



The Heart of a Christian Playwright

THE PERFECT GIFT II

An Original Stage play

By

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SYNOPSIS

The Saga continues. Gene and Jack and Carmen and Josef are still having trust issues. They make an appointment for counseling with Pastor Adolphus. The young people gather for rehearsals for their upcoming Easter Play. Jen and Robert face off with their peers at church who thinks they should not be allowed to participate in any church ministry, because of their sin. The stakes are high, and the tension builds as presuppositions and personalities clash, but there is a wonderful lesson of true forgiveness mixed into the drama.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

MALES

Josef
Pastor Adolphus
Robert
Roger
Paul
Deacon Brown
Extras

FEMALES

Carmen
Jennifer
Gene
Marsha
Extras

SETTING

The play takes place mostly in a church auditorium. It is a small church, and Pastor's office is a makeshift cubicle Stage Right with a small desk, a office chair behind the desk and two regular chairs in front.

THE SCRIPT

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Church Auditorium / Pastor's Office

Pastor Adolphus sits in the office chair behind his desk. Jen and Robert sit arms length apart in the other two chairs.

ADOLPHUS: I hardly know where to start.

ROBERT: It was an accident sir.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: You got Jen pregnant by accident?

ROBERT: We didn't...we, uhm...it's...we messed up. We're sorry.

ADOLPHUS: You're the Deacon's son. He hasn't even been back to church since this went public. How do you propose we fix this?

ROBERT: I don't know.

ADOLPHUS: Jen.

JEN: My life is ruined as it is, but I don't want to be expelled from the church.

ADOLPHUS: We don't expel people.

JEN: Dis-fellowshipped....whatever it is you do to people who backslide.

ADOLPHUS: Are you backslidden?

JEN: I love the Lord, and I know He has forgiven me. He accepts me just as I am...weakness and all, right?

ADOLPHUS: So right you are. Unfortunately and in most cases the problem is not with the Lord.

ROBERT: We deserve to be punished.

ADOLPHUS: I am not going to punish you, Robert, but I will ask that you don't participate so much in the choir and drama ministry.

JEN: But we have a play coming up for Easter. I am playing Mary. I don't want to lose that privilege.

ROBERT: I am supposed to be playing Jesus. I was looking forward to that.

ADOLPHUS: Well, how does your fellow brothers and sisters feel about you being an active part of the drama ministry?

JEN: Practice is schedule to start next week, so we don't really know.

ADOLPHUS: Some people know about your...condition.

JEN: I have seen the eyes and the faces...but if God has already forgiven us, it's their problem if they choose not to.

Pause. Adolphus bites his finger.

ADOLPHUS: Truth is, something needs to be said. I am having a meeting with the leaders later, and I would want to address this. Can you be at the meeting?

JEN: Yes.

ROBERT: No.

Pause.

JEN: No.

ROBERT: Yes.

Pause.

JEN: Do we need to be there?

ADOLPHUS: Maybe I should mention it outside of your presence first. To get some form of feedback. They might not want to speak the truth in your presence.

JEN: So we don't need to be there then?

ADOLPHUS: Not if you really don't want to.

Pause.

JEN: I will think about it.

ADOLPHUS: I do admire your courage about this whole thing.

JEN: We all fall sometimes sir. It's what we do then that really matters.

ADOLPHUS: And I am sure your choice will be a testimony for others.

Adolphus sighs.

ADOLPHUS: Well, I think this session went well. Jen, I need a few moments with Robert.

JEN: Okay. I should be getting home anyway.

ADOLPHUS: Take care. Be safe.

Jen leaves.

ADOLPHUS: How's your father?

ROBERT: I don't know. He's not talking to me. I have never seen him keep malice before.

ADOLPHUS: Oh Lord, he grew up kind of sheltered. This is all very new to him.

ROBERT: I know he's disappointed, but I would rather he just say it than treat me as if I don't exist.

ADOLPHUS: He will come around eventually. He's had a difficult time dealing with the passing of your mother...so this may feel a little too much.

ROBERT: I think the real problem is that he cares too much what people think.

ADOLPHUS: And you don't?

ROBERT: Jesus is a good example. They called him all kind of names, say all kind of stuff. He didn't care.

ADOLPHUS: So you are modeling your attitude from Christ?

ROBERT: That's what being a Christian is all about right.

ADOLPHUS: Robert, I have been here before. You have not yet had an incident, so it's easy to think you can handle what's coming.

ROBERT: I can handle it sir.

ADOLPHUS: In the interim, I need you to keep your distance from Jennifer.

ROBERT: But why? She's still my friend.

ADOLPHUS: I think it's much more complicated than that now my boy. You might not care what people think, but we still have to maintain the image and reputation of the church. This is not a free for all.

Pause.

ROBERT: It's not fair.

ADOLPHUS: You may be forgiven, but sin has a price. Somebody has to pay it.

ROBERT: I thought the price was paid for on the cross.

ADOLPHUS: In a sense, it was...but I was talking in a different context.

ROBERT: I don't understand.

ADOLPHUS: Ok, let me just say it. It does matter what people think. Just be prepared for what is coming.

Pause.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP

Setting: Church Auditorium

Young people file in one by one. Marsha stands as leader of the group holding a script in her hand that she scans through.

