

Summary of 'Bad Faith'

Pastor Paul Sternwell is a confident man with a strong spiritual conviction until his steadfast faith is put to the test when his son kills himself. Shocked, Paul covers up the evidence of the suicide and tries to go on with his life as if nothing has happened. While his wife Audrey seems to be coping well by teaching Sunday school and setting up for the annual rummage sale, Paul starts to lose his faith. Eventually he goes and visits Bishop Lovelow and asks to quit. His request is denied because the Bishop feels that Paul is too emotional, and is going through a natural crisis of faith. Instead of letting him go, the bishop sends him a new pastoral assistant, Mark.

Mark is recent seminary graduate, still very young and very naive. Audrey is drawn to him because he reminds her of her son who died and so invites him to live with them in the parsonage. Paul, on the other hand, can't stand him. Mark makes it his mission to save Paul. Paul makes it his mission to get rid of Mark by giving him busy work around the church. But a dedicated Mark finishes every task set before him.

Meanwhile, Paul is trying to get himself fired by giving provocative sermons, but every time he says something unorthodox, he reaches out and helps a member of the congregation without even meaning to. Over time, Paul and Mark bond as they fix up the church, and he starts to enjoy giving his outrageous sermons.

Everything is going well until Paul's deceased son's friend, Luke reveals to him that his son was gay and that's why he killed himself. Paul reacts by declaring the church a reconciling congregation (one that openly accepts people of all sexual orientations). Audrey doesn't take to this news and tries to appeal to Mark. She comes on too strongly

and Mark rejects her. So Audrey goes to the Bishop and exposes to him what Paul has been doing. Meanwhile Paul is told about Audrey's affection for Mark and becomes suspicious.

The very next sermon is Christmas Eve. The bishop comes to watch. Paul sees Audrey and the bishop talking and feels even more betrayed. He announces to the congregation that he is an atheist and that his son's death wasn't an accident. He reads from the suicide note before leaving in the middle of the service. The bishop fires him on the way out. Audrey leaves Paul, saying that he may have taken away her marriage, and her church, but he can't take away her faith. Paul blames Mark and kicks him out of the house. Paul is all alone in the Parsonage, camped out in his son's room, waiting to be evicted, when a member of the congregation who he helped through one of his over-the-top sermons comes and drags him to the in-progress church service.

There, Paul finds everyone carrying on in his spirit. Mark welcomes him back; the whole congregation had petitioned for his return, and since he made the church a fair amount of money with his outrageous sermons, they want to reappoint him. Paul makes it clear that he still doesn't know if he believes in God anymore, but the congregation is firm in their belief that God is working through him. And so Paul takes back his position and preaches on faith: in each other, and in ourselves- an atheist in the pulpit.

The End.