

Invitation

written by

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INT. CHURCH PARLOR - DAY

On black. Church bells ring in the distance.

HARD CUT TO:

A middle-aged man stands at the open window of a large, spacious parlor. He is steadfastly and with frustration flipping through several pages of notes - his sermon notes.

The man holds a lit cigarette out of the nearby open window as he mouths some words to himself - rehearsing. This is PASTOR PAUL.

Pastor Paul scans the open bible in front of him, finding a verse with his finger. He reads the words:  
"PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE..."

He pulls the cigarette back inside to meet his lips, taking a long drag.

PASTOR PAUL  
Bullshit.

As he reads, ash from the end of the cigarette falls onto the open bible.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
(hushed)  
Gah!

He hurries to brush it away in a frenzy. He blows on the page, inspecting it. He closes the bible, frustrated.

A page tucked into the cover of the bible catches his attention. He pulls it out, unfolding it, reading at the top:  
LETTER OF RESIGNATION

Pastor Paul looks at the letter with a tired, pensive gaze. He takes one last soothing drag on the cigarette before throwing it out the window.

Pastor Paul walks over to a chair where his blazer draped across the back. He sprays himself down with a can of air freshener. He's just donned the blazer when:

KNOCK KNOCK

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
Yes?

A young woman, AMY, opens the door. She's wearing a black dress and holding a binder and pen. She walks quickly to the table in the middle of the room as she speaks:

AMY

Pastor Paul, I don't mean to disrupt you but...there's a guy in the foyer. He sounds very upset. He said he needed to speak with someone...

Pastor Paul retrieves his bible from the window as she speaks, walking up to the table to meet her. He touches the bible down to the table with a THUD.

PASTOR PAUL

(annoyed sigh)

I would, but my office hours are over for the day, and the service is about to start.

Pastor Paul begins walking toward the door to leave.

AMY

But Pastor Paul, I don't think he's gonna wait much longer-

PASTOR PAUL

If he wants, he can stick around for service.

He turns back to her as he reaches the door.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)

Otherwise, tell him I'll see him next Sunday.

He opens the door and walks out. Amy, disappointed, begins to follow.

2 INT. CHURCH HALLWAY - DAY

Pastor Paul walks down the center of the hallway towards the sanctuary. The camera dollies forward, following him.

PASTOR PAUL (V.O.)

But if you suddenly decide to move outside of...

MATCH CUT TO:

3 INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - DAY

Dolly forward continues down the aisle of a church sanctuary. Sunday morning. The room is roughly half full.

Pastor Paul stands onstage at a podium, a commanding, confident smile on his face. He is dressed smartly, though not too formally, wearing a button down shirt tucked neatly into his freshly ironed pants with no tie and a green blazer jacket. His sermon is winding down.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
...God's protection, outside of  
God's will...if you find yourself  
caught up in sin, how can you grow?  
Are you even alive? Because God  
wants to you to *thrive*.

The crowd listens intently.

PASTOR PAUL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
Don't believe me? Jeremiah 29.  
"For I know the plans I have for  
you," declares the LORD, "plans to  
prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a  
future."

The crowd nods in agreement.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
Now doesn't that give you so much  
more comfort?

CROWD  
AMEN!

Pastor Paul smiles. Despite his earlier doubts, he is in his element, totally in control. He enjoys the attention.

PASTOR PAUL  
Now my hope here today is that you  
would know in your hearts that you  
are loved by Christ. And that  
because of that love, He died...

A MAN in the crowd has begun sobbing to himself. An older man sitting in front of him turns his head in annoyance towards him, but without fully turning around.

PASTOR PAUL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
...so that YOU might have life. So  
that YOU might have...

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
...that future. Will you pray with  
me, please.

Pastor Paul picks up his bible from the podium. He begins walking away from the podium as he prays.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
 Father, I know there are those here  
 today who don't know You...

He begins descending the steps from the stage, taking his place in the center of the space in front of the altar.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
 And Lord I just ask that you would  
 reveal yourself to them today,  
 Father. Bind your spirit to them,  
 and heal them...

THE MAN begins sobbing again, louder this time. Another old man closer to the front turns around to look at him. The woman sitting in front of him turns her head halfway.

PASTOR PAUL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 ...so that they may know true  
 peace, and they would leave here  
 today...

A married couple are looking at the crying man. The wife turns and mutters a comment to the husband. He answers in confusion, shaking his head.

PASTOR PAUL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 ...changed, forever.

The couple turns their attention back to the front.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
 In Jesus' name, Amen.

CROWD (O.C.)  
 AMEN.

PASTOR PAUL  
 Now...

The sobbing man continues to cry. The old man from before shifts in his seat even more uncomfortably.

PASTOR PAUL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 ...if you just gave your life to  
 Christ, or would like to today...

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
...we invite you to come to the  
front so that we can walk you  
through it.

Pastor Paul walks forward to hand his bible to the woman in the first pew. He retakes his place in front of the podium, where the WORSHIP LEADER stands and directs the crowd:

WORSHIP LEADER  
Please rise.

