.

PETE

I thought we decided they looked
too harsh.

WARREN

But the overall energy we'd save.
It's worth the investment-

PETE

I didn't say it wasn't, I only said-

PAUL

Gentlemen. We'll appeal to the
congregation, I'll work it into my
sermon.

The committee members look around at each other, unpersuaded

WARREN

There's no more money to be gotten.

PAUL

Just leave it to me.

The committee looks less than convinced.

Dean raises his hand timidly.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(amused)

Yes?

DEAN

What if it rains again?

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Plastic sheeting nailed to the roof heaves violently in the
wind and rain.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - DAY

Paul looks out his study window and sighs as he pins a little plastic sheet to the roof of his model church.

Paul gets up and goes to his writing desk where the unwritten sermon sits menacingly.

Paul sits down and concentrates. Finally he picks up a pen.

The moment the pen touches the page, music starts up from Isaiah's room.

PAUL

Now I remember why we got him the ipod.

His cell phone rings.

Paul crosses out the word 'Patience'.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Now what?

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul comes down the stairs. Audrey is sitting on the couch, surrounded by papers.

AUDREY

Where are you going?

PAUL

Sheep.

AUDREY

Sheep?

Paul puts his jacket on.

PAUL

Gail's afraid if I don't go now the Messiger's will bring them to the blessing of the animals Sunday.

AUDREY

But Paul...

PAUL

I know...

AUDREY

Sunday School starts next week and you still haven't OK'd the topics.

PAUL

I'm sure their fine. You don't need my approval for everything. Oh, can you make sure this music's off when I come back, it's been impossible to concentrate?

AUDREY

You know, now that I'll be teaching I won't be able to keep such a close eye on Isaiah anymore. You need to talk to him; you said you would.

PAUL

As soon as I finish this sermon. I promise.

AUDREY

Fine.

PAUL

Bless you.

Paul rushes out.

AUDREY

Gee, thanks.

EXT. CHURCH - STREET - DAY

Paul bumps into Gail on the way out the door. She is wearing a matching turquoise rain coat and polyester dress suit.

Gail hands him a stole with animals embroidered on it.

GAIL

Forget something?

PAUL

Yeah, I'll be needing that.

GAIL

I'm still waiting on a sermon title for the bulletin...

PAUL
(walking away)
Soon, I promise. Inspiration will
strike!

Gail shrugs; it's of no consequence to her.

EXT. FARM - GRAZING PASTURE - DAY

Paul stands before twelve sheep wearing a yellow rain poncho.

PAUL
John I bless you with long and
healthy life, and may you share
your blessings with Jean and Chris.
Peter, I bless you...

Bleating sheep drown him out.

I/E. PAUL'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Paul drives along a dirt country road.

PAUL
Giving all to God doesn't only
apply to your faith, it extends to
your pocketbook as well.
(beat)
No.
(beat)
It costs fifteen hundred dollars a
Sunday to heat this sanctuary every
winter. What are you willing to pay
to have God warm your soul?
(beat)
Come on, Paul.
(beat)
I know you don't want to have to
think about toilet paper, but
someone has to buy it.

Paul drives past a church. Paul's car screeches to a stop and
slowly backs up.

Paul lowers his window to get a better look at the church.

A sign out front reads 'First Baptist Church. This Sunday's
sermon: The Lord will Provide'.

Paul grabs a pen from the glove compartment. Looking around for a piece of paper he grabs his vehicle insurance card and hurriedly writes on the back of it.

Satisfied, he titles his sermon 'Giving all to God'.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Thank God for the Baptists.

Paul's car pulls away.

EXT. CHURCH - EVENING

As Paul drives past the church he sees a group of people smoking on the back steps.

EXT. PARSONAGE - EVENING

Paul pulls into the driveway.

As he gets out of his car he hears Isaiah's music coming from the house. It's hard to tell what makes him more annoyed, the music or the loiterers.

He chooses the later and walks over to the group of loiterers.

PAUL
You with the AA?

AA MEMBER 1
Yeah. How'd you know?

Paul motions to the cigarette-butt covered ground.

PAUL
The house of God is not an ashtray.
If it were, God would be a giant
cigar in the sky, and he'd put out
all those who dumped their ashes in
his pot.

AA MEMBER 2
Sorry, Man.

AA MEMBER 1
Yeah. We were just rockin' out to
the music, that's all.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVINGROOM - EVENING

The music plays at top volume as Paul enters the house.

PAUL
Audrey! Aud-

Audrey comes out of the kitchen with an apron on.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I thought I asked you to get him to
shut this racket off.

AUDREY
I asked him to! But he's ignoring
me.

PAUL
Then you should have turned it off
for him.

AUDREY
He locked the door.

PAUL
He what?

Paul heads up the stairs. Audrey starts to follow.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'll handle this. You go ahead and
finish diner.

Audrey shrugs and goes back toward the kitchen.

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - EVENING

Paul bangs on Isaiah's bedroom door.

PAUL
Isaiah.
(beat)
Turn off your music and open this
door, I want to talk to you.
(beat)
I said turn it off or I'll have to
take away your boom-box too.
(beat)
'Children, obey your parents in the
Lord, for this is right.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
Honor your father and your mother,
for this is the first commandment.'
(beat)
For the last time, turn off that
damn music, I've got some work to
get done!
(beat)
Alright you've given me no choice.

Paul rears up takes a breath and winces as he rams himself
into Isaiah's locked door.

Paul falls easily into the room.

INT. PARSONAGE - SON'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Paul catches his balance. He sees Isaiah lying on his bed.

PAUL
Isaiah!

He shuts off the boom box.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Isaiah.

Isaiah remains still.

Paul goes up to Isaiah.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Isai-

He turns Isaiah over. He is dead: a bottle of pills in one
hand and a suicide note in the other.

PAUL (CONT'D)
God.

INT. PARSONAGE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Paul walks into the dining-room. The sound of shaking pills
in his pants matches the beat of the hymn 'O How I Love
Jesus' that Audrey is singing in the kitchen.

The suicide note sticks out of his back pocket.

AUDREY (V.O.)
(singing)
There is a name I love to hear, I
love to sing its worth;
(MORE)

AUDREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
it sounds like music in my ear, the
sweetest name on earth. O how I
love Jesus, O how I love Jesus, O
how I love Jesus, because he first
loved me!

Paul steadies himself then walks toward her.

INT. PARSONAGE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Audrey sings as she finishes cutting up vegetables for the salad.

Paul watches her from the doorway.

AUDREY
It tells me of a Savior's love, who
died to set me free; it tells me of
his precious blood, the sinner's
perfect plea. O how I love-

A shadow falls across the vegetables.

Audrey looks up.

Paul steps into the kitchen.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
(to Paul)
I see you have the magic touch.
Hope you weren't too hard on him.

Paul doesn't respond.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Well, I'm not quite ready yet.

PAUL
Let me help.

AUDREY
OK... here.

Audrey hands him place settings for three.

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Paul sets the table, even Isaiah's spot as Audrey hums in the kitchen.

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Audrey and Paul sit at the table.

AUDREY

Isaiah!

(to Paul)

I'm going to get him.

Audrey get's up and starts to walk over to the stairs.

Paul concentrates on his plate.

PAUL

He's not coming!

AUDREY

What do you mean he's not coming? I
cooked pork chops.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul stands before a closed coffin as the congregation sing
the hymn 'Up from the Grave He Arose'.

CONGREGATION

Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus
my Savior; he tore the bars away,
Jesus my Lord! Up from the grave he
arose; with a mighty triumph o'er
his foes; he arose a victor from
the dark domain, and he lives
forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah!
Christ arose!

The hymn ends and all eyes shift to Paul.

Beat.

PAUL

In God's glorious plan there are no
accidents. If He has brought Isaiah
to him before we expected, it is
because He must have a plan for him
in heaven.

(beat)

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
So let us pray not for he who is at
peace, but for us, who should
remember to be thankful for the
life we have been given.

Everyone bows their heads.

PAUL (CONT'D)
O God our Father, creator of all
mankind, giver and preserver of all
life: We confess to thee our
slowness to accept death as part of
thy plan for life.

Paul eyes Isaiah's friend Luke who is crying.

Audrey strangely is not.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATER

Four members of the congregation lift the coffin and begin to
carry it out. The congregation follow.

As they leave Paul sees them throw away their funeral
programs in a wicker basket near the door.

Paul walks out.

Beat.

Eileen sneaks back in and hurriedly empties the wicker basket
into a large purse she is carrying.

INT. PARISH - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A pot of food is placed on the table in the spot where Isaiah
would normally sit.

Paul goes to serve himself, but Audrey pushes his hand away
and does it for him.

She sets the plate down in front of him.

Paul smiles as best he can. He picks up a fork to eat.

AUDREY
Paul!

Audrey holds out her hand.

PAUL
Oh. Right.

Paul puts down his fork and takes her hand. He watches her as she prays with her eyes closed.

AUDREY
Let us with a gladsome mind-

PAUL
Praise the Lord, for he is kind.

Silence.

Audrey opens her eyes and looks to Isaiah's usual place. Realizing he's not there, she continues quickly on.

AUDREY
For his mercies shall endure.

PAUL
Ever faithful, ever sure.

AUDREY
Amen.

PAUL
Amen.

Paul tries to hold onto her hand, but she pulls it away.

AUDREY
Forgot the lemon.

Audrey gets up from the table.

INT. PARSONAGE - PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul lies in bed next to a sleeping Audrey. He is wide awake.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - NIGHT

Paul turns on the light and adjusts to the brightness.

He goes over to his miniature model church and sits down.

Paul removes a miniature Isaiah from the church.

He touches it gently, then more and more until, trying to hold himself together, he clutches it in his hands.

Snap.

Paul opens his hands to see that the head has broken off the body.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Paul walks into church clutching his now finished sermon in one hand and something else in the other.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - DAY

The broken miniature Isaiah lies next to the model church; a headless body.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Paul walks toward his office.

Gail sees him.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul walks into his office where he starts to put on his robe.

Gail comes in after him.

Paul gets dressed throughout the scene.

GAIL
We weren't expecting you today.

PAUL
Well, I'm here.

GAIL
We asked Dan Salsbury to talk on his experiences in Sudan.

PAUL
(laughs)
Dan's a good man, but he's no preacher. I wouldn't have thought it possible to make lion hunts and scarification boring, but he manages...

GAIL
Well, he's not you, but he's alright as a stand in.

PAUL
And the blessing of the animals?

GAIL
He did work with lions.

PAUL
But never a scripture eating goat,
I bet. Tell him thanks for the
offer for me though, will you?

Paul walks out of the room.

Gail sighs and heads dutifully after him.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Paul and Gail walk down the hallway.

GAIL
We have things under control here,
you should go home and be with
Audrey.

PAUL
Audrey's teaching Sunday school.

GAIL
Today?

PAUL
I expect she's rehearsing with the
children right now. It's the big
money sermon, you know. We're
pulling out all the stops.

INT. CHURCH - BACK STAIRWELL - DAY

Paul walks down a flight of stairs.

GAIL
There's really no need.

PAUL
(curtly)
The roof wont fix itself.

Paul walks up a flight of stairs. Gail stands in front of him
pleadingly.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Why should the word of God stop
just because one life did?

GAIL
It's not just any life, it's-

Paul pushes past Gail and walks into the sanctuary where he
confronts a confused DAN SALSBURY, 43, clean cut.

GAIL (CONT'D)
-your son's.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

A group of children assemble before the congregation,
overseen by Audrey.

Audrey turns to the church.

AUDREY
The children have worked very hard
this morning practicing this little
tune in the spirit of giving, that
I hope all of you can let into your
hearts... and your pocketbooks.

The congregation chuckle uncomfortably.

Except for Luke who looks pretty bad off.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR
(singing)
Love is something if you give it
away, give it away, give it away.
Love is something if you give it
away, you'll end up having more.

MADDY, 7, as cute as they come, steps up to the mic.

MADDY
It's just like a magic penny. Hold
it tight and you wont have any.

Dick and Barb smile proudly.

MADDY (CONT'D)
Spend it, send it, and you'll have
so many, to roll all over the
floor.

Sam decides to enact the rolling on the floor bit.

The congregation laugh.

Audrey glares at him and he gets up.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR (CONT'D)	CHILDREN'S CHOIR (CONT'D)
For, love is something if you	Give it away. Give it away.
give it away, give it away,	Give it away. Give it away.
give it away. Love is	Give it away. Give it away.
something if you give it	Give it away. Give it away.
away, you'll end up having	Give it away. Give it away.
more.	Give it away. Give it away.

The choir stops and there is dead silence.

The children begin to look around.

Audrey looks at Paul.

Paul begins to clap.

Everyone joins in for a very hard and very brief applause.

The choir children are still leaving the chancel when the sanctuary falls silent again.

PAUL
 (reading what is written
 out word for word)
 Thank you, very nice. Very nice. A
 good lesson about giving all to
 God, which the children will
 explore further in their first
 'Trinity Trekkers' Sunday school of
 the season, how exciting.

The children all run out of the sanctuary, followed by
 Audrey.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Our bible reading for today will be
 from Genesis 22.1.

Edna grabs her bible and starts to flip to the appropriate
 passage.

Dick and Barb each step up to separate pulpits that flank the
 altar. They both have soft, sweet voices.

BARB
 God tested Abraham. He said to him,

DICK
 "Abraham!"

Cynthia glares down at them from the balcony.

BARB (V.O.)
And he said,

DICK (V.O.)
"Here I am."

BARB
He said,

DICK
"Take your son-

Dick looks at Paul uncomfortably. Paul nods for him to go ahead.

DICK (CONT'D)
-your only son Isaac, whom you
love, and go to the land of Moriah,
and offer him there as a burnt
offering..."

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

Dick and Barb's voices are carried over a baby monitor set up in the Sunday school room.

They are barely audible over a dozen kids who are running around like crazy, followed by Audrey who is trying to round them up.

A couple of kids, JEREMY, 6, and AUSTIN, 5, are fighting over a stuffed bunny.

Only Maddy sits patiently on a circle of large pillows humming to herself.

No one pays attention to the voices coming from the monitor.

BARB (V.O.)
Then Abraham reached out his hand
and took the knife to kill his son.
But the angel of the LORD called to
him from heaven, and said...

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

All eyes are on Paul who looks calm and collected.

DICK (V.O.)

"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Paul's knuckles are white from clenching the hand with Isaiah's miniature head in it.

BARB

This is the word of God.

BARB (CONT'D)

Amen.

DICK

Amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

Jeremy and Austin now fight over the bunny from the circle of pillows, where Audrey has managed to contain the children.

Some of them hold hands, others pick their noses.

AUDREY

Thank you God for us children.

Maddy is the only child who repeats everything Audrey says with heart and soul.

AUDRY (CONT'D)

Thank you God for us children.

CHILDREN

Thank you God for us children.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

May you offer us your wisdom.

AUDRY (CONT'D)

May you offer us your wisdom.

CHILDREN

May you offer us your wisdom.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Amen.

CHILDREN

Amen.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY -SAME

PAUL

Amen.

Paul walks to the center of the altar and adjusts a music stand to his height.

He places his sermon on it and reads.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'd like to talk to you today about giving all to God.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

Audrey and the children sit in the circle.

AUDREY

OK, so there was a man named Abraham.

SAM

What was his last name?

AUDREY

I don't know. He didn't have one. Anyway, this man named Abraham was asked to do something very difficult by God-

JEREMY

But everyone has a last name.

Jeremy grabs the bunny from Austin.

AUSTIN

(grabbing the bunny back)
I, I, I, I, I, I have a last name.

AUDREY

Well, Abraham didn't.

SAM

But-

AUDREY

OK: Kowalski. Abraham Kowalski. Everyone happy now?

Jeremy and Austin stop fighting.

The kids nod timidly.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Good. So... Abraham had-

Sam opens his mouth.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
-Abraham Kowalksi had a son named Isaac.

AUSTIN
What was his last name?

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

Paul reads from his sermon without looking up.

PAUL
Now, the place where Abraham brought Isaac was named "the Lord will provide" because God provided a ram in the place of a human sacrifice. The Lord will provide, but he can only offer what we are willing to sacrifice.

Paul pauses.

He clutches the miniature head.

Members on the congregation look at each other and share significant looks.

Paul takes a deep breath and continues.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Many of you may have noticed the embarrassing blemish on our church roof, which is there only because we do not have money in our budget to fix it.

Paul looks up from his sermon for the first time.

As he speaks he becomes more and more animated.

PAUL (CONT'D)

To this I say, if Abraham could
offer his only son, if God himself
offered his only son, Jesus, to
humanity so that we could all be
redeemed, I ask you: why can't we
offer up a few pennies among us to
repair his holy house?