The whole congregation stands up as the hymn "Just As I Am" begins to play on the piano.

The sobbing man clumsily climbs over another man as he exits his pew.

SOBBING MAN  
(quietly)  
Sorry...excuse me...

He makes it out to the aisle and walks toward Pastor Paul, sniffing. He tucks his hands into the pockets of his gray hoodie. He's wearing jeans and a brown plaid button-up underneath the hoodie.

PASTOR PAUL  
Good morning.

SOBBING MAN  
(teary)  
Hey.

Pastor Paul extends his hand for a handshake. The sobbing man accepts it.

PASTOR PAUL  
What's your name, sir?

SOBBING MAN  
Ambrose.

PASTOR PAUL  
Ambrose, it's great to meet you.  
Now, have you decided to give your  
life to our Lord and Savior Jesus  
Christ?

AMBROSE  
No sir...but I want to.

Pastor Paul smiles again.

PASTOR PAUL  
Wonderful. Repeat after me.

He places his hand on Ambrose's shoulder, grabbing his right hand with his. They both bow their heads and close their eyes as they pray together.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
Jesus, I am a sinner.

AMBROSE  
(crying)  
Jesus, I am a sinner.

PASTOR PAUL  
Up until this point, Lord, I've lived my life only for myself. I know that I am lost.

AMBROSE  
God, I'm so lost.

PASTOR PAUL  
But I do not want this-

AMBROSE  
(quietly upset)  
I've been so messed up, God, I have.

Pastor Paul pauses, waiting to see if he'll continue

PASTOR PAUL  
Yes. But I do not want this for myself-

AMBROSE  
(Loudly)  
I done some messed up shit, God!

Pastor Paul grimaces. He looks around to see if anyone else heard the expletive, clearing his throat in discomfort.

The crowd doesn't appear to have heard it. The music is loud enough to mask it for anyone not standing immediately next to them.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
I've lied, and I've cheated my whole life. I've been jealous of my neighbor. He's got a better house than I got. And he got a brand new Chevy Impala, and he parked it in front of my house...  
(MORE)

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
(Loudly, upset)  
...and I just keyed it all to hell!

PASTOR PAUL  
(nervously laughing)  
The Lord has forgiven you for that,  
son.

AMBROSE  
He's got this dog that just barks  
all the time. And I work nights so,  
I was tryin' to sleep in the day,  
and he just BARKED and BARKED...  
(sniffing, big sob)  
...so I shot him in the face with a  
water hose...and he didn't come  
back home!

Pastor Paul breathes a deep sigh.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
(remorseful)  
I think I saw him on the side of  
the road last week...he was flatter  
than a tortilla!

PASTOR PAUL  
(flustered)  
Okay, okay, the Lord has forgiven  
ALL your sins, son. But now let's  
try to focus a little-

AMBROSE  
And I masturbate all the time.

Pastor Paul leans back away from Ambrose in shock.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
(grimacing)  
I did it in the car before I came  
in today!

Pastor Paul's eyes widen.

He hastily releases Ambrose's hand.

Ambrose leans in urgently.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
Someone told me God sees that shit!  
Is that true, he can see me?

Amy and some of the crowd hear some of this exchange and  
begin muttering amongst themselves in surprise.



PASTOR PAUL  
 Son, this isn't exactly the place  
 for confession. You really don't  
 have to do all this. Now, are you  
 ready to accept Jesus Christ into  
 your heart today?

He looks at Ambrose with pleading, nervous eyes.

AMBROSE  
 I'm trying, Pastor. It's just, it's  
 been so hard...  
 (loudly crying)  
 ...since my wife left me!

Ambrose lets out a full, uncontrolled sob.

PASTOR PAUL  
 (pause)  
 I know. That's-.

AMBROSE  
 (loudly)  
 That FUCKING BITCH!!

Ambrose doubles over in tears, the word trailing off.

The music hits several wrong notes as the crowd gasps. They  
 definitely heard this. The worship leader widens his eyes as  
 he conducts.

Amy puts a hand over her mouth, the churchgoers behind her  
 shaking their heads and looking at each other in dismay.

One of the older men chuckles to himself with a smile.

The music starts back up urgently.

PASTOR PAUL  
 I'm gonna have to ask you to not  
 use that kind of language in here.

AMBROSE  
 Yeah, shit, man, God, oh, shit, I'm  
 sorry. I know.

PASTOR PAUL  
 I can see you're upset. It looks  
 like you've had a hard go of  
 things.

Ambrose nods.

AMBROSE

It's just that...she said that we weren't compatible...aaaand that I wasn't a good lover...and that I didn't believe in her enough.

The music has slowly gone quiet and stopped as Ambrose speaks.

PASTOR PAUL

That's hard.

Pastor Paul raises a finger behind him and swirls it in a circular motion to the worship leader, telling him to keep going. The music awkwardly and abruptly picks back up.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)

You can talk to somebody else about all this...stuff, later, all you need. But for now...we've gotta get you saved.