(beat)

I say it's high time we provide for
the Lord!

Paul lets go of the miniature head as he raises his hand up
for dramatic effect.

It drops to the floor.

The head bounces and rolls behind the altar.

The congregation stare in disbelief.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

The children sit around Audrey their mouths open, silent for
once.

Sam shoots his hand up in the air.

AUDREY

Yes Sam?

SAM

Will God ask my daddy to kill me?

Maddy bursts out crying.

Audrey looks exasperated.

Jeremy and Austin start wrestling, each pulling at the bunny
from opposite ends.

INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

Jeremy and Austin stand in front of Paul and Audrey. Jeremy
holds the head of the stuffed bunny, Austin holds the body.

Behind them a line of people holding real pets, whisper
amongst each other as they wait for their turn.

Audrey motions for Jeremy to come forward.

Paul looks up, ready to receive him.

As he looks up everyone stops whispering and looks away; they were obviously staring at him.

Paul leans over to Audrey.

PAUL
(whispering)
This doesn't feel right. They don't
want us here.

AUDREY
Don't be silly.
(to Jeremy)
What is the name of your pet,
Jeremy?

JEREMY
Bunny.

PAUL
Bless you Bunny... 's head. May you
have a long, and uh, healthy life.
Amen.

JEREMY
Amen.

Audrey motions for Austin to come forward.

PAUL
They didn't want me to preach
today, you know.

AUDREY
(so?)
They didn't want me teaching Sunday
school either-

AUSTIN
His name is also Bunny.

AUDREY
Yes, Austin, we know.

PAUL
They were probably right. Maybe we
should take some time-

AUDREY
No.

AUSTIN
His head got ripped off by mutant
aliens.

AUDREY
Yes, Austin, that's very nice.

Paul aggressively grabs hold of the bunny.

PAUL
Bless you Bunny's body. May you
have a long and healthy life. Amen.

AUSTIN
Amen.

Jeremy and Austin run away excitedly as Dean comes forward.

AUDREY
(to Paul)
We made a commitment to this
congregation. We can't just ignore
our obligations.

Dean walks up to Paul.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
And what's the name of your animal?

Paul receives the turtle.

DEAN
Endangered.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - NIGHT

Paul sits at his desk with a sermon outline in front of him
that reads "Our Obligation to God". Most of the sermon has
been crossed out.

It's eerily quiet.

INT. PARSONAGE - LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Audrey sorts through dirty laundry, throwing the darks into
the washing machine.

She picks up a T-shirt with the words 'What Would Jason Do?'
printed under an image of a Jason mask.

Audrey pauses.

She inhales the scent of the shirt.

But then throws it decidedly in.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - MORNING

Paul wakes up at his desk to the sound of a washing machine going.

INT. PARSONAGE - LAUNDRY ROOM - MORNING

Audry sleeps hunched over a heap of clean laundry.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - MORNING

Paul looks out the window, it's early.

He picks up his sermon and reads it quietly to himself.

PAUL

Have I said that before?

Paul groggily goes to a filing cabinet and opens it. It is filled with hundreds of tapes organized by theme.

Paul skims over them: damnation, forgiveness, obedience; he stops on obligation.

He grabs a tape.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Paul fast-forwards through it a hymn. The hymn ends and he pushes play.

PAUL (V.O.)

-from Deuteronomy 10:12.

BARB (V.O.)

What does the LORD your God require of you?

DICK (V.O.)

Only to fear the LORD-

Paul fast-forwards. Play.

PAUL (V.O.)
-like to talk about obligations.

Paul sits in his chair and closes his eyes.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We all have them, at work, at home,
to our friends, to our mother-in-
laws...
(the congregation laughs)

Paul chuckles.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In fact we have so many obligations
that we often forget the most
important one: our obligation to
God.

(beat)
God gave us life. And for this we
must thank him, and to thank him,
we must obey him. For Noah that
meant building a giant boat on dry
land, and probably looking pretty
silly. For Abraham that meant being
willing to sacrifice his only son.

Paul opens his eyes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
And for his son, Isaac, that meant
being willing to be sacrificed.

Paul holds back tears.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And so Isaac walked, carrying the
wood that would be the death of him
on his back, like Jesus carrying
the cross.
(beat)
A true role model of obedience for
our children.

Paul shuts off the tape.

He closes his eyes and bows his head.

PAUL (CONT'D)

(hurriedly)

O God our Father, have compassion,
we pray thee, upon all those whose
hearts are touched with sorrow,
whose spirits are troubled or cast
down within them. Remember those to
who the burdens of this life bring
darkness of soul; have mercy upon
all who suffer... for the sake of
Jesus Christ, our burden-bearer and
Redeemer. Amen.

(beat)

How could you let this happen?

Paul looks up.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well?

There is a knock on the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What?

The door opens, and there stands MARK, 22, the kind that
still believes in world peace.

MARK

Hi, Pastor Sternwell, sorry for the
intrusion, they told me at the
church I could find you here.

PAUL

And you are?

MARK

Sorry, Mark.

(beat)

Your new Pastoral Assistant.

Mark holds out his hand. Paul doesn't take it.

PAUL

My what?

Mark withdraws his hand and laughs nervously.

MARK

Your Pastoral Assis-

PAUL
Who sent you?

MARK
Oh!

Mark hands him a card and smiles eagerly.

INSERT CARD:

Paul,

Sorry I couldn't be there. Thought I'd give you a gift more useful than flowers. Use him as you see fit.

Blessings,

Bishop Langston Lovett

BISHOP LOVETT (V.O.)
I see you got my card.

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE WITH THE BISHOP WILL BE REWORKED.

INT. BISHOP LOVETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul scowls as he holds the card.

BISHOP LANGSTON LOVETT, 50, African American, jovial, sits behind his desk across from him.

PAUL
Yes. It was very thoughtful. And it's not that I don't appreciate the gesture, but I don't really need any help.

Paul holds out the card to the bishop.

The bishop pushes his hand back.

BISHOP LOVETT
That's not what a certain concerned member of your congregation told me when they had Janice track me down yesterday during Sunday lunch with my mother.

PAUL
Who called you?

BISHOP LOVETT
I was told in confidence.

PAUL
It was Gail Peterson, wasn't it?

BISHOP LOVETT
I'm not at liberty to say, you know that.

PAUL
Well, what did she say then?

BISHOP LOVETT
Listen, Paul, I'd love to chat-

Bishop Lovett gets up and starts to collect his things.

BISHOP LOVETT (CONT'D)
-but I have to jet. I've got to go
bless the new wing of our office
building, very exciting, can't
possibly get out of it.

The Bishop opens his door and gestures for Paul to go out first.

INT. BISHOP LOVETT'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Paul enters into a waiting room, followed by Bishop Lovett.

A secretary, JANICE, 65, stylish, sits at a desk wearing a headset and talking on the phone.

BISHOP LOVETT
But let Janice know if you need
anything, and make an appointment
next time so we can catch up.

Bishop Lovett pats Paul on the back.

He crosses the room to a stairwell door and enters.

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Bishop Lovett opens the door to a stairwell and begins to trot down the stairs. Paul follows.

PAUL
Bishop Lovett!

Paul catches up with him.

They continue down the stairs full-ahead.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I can't go back.

BISHOP LOVETT
You want to quit?

PAUL
Yes.

BISHOP LOVETT
No you don't.

PAUL
Actually, now that I think about
it...

BISHOP LOVETT
So, your having a spiritual crisis:
It happens to the best of us.

Paul looks surprised.

BISHOP LOVETT (CONT'D)
We've all had them. But let me tell
you from experience: you'll be just
fine.

INT. NEW WING OF BISHOP'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Paul and Bishop Lovett exit the stairwell.

They walk down a hall toward a small, but noisy crowd of
people who stand in front of the new wing which has been
blocked off by a raised platform and a red ribbon.

PAUL
Let the kid take over.

BISHOP
First you say you don't need help,
and now you want a young man two
months out of seminary to take
charge of your congregation?
(beat)
(MORE)

BISHOP (CONT'D)
Paul, think about it: Where would you live, what would you do? What about your congregation who depend on you? What about your wife? Does she know you're here?

PAUL
She wouldn't understand.

They reach the crowd.

BISHOP LOVETT
No, I can't let you quit, you're just too emotional right now.

PAUL
I'm not emotional!

Everyone looks at him. The Bishop looks condescendingly at him.

BISHOP LOVETT
Paul, go home, take a vacation, clear your head, then get back to work.

Bishop Lovett is ushered toward the front of the crowd. Paul fights to keep up.

PAUL
I don't think you understand.
(beat)
I'm not sure I believe in God anymore.

They reach the platform.

Bishop Lovett is helped up onto the platform.

BISHOP LOVETT
(smiles down at him)
But God believes in you.

Bishop Lovett is handed a pair of very large golden scissors.
The ribbon is cut.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul enters a dark and quiet house.

He walks through the livingroom-

INT. PARSONAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - SAME

-and into the kitchen. No one is there.

PAUL
Audrey?

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Paul goes up the stairs.

PAUL
Audrey!?

AUDREY (V.O.)
In here!

INT. PARSONAGE - ISAIAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul open's Isaiah's door to see her putting the finishing touches on the now spotless room.

Mark is sitting on the bed, they are both smiling as if they've just shared a private joke.

PAUL
What's he still doing here?

MARK
Your wife has graciously offered to let me stay in your home.

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - DAY

Mark stands outside Isaiah's bedroom door trying very hard to distract himself with the woodwork.

PAUL (V.O.)
Did you tell that boy that he could stay in this room?

INT. PARSONAGE - ISAIAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Audry makes the bed.

AUDREY
(cold)
Your son would have wanted us to.

Paul grabs the sheet from Audrey's hands.

PAUL (V.O.)
No. Our son, Isaiah, would have
wanted his privacy. The kid's not
staying here.

INT. PARSONAGE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mark, and Audrey sit across from each other. Audrey reaches out and grabs a giant spoon in a bowl of mashed potatoes.

Mark reaches out and covers her hand.

MARK
Let me.

Audrey smiles and blushes. She lets him.

Paul sitting at the end of the table glares at them.

Mark serves him and smiles. He doesn't smile back. Mark gets the hint and looks away.

They all get their food in silence.

AUDREY
Mark, would you like to lead us in
prayer.

Mark looks at Paul guiltily.

MARK
Of course.

Audrey holds out her hands and Mark takes it. He holds out his hand to Paul who looks at it with utter disdain.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Audrey struggles to unfold a pullout couch.

AUDREY
I am so sorry.

Mark rushes over to help.

MARK
Don't worry about it.

AUDREY
He hasn't been himself since our
son died.

MARK
He- Oh, no one told me. I thought
he was away at college or
something.

AUDREY
He was 15.

MARK
I'm sorry.

AUDREY
I'm just so embarrassed.

MARK
Don't be. I understand completely.

AUDREY
I don't.
(beat)
I'm just so glad you're here.

Audrey leans forward and gives him a kiss good night on the
cheek. She lingers a bit too long.

She pulls away.

Awkward silence.

AUDREY (CONT'D) MARK
Well, good night. Good night.

INT. PARSONAGE - PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul and Audrey lie in bed. Audrey's back is to him.

PAUL
After 19 years of marriage I know
how you breath when you're asleep
and how you breath when you're
pretending to be.

AUDREY
So, I'm mad at you.

PAUL
That's all you seem to be lately.

Audrey turns over and faces him.

AUDREY
I'm sorry. This hasn't been easy
for me. It might look that way, but
it's hasn't.

Paul holds Audrey.

PAUL
I'm here.

They hold each other tightly.

Paul begins to stroke a curve.

Audrey pulls away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What?

Paul kisses her, but she pulls away again.

AUDREY
Mark will hear.

PAUL
So let him; the kid has to learn
about the birds and the bees sooner
or later.

He takes Audrey in his arms, and she lets him.

AUDREY
(smiles)
Paul!

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVINGROOM - NIGHT

Mark sits reading by lamp light.

He hears the sound of a bed rocking back and forth.

INT. PARSONAGE - PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Audrey tries to push Paul off of her.

AUDREY
Stop.

PAUL
Why?

AUDREY
Just stop.

Paul flops next to her.

Silence.

PAUL
You wanna hear something I've never
told you before?

Audrey doesn't respond.

PAUL (CONT'D)
When I was younger, I was
embarrassed to have sex because I
actually thought that God was
watching. Even after we were
married, I always felt a little
guilty afterwards.
(laughs)
Now I feel free and you're-

Audrey turns over and faces away from him again.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Ignoring me again.

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Paul closes the bedroom door behind him and heads toward his study.

He hears a voice.

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Paul tiptoes down the stairs following the voice.

MARK (V.O.)
Tend thy sick ones, O Lord Christ.
Rest thy weary ones. Bless thy
dying ones. Soothe thy suffering
ones.

He sees Mark praying.

MARK (CONT'D)
Pity thy afflicted ones. Shield thy
joyous ones. This we ask for thy
love's sake. Amen.

(beat)
Oh, and please watch over Pastor
Sternwell. I fear for his faith. He
seems so... fragile. Amen.

Paul gives a "you've got to be kidding me?" look.

INT. HOUSE - STUDY - MORNING

Mark knocks on the door and sticks his head in.

Paul sits up in his chair; it is obvious that he slept there.

MARK
Oh, I was just wondering if you had
a minute.

Paul grunts.

Mark takes that as a 'yes' and goes in all the way.

Paul busies himself with the model church.

MARK (CONT'D)
Wow, is this the church?

Paul tries not to look too proud.

PAUL
Yeah, well... it's just a hobby.

MARK
It's quite a hobby. Have you been
doing this for long?

PAUL
This model? I started it when I
came to this church 17 years ago.
Before that? Well, I wanted to be
carpenter, like Jesus. A walking
stereotype, right? Of course, that
was before I went to seminary and
found out that was all a lie; Jesus
never was a carpenter. It was meant
as an insult to imply that he was
ignorant. But they don't teach you
that in Sunday school.

MARK

Well, it's turned out to serve a useful purpose none-the-less.

PAUL

And what would that be?

MARK

To contain the chaotic world. Isn't that why children play with doll houses?

PAUL

This isn't a doll house.

MARK

I know.

PAUL

Did you have something you wanted to tell me?

MARK

Yes!

(beat)

I want to help.

PAUL

I don't need any help.

MARK

I'm sure you don't, but, well, Gail gave me a tour of the church yesterday, and quite frankly, it does.

Mark points to part of the model's ceiling.

MARK (CONT'D)

There's peeling paint on the ceiling here.

Mark points to the model flooring.

MARK (CONT'D)

And warped flooring here.

(beat)

But I see you've constructed yourself an idealized version.

Paul closes the model defensively.

MARK (CONT'D)
Ahh, but you have the roof at
least. We often only notice the
problems that are too big to
ignore, don't you think?

Paul examines Mark; he agrees.

INT. CHURCH - STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Mark blows the dust off a small nativity set, sitting on a
shelf of other Christmas related paraphernalia in a cluttered
storage room.

He coughs as the dusts billows around him.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - DAY

Paul smirks as he writes a sermon.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

Audrey and the children sit in their circle.

Jeremy and Austin cling to their respective parts of the
stuffed bunny.

Audrey takes a small doll out of a bag.

AUDREY
Look everyone! Today I've got a new
friend for you to play with. Her
name is Molly Morals! Can everyone
say 'hi' to Molly!

CHILDREN
(droning)
Hi, Molly.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

Paul walks up to the pulpit.

AUDREY (V.O.)
Now sometimes Molly can be good.

The congregation looks apprehensive.

AUDREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And sometimes Molly can be bad.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY

AUDREY
Now, we're going to pass her around
the circle and I'll tell you
something that she did. If she's
been good I'll ask you to place her
in the rewards basket.

Audrey gestures to a basket decorated to look like heaven
with the word 'rewards' glued onto it.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
But if she's bad...

The hell basket sits, the word 'consequences' glued on in red
glitter.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul takes out his sermon and puts it on the podium.

PAUL
Today's sermon is titled 'Our
Obligation to God.'

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY

AUDREY
Now Sam, listen closely.

Audrey reads from her lesson plan.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Molly Morals sees her elderly
neighbor bringing in groceries from
the store. She runs out to help
her. Now where does Molly go?

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul preaches.

PAUL

Some would say we are obligated to God because he made the world for us and because he takes care of us, be it in mysterious ways.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY

Sam thinks.

SAM

The heaven basket?

AUDREY

The rewards basket, Sam.

(beat)

Go ahead.

Sam puts Molly in the rewards basket.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Now it's your turn Maddy.