Ambrose nods wildly, sniffing.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)

Is that okay?

AMBROSE

(softly)

Yeah okay.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Okay...

Ambrose awkwardly wipes his hands against the sides of his pants. He looks around behind him. Seeing the bible on the front pew, he lunges forward, grabbing the bible as the woman who took it uncomfortably shifts away from him. He begins flipping through.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

Maybe if I had like a...

Ambrose looks at Pastor Paul as he frantically flips through the bible.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)

...like an outline, or somethin' to follow....

Pastor Paul shakes his head.

Pastor Paul looks straight at Ambrose as he takes the bible out of his hands.

PASTOR PAUL  
It ain't in there.

He tosses it aside, flippantly. It hits the ground with a loud SMACK.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)  
Let me do the talkin'; you just agree.

AMBROSE  
...okay.

Pastor Paul walks forward, putting his right hand on Ambrose's shoulder and very carefully taking his wrist with his left. The camera begins dollying forward.

PASTOR PAUL  
Father, I know you know this man better than I. You know his sins.

AMBROSE  
Yes...

PASTOR PAUL  
You know his life, Lord. You know what he's done.

AMBROSE  
Yes...

PASTOR PAUL  
But Lord I believe you also know that he doesn't want this for himself anymore.

AMBROSE  
(on the verge of tears)  
No sir...

PASTOR PAUL  
Be in this place, Lord. So that he can feel your grace and your mercy.

AMBROSE  
(tearfully)  
Yes!

PASTOR PAUL  
Allow him to commit his life to you, Lord!

AMBROSE  
(crying)  
YES!

PASTOR PAUL  
FREE HIM FROM HIS CHAINS, JESUS.

AMBROSE  
(crying)  
I WANT TO BE FREE!

PASTOR PAUL  
GIVE HIM LIFE NOW LORD!

AMBROSE  
(sobbing)  
TAKE IT JESUS!

Ambrose lunges forward, violently embracing Pastor Paul.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)  
I DON'T WANT TO BE SCARED ANYMORE!

Ambrose is sobbing very loudly. The sound of it fills the air of the sanctuary. Pastor Paul is startled.

The music stops altogether. Everything is quiet.

Pastor Paul gently pats Ambrose on the back.

He thinks for a minute, more confused than frustrated now.

PASTOR PAUL  
Son, what are you scared of?

A heavy pause, Ambrose trying to calm himself.

AMBROSE  
(crying)  
I don't like myself very much,  
Pastor. I don't have much reason  
to.

This resonates with Pastor Paul.

PASTOR PAUL  
Ahhh c'mon now, you can't mean  
that. You've got rea-  
(laughs awkwardly,  
stalling)  
Why- You're- Very-  
(sigh)

...forthcoming...generous? With details...you're authentic!

AMBROSE

No, I'm a fuckin' fraud, pastor. I'm a fraud in my job...and in my marriage! My wife saw it. Her boyfriend saw it. And I just drove 'em all away.

(beat)

And I can't make sense of it. I don't know what it means. And if I died today would it mean anything to anyone?

Pastor Paul winces. It rings true. He sees the man in front of him.

He disengages from the hug to look at Ambrose.

PASTOR PAUL

Sometimes it feels like things don't have any meaning. Like it's fake...unreal. But I'll tell you one thing that's always real...is that you're here. And I'm here. Right now. And as long as that's the case, I'm not gonna let either one of us feel that way about ourselves.

Ambrose nods, face wet with tears. Pastor Paul nods too.

PASTOR PAUL (CONT'D)

There is love and grace for you. More than you can imagine. And I'm gonna help you find it.

AMBROSE

(tearfully; gratefully)

Thank you, pastor.

PASTOR PAUL

Call me Paul.

Ambrose leans in, wearing a wry smile.

AMBROSE

My old man smoked menthols too.

Pastor Paul looks sideways at Ambrose before loosing a short chuckle. He shakes Ambrose's hand.

PASTOR PAUL  
Go with God. See you next Sunday.

Pastor Paul pats Ambrose on the back as he turns toward the congregation. They notice for the first time all the eyes on them.

Most are confused. Some heard some of the conversation and clearly disapprove.

Pastor Paul turns to the worship leader and motions him to wrap it up.

The worship leader snaps out of a daze, dropping the pencil he'd been playing with and bolting to attention.

WORSHIP LEADER  
Alright, hey- what a wonderful  
message Pastor Paul brought us  
today, right?. Now listen, be  
blessed, uh, you are dismissed.

Ambrose walks down the aisle toward the exit before the congregation begins filing out of the pews. Confused murmuring erupts as everyone begins collecting their things.

Pastor Paul stands at the head of the pulpit, watching Ambrose walk out. He's smiling softly. He looks down at his feet, thinking. He lets out a soft, satisfied chuckle, before returning his gaze to the man who saved him.

THE END