Audrey takes Molly out of the rewards basket and passes it to Maddy. Maddy is taking this game seriously.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Molly Morals steals a cookie out of the cookie jar. When her mother asks her if she took it, Molly lies and says 'no'. Now, where does Molly go?

MADDY

Molly goes to Hell.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

PAUL

Well, I'm here to tell you that...

Paul pushes his sermon aside.

PAUL (CONT'D)

That that's a load of crap.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY

Maddy dunks Molly in the consequences basket.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The congregation's jaws drop.

Luke looks up.

Edna fiddles with her earphones to make sure their working properly.

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME

Silence.

MADDY

Audrey. Pastor Sternwell said a bad word.

CHILDREN

Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap!...

AUDREY

Just sit down and shut up, I can't hear!

The kids all stop. Maddy looks wounded.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

PAUL

For those of you who think God will solve your problems, I've got news for you: there is no God.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY - SAME

Audrey leads the kids up the stairs.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

PAUL

And if there is no God then there is no plan.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY - SAME

Audrey leads the kids down the hallway.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY - SAME

PAUL

So you better stop waiting for some
sort of divine intervention to fix
what's wrong with your lives, and
have some personal accountability.

Audrey and kids enter back of sanctuary.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Because no one's going to make
anything happen but you.

Maddy rushes over to Dick and Barb and hugs them.

She whispers something to them and they all glare at Audrey.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Everything else...

Paul sees Audrey.

PAUL (CONT'D)

It's just one big accident.

Audrey glares at him and ushers the children out.

PAUL (CONT'D)

So now I guess, as usual, it's time
to give us your money. But just so
you know, it won't be going to God.
It'll be going to this church: to
pay for toilet paper and to fix the
roof. So don't bother giving us a
penny because you feel "obligated".
The only person you're obligated to
is yourself, to go home and live
your life-

(beat)

-and let me live mine.

Paul signals Warren to play, and he does.

Paul starts to walk defiantly down the center isle as the
ushers hand out the collection plates.

He feels everyone's eyes on his neck.

As he reaches the door in the back of the sanctuary he sees a
small line of smiling people waiting to greet him.

Paul starts to open the door.

CONGREGATION MEMBER 1
Aren't you going to say anything to us?

PAUL
There's nothing to say.

HAROLD
What about how inspiring your sermon was?

PAUL
I don't get it.

EILEEN
I do.

The music stops and all eyes are again on Paul and Eileen. Some people stand up to get a better look at what's going on in the back.

EILEEN (CONT'D)
I've been feeling obligated to the memory of all those people who died, but keeping them in storage won't bring them back. They're with God now. I'm the one who's alive, and that means I need to be obligated to myself.

PAUL
Actually, what I meant was-

EILEEN
God gave me my life to live it. And He won't judge me for doing so.

HAROLD
Like you said, that god doesn't exist.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - LATER

Paul greets a huge line of people as they exit the sanctuary.

Warren's steps up to Paul.

WARREN

Just thought you'd like to know,
there was a record amount given in
today's offerings. I counted it
myself because I couldn't believe
my eyes; I've never seen the
collection plates so full.

Paul looks confused, but also kinda proud.

Warren walks on.

Dick comes up to Paul.

DICK

Can I talk to you? It's about your
wife.

INT. CHURCH - STAIRWELL TO STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Audrey walks up the stairs carrying a plate with a sandwich
and a glass of lemonade.

INT. CHURCH - STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Mark, covered with dust, sits on the floor, surrounded by
storage items.

AUDREY (V.O.)

Hungry?

Mark looks up and sees Audrey through a cloud of dust. She
holds up the food and drink.

INT. CHURCH - STORAGE ROOM - LATER

Mark and Audrey sit eating beside a large foam camel.

MARK

Can I ask you a question?

AUDREY

No, I don't know what's gotten into
him.

MARK

Actually I was going to ask how you
and Pastor Sternwell met?

AUDREY

Oh. He saved me.

MARK

He converted you?

AUDREY

I was a college student, lost, no support to speak of. And he was... well, he was irresistible; the most confident man I'd ever seen. If you'd only known him then... Ask anybody, they'll tell you.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Warren sits at the organ practicing.

WARREN

(to the camera)

He converted his whole family, extended too. Slipped Bibles into their Christmas stockings. Everyone knew it was him, but he denied it for years; said it was a miracle.

Mark takes this in as he windexes the mirror over the organ.

INT. CHURCH - GAIL'S OFFICE - DAY

Gail organizes some papers.

GAIL

Paul isn't his real name; he changed it when he was saved. It was Stanley. Stanley Sternbenk.

Gail suppresses a grin.

Mark does too as he changes the light-bulb in her desk lamp.

INT. CHURCH - STAIRWELL - DAY

Cynthia hauls in a large plastic bag for the rummage sale.

CYNTHIA

He only got married when he was told that to be a pastor of a large church he should have a family.

Mark polishes the banister.

EXT. CHURCH - SIDEWALK - DAY

Edna is helped out of the yellow bus by the driver.

EDNA
What? Who died?

Mark pulls weeds from out of the sidewalk cracks.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Nan, puts on her choir robe.

NAN
Horrible accident. I heard it was
aspirin. He just took too much.
Kids are so impatient these days.

CHOIR MEMBER 1
No, it was Paul's heart medicine
that was kept in an old aspirin
bottle. That's what I heard.

CHOIR MEMBER 2
I heard it was Audrey's Valium.

Mark de-lints the choir robes.

NAN
Audrey takes Valium?

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Luke files into the sanctuary behind Dick who heads to the
altar where Paul is standing.

MARK (V.O.)
Hi, Luke, right?

LUKE
Who are you?

MARK
I'm Mark, the new Pastoral
Assistant.

Luke doesn't care one way or the other.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'm staying at the Sternwell's. I
hear you were friends with their
son. I'm sorry that-

LUKE
You heard wrong.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - SAME

Paul stands at the back with Dick who is flipping through the Bible to the appropriate scripture passage.

Dick sees Luke walk away from Mark. Luke sit in his usual seat, head down.

DICK
That new assistant of yours has
been nosing around an awful lot.

PAUL
I know. But not for long...

INT. CHURCH - SUNDAY SCHOOL - DAY

Audrey walks into the Sunday school room.

All of the kids are already sitting obediently in a circle around Eileen, who looks guiltily up at Audrey.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Barb and Dick stand at the pulpit reading the scripture.

DICK
He called the twelve and began to
send them out two by two, and gave
them authority over the unclean
spirits.

BARB
He said to them.

DICK
"Wherever you enter a house, stay
there until you leave the place. If
any place will not welcome you and
they refuse to hear you, as you
leave, shake off the dust from your
feet as testimony against them."

BARB
This is the word of God.

EVERYONE
Amen.

Dick and Barb step down and Paul steps forward.

PAUL
As Christians, we have been taught
our whole lives is that we have the
power to save even the most wicked-
hearted. But, as you just heard in
our gospel reading for today, even
Jesus knew that you can't save
everybody. Some people are a lost
cause.
(to Mark)
So I'm here today to tell you to
shake the dust off your feet and
leave town.

Mark stares defiantly back.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Mark walks defiantly toward the memorial room. He is holding
a silver cross in his hand.

INT. CHURCH - MEMORIAL ROOM - DAY

As Paul walks through the memorial room people stop him to
complement him on his sermon.

INT. CHURCH - MEMORIAL ROOM- DAY

Mark walks into the memorial room and looks around.

Dean rushes up to Paul.

DEAN
Your sermon: it... it was...

Paul readies himself for a lecture.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Fantastic.

PAUL

I don't understand why everyone
thinks it was so great. What I said
was-

Mark looks for Paul.

DEAN

Everything's clear now. Maybe I can
save the turtles, but I can't save
the turtles, and the polar bears,
and all the starving children in
the world. I need to save myself
first, for my family's sake.

(beat)

Thank you.

Mark spots Paul from behind.

PAUL

(perplexed)

Any time.

Mark walks up to him, and points the cross at him like a gun.
He opens his hand and lets a key drop from the a chain
connected to the cross.

INT. CHURCH - STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Paul turns the key with the cross key-chain in the lock and
opens the storage room door.

He turns on the light in the storage room. Everything is
spotless and perfectly organized.

So is the organ, and the banister, and gail's office, and the
choir robes, and the sidewalk.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Paul can't help but be impressed.

MARK

Now I'm ready to help for real.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Paul and Mark stand in front of a large pile of roofing
singles.

MARK

Surprise!

PAUL

Where did you get the money for these?

MARK

Your organist is your accountant.

PAUL

He's certified.

MARK

And 75. I saved you over three thousand dollars in bad accounting.

PAUL

You what?

MARK

That and last week's sermon bought us these.

Mark opens up a box and displays the goods.

Paul closes the box.

PAUL

And what made you think you had any authority to buy them? "Arrogance is hateful to the Lord."

MARK

I was sent here to help. I thought it was one less thing for you to worry about, so did the finance committee.

PAUL

You met with the finance committee behind my-?

MARK

And "love is not envious, or boastful or arrogant."

Mark open the box again.

PAUL

"You have played the whore with many lovers."

And Paul closes it.

MARK

"Do not be quick to anger, for
anger lodges in the bosom of
fools."

Mark starts to open it, but Paul forces his hand back down.
He stares at Mark, and Mark stares right back.

PAUL

"Therefore the anger of the Lord
was kindled against his people, and
he stretched out his hand against
them and struck them; and... and
their corpses were like refuse in
the streets."

MARK

"His anger is but for a moment; his
favor is for a lifetime."

PAUL

Well... God said "I will be an
enemy to your enemies and a foe to
your foes."

MARK

"You have heard that it was said,
'You shall love your neighbor and
hate your enemy.' But I say to you,
Love your enemies and pray for
those who persecute you..."

Mark slides Paul's hand off on his and opens the box.

MARK (CONT'D)

"For if you love those who love
you, what reward do you have?"

Paul can't come up with a return.

MARK (CONT'D)

I'll do all the work.

PAUL

I was a carpenter.

EXT. CHURCH - ROOF - DAY

Mark and Paul lie harnessed against the roof, rolling out roofing felt and tacking it down.

Paul clings on for dear life.

PAUL

So where'd you learn how to shingle
a roof?

MARK

I wanted to be a carpenter too.

They both look at each other and laugh.

MARK (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question Pastor
Sternwell?

PAUL

If you stop calling me Pastor
Sternwell and start calling me Paul
like everybody else.

MARK

How did you get into the ministry?

PAUL

I was bullied in school, found God,
the usual. I was a real bible
thumper; it was just me and God
against the world.

MARK

Before you got married.

PAUL

(laughs)

Yes. Then it was me and God against
the world, and a wife.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVINGROOM - EVENING

Paul sits on the couch staring at the front door. It is getting dark.

Mark sits reading a copy of Audrey's 'Crochetting for Christ' magazine at the table nearby.

PAUL
(to himself)
This is ridiculous.

Mark looks up.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'm hungry.

INT. CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

Paul walks into the basement. It has been transformed into a sea of tables and rummage sale items.

PAUL
Where does all this stuff come from?

EILEEN
The Unitarian rummage sale mostly.

Paul jumps. He turns around to see Eileen sorting through some shirts.

EILEEN (CONT'D)
If you buy stuff on the 10 cents day you can sell it for over %500 profit, guaranteed.

PAUL
Eileen, have you seen Audrey by any chance?

EILEEN
She's over by the Dancing Santas.

Paul spots Audrey. He walks over to her.

PAUL
It's 7:30.

Audrey takes a Dancing Santa out of a large trash bag and puts on a table with about a dozen other ones.

AUDREY
It is.

She moves away from Paul. He follows.

PAUL
Well, aren't you coming home?

Audrey takes out another item, places it on a table and walks away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Alright, what is it this time?

AUDREY
I should have known you wouldn't
have the guts to tell me yourself;
as usual you had to get Gail to do
your dirty work for you.

PAUL
Oh.

AUDREY
Imagine how foolish I felt walking
into Sunday School and finding
Eileen Hunt sitting there.

Audrey looks over her shoulder at Eileen who is now trying on
a kitty sweater vest.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Eileen Hunt, of all people!

Audrey angrily slams an item onto a table.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
Why should I suffer for your lack
of faith?

PAUL
I had complaints from the parents,
Audrey. What should I have done?

AUDREY
At least talked to me about it.

PAUL
How can I when you refuse to even
finish a conversation? Every time I-

AUDREY
You're right, it is late. I should
go make dinner for Mark.

Audrey puts down the bag and starts to walk away.

Paul looks around him to see if anyone else witnessed Audrey's behavior when he catches Cynthia's eye.

Paul quickly looks away, but it is too late. Audrey is leaving and Cynthia is walking straight for him carrying a large box.

CYNTHIA

I'm so glad your here. You wont believe what Dick just did. I was-

PAUL

Just get over it already.

Cynthia is taken aback.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You're not the only one who has problems you know.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - MORNING

Paul and Audrey enter the church together followed by Mark.

They walk off in separate directions without speaking to each other.

Mark stands there unsure of who to follow.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul stands in front of the congregation holding a cardboard box.

PAUL

This weekend is a very big event for our church. According to my wife, whom most of you know, it's the most important one. The Annual 'Good Will' Rummage Sale.

(beat)

Nothing's safe in our house.

Everyone laughs.

Well, everyone, but Audrey.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Every year I'm forced to go through my stuff, even though I hardly have anything left I can call my own. You know what I'm talking about Charley.

CHARLEY, 75, nods his head in agreement. His WIFE, 70, concedes.

PAUL (CONT'D)

This year I found a few relics that until now I just couldn't part with. But I think their time has come. So before their gone for good, I thought I'd share them with you.

Paul holds up a tie.

PAUL (CONT'D)

My communion tie. In case those of you in the back can't see, it's covered with little glasses of wine.

The congregation smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I thought it made sense to wear it because Jesus did allegedly give a certain Last Supper toast over a loaf of bread and a glass of wine. Of course, we drink grape juice here, so it doesn't make much sense for me to keep this.

Paul lets it drop to the ground.

Paul reaches into the box and takes out a 'praying hands' plaque.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Ahhh, the praying hands. But I say why pray when you can act?

He drops the plaque and it clatters to the floor.

He takes out a cross.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Too morbid.

He drops it.

A bronzed ten commandments plaque.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Thou shalt not kill. Who here
wouldn't have killed Hitler if they
had the chance?

Drops it.

PAUL (CONT'D)
All of this stuff... it's as stale
as a communion wafer. I mean, when
did wine become grape juice? Jesus
was a revolutionary, and
revolutionaries, don't drink grape
juice.

Paul empties the whole box onto the ground.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(to Audrey.)
For the free box, Darling.

If looks could kill...

Everyone claps.

Paul looks amazed.

MONTAGE:

(note: There are more people in the congregation for each
sermon.)

The choir stands and sings Handel's 'let us break the bonds
asunder'

Audrey sulks as all around her the chaos of the rummage sale
ensues.

Paul holds two dolls up; one is dressed like Mary, one like
Joseph. He has them kiss.

Mark and Paul work on the roof.

Paul uncovers a tray of tiny communion cups filled with grape kool-aid, and silver platters filled with donut holes.

Leaves fall on the roof as Mark and Paul continue to fix it.

Paul stands in front of the congregation dressed as Lucifer.

A dusting of snow covers the now finished roof.

Paul shows evolution poster of a monkey turning into Jesus.

Mark and Paul fix the hole in Paul's office ceiling.

Eileen comes in carrying a large box.

The congregation claps enthusiastically.

Funeral brochures line the floor as the ceiling is painted.

INT. CHURCH - PAUL'S OFFICE - DAY

Paul picks up the last funeral brochure and puts it in his trash can.

He sinks into his desk chair. He looks exhausted, but happy.

There is a knock on door.

PAUL

Yes?

There is no response.

Paul looks up and sees Luke standing awkwardly in his doorway. His eyes are puffy and red.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Luke. Come in.

Luke takes a step in.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What can I help you with?

LUKE

It's my fault.

PAUL

What is.

LUKE

It's my fault Isaiah died.

PAUL

Luke, it was an accident.

LUKE

I know, but, I know he didn't mean to overdose, but he wouldn't have taken those medications if... if I hadn't made him feel so shitty. I'm sorry.

PAUL

What are you talking about?

LUKE

I didn't want to tell you, but what you said in your sermon about being accountable for your actions and all...

(beat)

He hit on me.

PAUL

Hit as in?

LUKE

I kinda suspected, but I didn't really know until... He said he loved me and I... I told him to fuck off.

Paul breaths a sigh of relief.

PAUL

I thought it was me. I blamed myself.

LUKE

I thought you said it was an accident.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul stands under the lamp in church.

PAUL
(to God)
Just kill me now if that's what you
want. Just do it! Put me out of my
misery.

Looking up he sees the dome of rainbow-colored angels.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul stands before the congregation.

PAUL
It has come to my attention that my
son, Isaiah Sternwell, who many of
you know died recently, was gay.

Audrey sits perfectly rigid stares straight ahead.

Luke sinks down into his seat.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I did not know this. Perhaps there
were many things I didn't know
about him. I do know I wasn't the
best father. But I'd like to make
up for it now. If Isaiah were here
I'd want him to know that he was
accepted, in my heart and in this
community. So, from this day on I
would like to make this church all
inclusive. And just to make it
perfectly clear, that means gays,
lesbians, transvestites,
transsexuals; they're all welcome
here. I say, if Jesus could eat
with lepers, we can commune with
queers.

(beat)
So let's celebrate.

Paul signals Warren who begins to play a hymn.

Paul goes back to him and whispers something in his ear.

The hymn morphs into a tango.

Paul goes over to Mark and starts to Tango with him. Mark
looks uncomfortable but as the congregation laughs he lets
himself go.

Paul partners Mark with Luke, but Luke resists and sits back down.

Mark is partnered with Dick instead, much to the amusement of Barb.

Barb with Cynthia. Barb is oblivious to Cynthia's death stare.

Dean with finance Harold.

The rainbow angels above watch down approvingly.

Soon everyone is singing and dancing their hearts out including the choir.

Paul extends a hand to Luke who finally accepts and they dance together.

Only Audrey seems uncomfortable with the situation.

INT. CHURCH - MEMORIAL ROOM - DAY

Audrey hurriedly walks up to Mark, her head down, avoiding all contact with the congregation who is talking excitedly among each other in small gossiping groups.

Mark is talking to Edna.

MARK

Well... no, not exactly. I mean yes, it's that too, but really it's about that if two people are in love, regardless of their gender.

EDNA

Or sex.

MARK

Yes, or sex. Well, that's OK with God.

Audrey slips her arm through Mark's and hooks him at the elbow. She pulls him away.

AUDREY

(to Edna)

Mind if I borrow him?

Audrey drags him away without waiting for an answer.

MARK
Hey, I was-

AUDREY
(whispering)
We need to talk.

Audrey hurries him out of the Memorial room.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

Audrey leads him down the hall. Glancing around to make sure the coast is clear she opens a closet door and pushes him in. She follows, closing the door behind her.

INT. CHURCH - BACK ROOM - DAY

In darkness.

AUDREY
I'm sorry, I just need someone to
talk to.

MARK
Audrey, I can't talk to someone I
can't see.

AUDREY
Of course you can; you talk to God.

MARK
Audrey...

A light comes on.

Audrey holds a pull string light. She is centimeters away from Mark in a cramped closet filled with electrical switches, circuit breaker boxes, and thermostats.

Mark moves back what little space he can.

MARK (CONT'D)
Thank you.

AUDREY
I'm sorry.

MARK
Don't apologize.

AUDREY

I just don't know what to do. What he said, about Isaiah... I don't know what he thinks he heard, but...

MARK

Why don't you talk to him about it?

AUDREY

Talk to him? You know what he's been like.

(beat)

God, what's going to happen?

MARK

I heard of a church that did this in California, but that's California, and even they needed a vote. Bishop Lovett won't like it, but don't worry, I won't tell.

AUDREY

California? Votes? Don't you see what's happening? He's destroying himself, and the church with him.

(beat)

We have to help him.

MARK

You don't think I've tried? I've been praying for him every night.

AUDREY

The time for praying is over.

MARK

What do you suggest we do?

AUDREY

You have to help me.

Audrey takes a step toward him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

We have to help each other.

Mark tries to move back but just bumps into the wall.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

I can't take it any more. He's not the man I married.

She presses against him and leans in for a kiss.

Mark grabs her by the shoulders and moves her away.

MARK
Neither am I.

Mark lets go of her and opens the door.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I can't help you in that way.

Mark walks out.

Audrey sees Cynthia out in the hallway looking suspiciously at her.

Audrey closes the door quickly.

She shakes, holding back tears.

She shuts off the light as the first tear falls.

INT. BISHOP'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Audrey waits.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

A group of church members including Dean, Dick, Barb, Cynthia, and Gail hang up Christmas decorations.

Children practice for Christmas pageant.

Mark sees Paul alone hanging a wreath and goes to help him.

INT. BISHOP LOVETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Audrey sits before Bishop Lovett, tiny in his large leather chair.

BISHOP LOVETT
What can I do for you?

AUDREY
It's about my husband.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Children practice for nativity scene.

Mark and Paul hang boughs of fake holly from the balcony.

MARK

Paul. I'm worried about Audrey.

PAUL

How so?

MARK

Well, she seems upset by your last sermon.

PAUL

What isn't she upset about these days?

Paul goes to take a twist-tie out of a bag. The bag is empty.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Can you run and get us some more twist-ties, I've run out.

MARK

Sure.

PAUL

I'll just hold this here.

Mark laughs and walks away.

Paul holds the bough, when suddenly a hand covers his.

It's all Paul can do to keep his balance.

He looks up to see Cynthia on the balcony tying a red ribbon to the banister.

CYNTHIA

You and Mark seem to be getting along well.

PAUL

Yeah, he turned out to be a good kid.

Paul smiles fondly at Mark who is helping Edna untangle a rope of Christmas lights.

CYNTHIA
He's such a good looking boy too.

PAUL
I guess.

CYNTHIA
Audrey seems to think so.

PAUL
What are you getting at?

CYNTHIA
Oh, it's nothing I'm sure. It's
only that, last Sunday, I saw them
coming out of a closet together.
(beat)
There, got it.

Cynthia finishes tying the bow and walks on.

Paul looks curiously at Mark. Mark sees him looking and
smiles.

Paul doesn't smile back. Mark looks confused.

The baby Jesus starts crying in the manger.

INT. CHURCH - BACK STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Children get dressed for the Christmas pageant.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Acolytes light the candles on the altar.

People file in in their Christmas best.

People sit on the balcony where a brass band is playing
Christmas Carols.

A group of people unable to find a seat sit on the stairs
leading to the balcony.

An usher comes up to them and motions for them to get off.

Folding chairs are set up in the back.

The doors to the memorial room are opened, where even more chairs have been set up. New mothers and young children occupy that space.

Paul arranges his robe and his notes. He reaches down and plugs a cord into an electrical socket.

When he stands up he sees the bishop come in and sit down in one of the folding chairs in the back center.

Paul is ready to smile at him when he sees Audrey come up to him and whisper something in his ear. He whispers something in hers and she nods.

The lights dim and the brass band stops.

Paul stands in front of the mass of people.

A spot light, operated by Mark from the balcony is trained on him.

PAUL

(overly enthusiastic)

Merry Christmas. And welcome. A few quick announcements, the locations of the bathrooms are marked in the main hallway. The string of red tinsel is for the women, and the green for the men. Also if you have a little one whose getting a bit too moved by the spirit, please remove them from the sanctuary and let them praise at full volume out there.

The congregation laugh.

The bishop approves.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Now, this is a service about the spirit of the Christmas, traditionally enacted through the infamous Christmas pageant.

(to Audrey and Mark)

But since there's no spirit of Christmas anymore, I think we'll just skip that part of the service.

Children waiting at the door look confused.

Bishop Lovett sits up.

Paul flips a switch on a cord and an inflatable nativity scene pops up.

Paul pulls the area-rug that had been concealing it, off.

PAUL (CONT'D)
This should do.

Maddy starts crying.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(to Maddy)
Oh Maddy, don't cry. One day you'll thank me. Just because your dressed like a sheep doesn't mean you have to behave like one.
(to the congregation)
Don't you see how completely absurd Christmas has become? It's as fake as this inflatable nativity scene. It's not about anything but consumerism: how much people spend on presents and how little they give to God.

CONGREGATION MEMBER
Amen!

The congregation claps.

Bishop Lovett looks confused.

So does Paul.

PAUL
Stop it!

The congregation stops clapping.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Why do you just blindly follow me? Don't you realize that I'm just a man, not a man of God? That he doesn't speak through me, or to me? Think for yourselves; I make mistakes. My son...
(beat)
My son killed himself.

Audrey stands up.

Paul takes out the suicide note.

PAUL (CONT'D)

This is the note that he left. I hid it, because I didn't want anyone to know that I had made the biggest mistake of all: putting all of my faith in an intangible God, and none in my own flesh and blood.

Audrey rushes over to Paul.

AUDREY

Paul, don't.

Audrey tries to grab it from him, but he holds it out of her reach.

PAUL

(reading)

Dear Mom and Dad. It's become obvious to me that God made a mistake when he made me. I think things I shouldn't think and feel things I shouldn't feel.

Audrey runs off mortified.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I don't know why He would make me this way if it's so wrong, but it's obvious to me that I don't belong here.

(beat)

I'm sorry but I have no choice.

Paul balls the note up and drops it to the floor.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There's the truth. My son killed himself, because of God.

Paul walks toward the back of the sanctuary. Everyone watches.

Bishop Lovett stands up and blocks his way.

Gail rushes over to the scene.

BISHOP LOVETT

Where do you think you're going? This is our biggest service of the year. Go back, apologize, say you have a headache, and bring in the little children dressed like sheep.

PAUL
I told you I quit.

BISHOP LOVETT
No you don't. If you don't go back
up there and apologize, then you're
fired.

PAUL
Finally.

Paul walks out.

INT. CHURCH - HALL - NIGHT

Paul walks angrily down the hall.

Gail follows.

GAIL
Paul. Paul!

PAUL
Stop following me around, will you?
Get your own life.

GAIL
Well, I'm tired of having to follow
you around. You think your so great
but your the most insincere,
thankless, egotistical, person I
know, and I'll be glad not to deal
with you any more.

Paul looks betrayed.

PAUL
I knew it was you who ratted me out
the the Bishop.

He walks out.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul walks into the house.

Audrey sits on the couch.

AUDREY
I'm leaving.

PAUL
Of course you are. It's to be with
Mark I suppose.

AUDREY
It's to be away from you, actually.

PAUL
Well then what's stopping you?

AUDREY
Nothing I guess.

Audrey gets up and picks up a packed suitcase.
Before she walks out the door she turns around.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
You may have taken away my husband,
you may have taken away my church,
but you can't take away my faith.

Audrey walks out.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul still sits on the couch in the same spot where Audrey
left him. No lights are on.

Paul doesn't react to the sound of the front door opening and
closing.

The light turns on.

MARK (V.O.)
Paul?

Mark stands in the doorway.

Paul looks at him incredulously.

PAUL
Where have you been?

MARK

I'm sorry I'm so late, I was talking to Bishop Lovett.

PAUL

Of course you were.

MARK

I tried my best to smooth things over, but, well, you went too far.

PAUL

Liked the show did he?

MARK

They want you to move out. I'm sorry.

(beat)

Of course, I'll help you in any way I can. They gave you two weeks, so there's plenty of time for us-

PAUL

Us? There is no us, boy. You were the one who turned my wife against me, and the one who fucked her.

MARK

What are you talking about? I can't believe you'd think any of those things.

PAUL

I can't believed I trusted you.

MARK

I was trying to help you; what did you think would happen if you kept going on the way you did?

PAUL

That's not the point.

MARK

Then what is?

PAUL

You abandoned me.

MARK

I'm not your son.

PAUL
No, your not... now get the fuck
out of my house.

MARK
Fine.

Mark pauses at the door.

MARK (CONT'D)
"faithful friends are a sturdy
shelter: whoever finds one has
found a treasure."

PAUL
I don't speak that gibberish any
more.

Mark walks out leaving the door open.

Paul gets up and goes to the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(calling after him)
Tell them my son died in this house
and I'm taking my full two weeks.

Paul slams the door behind him.

INT. PARSONAGE - STUDY - NIGHT

Paul enters the study and walks directly over to the model of
the church. He picks it up.

EXT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

Paul dumps the church into a trash can in the side of the
house. He tries to make it fit, but it wont.

So he smashes it on the ground, then jams it in.

Suddenly he is aware that he is being watched.

A group of AA members smoke next on the church steps.

They all quickly put out their cigarettes when they see Paul
coming towards them.

PAUL
Mind if I bum one. I'm looking to
replace one addiction with another.

AA MEMBER
What's that?

PAUL
God.

AA MEMBER
I hear heroin is best for that.

INT. PARSONAGE - ISAIAH'S ROOM - MORNING

Several days worth of alcohol bottles and mess litter the floor.

The song that was playing when Paul found Isaiah dead is playing. The song ends and starts again from the beginning.

Paul sits on the floor propped up against Isaiah's bed, reading Richard Dawkin's 'The God Delusion', and drinking from a bottle of liquor. He is wearing a weeks worth of stubble, and the same clothes by the looks of it.

The sound of the church service going on next door invades the space, and Paul cranks up the music.

He takes a nice long swig.

The music turns off.

EDNA (V.O.)
Oh, snap out of it.

Edna stands in the doorway, the boom-box plug in her hand.

PAUL
How-?

EDNA
It was either the doggy-door or
pick the lock, so...

PAUL
You broke in?

EDNA
I was young once. Now make yourself
decent, we're going to church.

PAUL

I can't. They've all betrayed me. Mark pretended to be my friend then slept with my wife, who then abandoned me, which wouldn't have happened in the first place if Gail hadn't ratted me out.

EDNA

You silly boy. I was the one who called you in. And good thing I did, that boy gave me a new battery in my hearing aid. Apparently once every ten years isn't enough...

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Paul comes in to see a NEW PASTOR, 80, formal and out of practice, trying to preach to no avail as Mark eggs the now diverse congregation on to sing and dance in the isles.

Mark spots him and stops. He rushes over to Paul.

The new pastor keeps preaching.

MARK

Welcome back Pastor Sternwell. Congratulations on your reappointment.

PAUL

What's all this about a reappointment; I told Edna, I've been fired.

Slowly the congregation start to look in the direction of Mark.

MARK

I talked to Bishop Lovett; brought a petition with over 500 signatures on it. The church is afraid that if you don't come back they'll lose the congregation to the Unitarians. That and you also happened to make them a hell of a lot of money.

People get up and go over to Paul.

The new pastor stops preaching and looks confused.

MARK (CONT'D)
They want you back.

PAUL
(to god)
Haven't had your fill yet? You've
taken everything. Now you want to
give it back so you can take it
away twice?

EDNA
I thought you said you were an
atheist.

PAUL
It's a force of habit, like
breathing. I'm trying to break free
of both right now.

MARK
We want you back too.

CONGREGATION
Yeah. We do. Come back!

PAUL
Weren't any of you listening?!

The congregation quiets.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I don't believe in God anymore. He
doesn't exist.

CYNTHIA
I disagree.

All eyes of Cynthia.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
I've spent the last six years
living in the past, hating everyone
for going forward when I wanted so
desperately to go back. But what
you said at Christmas, about
loosing the spirit in competition
and jealousy, made me realize that
it's time to move on.
(beat)
You really helped me.

EILEEN
Me too.

DEAN

And me.

CONGREGATION

And me. And me. And me.

AA MEMBER 1

God is working through you, man.

GAIL

See, you brought the spirit here.

More collective agreement.

EDNA

You'll make it through.

PAUL

I'm not sure I will. I wish I could believe again, but...

MARK

It doesn't matter, we believe in you.

EDNA

Amen!

CONGREGATION

Amen!

MARK

Please preach to us... as you are.

INT. CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Warren plays the organ.

The choir walks down the center isle singing Handel's 'Halleluiah!' chorus.

CHOIR

Halleluiah! Halleluiah! Halleluiah!
Halleluiah! Halleluiah!

As the reach the altar where Paul is standing, Luke starts to play the electric guitar and the music turns rock.

PAUL

In life there's always death.

CHOIR
Always death.

PAUL
In death there's always life.

Dean and his wife hold a baby in their hands.

PAUL (CONT'D)
We can never know.

CHOIR
Never know.

PAUL
When either will strike.

Mark smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
But with faith in each other,
together we'll unite.

Cynthia sits with Barb, Dick, Luke, and Maddy.

PAUL (CONT'D)
This is the beginning.

CHOIR
This is the beginning.

CONGREGATION
This is the beginning.

Everyone claps to the beat and dances in the isles.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - DAY

The sanctuary doors close on the singing congregation.

On a table next to the door stands the model church, now mended.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

We exit and pull out until we can see the entire church.

Zip: we go down the street to a church on the next corner.

CHOIR
 Unite, unite!
 Unite together.

CONGREGATION
 The beginning! The beginning!
 Halleluiah! Halleluiah!

That church is connected to another one, and yet another
 one...

EVERYONE
 Halleluiah!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

THE END.