MARSHA: This script is really good. Who wrote it?

ROGER: It was bought offline.

MARSHA: We couldn't find someone in the church to write our Easter Play?

ROGER: Everyone is busy...and the person who normally writes it is...indisposed.

Pause.

MARSHA: Are you talking about Jennifer?

PAUL: Let's not talk about Jennifer.

MARSHA: You guys don't know, do you?

ROGER: Know what?

MARSHA: That is why you young people should come to church meetings.

PAUL: We get enough lectures at school.

MARSHA: But you miss vital information and announcements.

PAUL: Like what?

Jennifer enters and sits with the others. The room falls silent, some stare, some try not to.

Robert enters and also finds a seat. Others stare, most look very uncomfortable.

MARSHA: Welcome Jen and Robert. I guess now we can begin.

Roger half lifts his hand.

MARSHA: You have a question, Roger?

ROGER: Just a small one, and I guess others may have the same question as well...but will our sister and brother here be in the Easter Play?

Pause.

MARSHA: I assume it's the reason they are here at rehearsal.

ROGER: But they are no longer a part of the church.

JEN: You're talking about me as if I am not even here.

MARSHA: Hold it. Let's not get in an uproar ok. We are adults, so let's handle this like adults. Roger, why would you think they are not a part of the church?

ROGER: Well...because...they, uhm...you know....(*clasps and entwines his fingers*)...you know.

MARSHA: I don't know what all that means.

Pause.

PAUL: They sinned.

MARSHA: And we have never committed a sin?

ROGER: It's not going to show like their sin.

Marsha sighs.

ROBERT: A lot of you here are just as guilty as we are.

ROGER: Even if that was true, it's not going to show.

MARSHA: It was decided in the meeting last night that if they choose to participate they can.

ROGER: No one opposed?

MARSHA: Well it seems that those who would have, were not at the meeting.

ROGER: When is the next meeting?

MARSHA: Three months from now. It's a quarterly meeting.

ROGER: I don't think I will feel comfortable in this play with them, knowing they have transgressed God's sacred laws.

JEN: God has forgiven us.

ROGER: You think forgiveness is an overnight thing?

MARSHA: It is.

Pause.

ROGER: So you are condoning what they did?

MARSHA: Not in the least, but I am not their judge. It's not like all the other cases like this that I have known. They openly confessed and ask to be forgiven of God and their church family.

ROGER: And we think we should just let them off so easy?

PAUL: What's to stop other young people from doing what they did, and just continue on in the church business as usual?

ROGER: They should be given a leave of absence from this church, and banned from all ministries.

PAUL: It will reflect badly on the church.

MARSHA: Sanballat and Tobias. Are you done?

Pause.

ROGER: What did you call us?

MARSHA: You heard me.

PAUL: Seriously Marsha. You of all people.

Roger stands.

ROGER: Well...I see some favoritism here with Robert being a Minister's son and all, so I will just leave it. But there is no way I am taking part in the drama ministry side by side with these sinners.

Roger leaves.

PAUL: I think he speaks for most of us.

Paul leaves.

A few others leave...eventually only Marsha, Jennifer and Robert remain.

ROBERT: That went well.

Jennifer breaks down in tears. Marsha hugs her.

MARSHA: I imagine this must be very hard for the two of you, but you must stand your ground. In some sense, we still haven't learnt what forgiveness is.

JENNIFER: Yes, but we have always had an Easter Play here. It's not fair that on account of us, there will not be one.

ROBERT: Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all.

MARSHA: Let's pray about it.

They bow their heads...

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 3**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Pastors Office

Josef and Carmen sit before Pastor Adolphus in his office.

A few people, including Roger, gather in the Auditorium on their knees in prayer.

ADOLPHUS: Have you both worked out your differences?

CARMEN: To some extent.

JOSEF: She struggles to believe that I have actually changed, and will not allow me access to my own accounts.

CARMEN: I think it's best to be on the safe side.

JOSEF: Pastor, I am thinking that there is a lack of trust when she does something like that.

CARMEN: I am just looking out for you.

JOSEF: The other day I wanted to buy a new shirt to wear to church. She had to drive 6 miles, while I waited at the store to use my card to make the purchase. What am I going to do when I need to go out of town?

Pause.

CARMEN: We will get to that bridge when we cross it.

JOSEF: Baby, I no longer gamble. Why won't you believe me?

CARMEN: You don't because you don't have access to money.

JOSEF: I could go to the bank and get a new card, but I don't. I need you to trust me.

CARMEN: Look where that got us the last time.

JOSEF: You gotta let this go.

CARMEN: Just know, that I am doing this for you ok.

ADOLPHUS: That's enough.

Adolphus sits back in his chair, and removes his glasses.

ADOLPHUS: There is some wisdom in what Carmen is doing...

JOSEF: What?

ADOLPHUS: ...And there is some wisdom in what you are saying Josef.

CARMEN: What?

ADOLPHUS: But there needs to be a point of compromise between you too.

JOSEF: Exactly.

CARMEN: And if he gambles again?

ADOLPHUS: When you forgave your husband, you actually made a decision to give him another chance. That really means that you should be treating him as if he never gambled in the first place.

Pause.

CARMEN: I don't know how to do that.

ADOLPHUS: It is what Jesus do for us every day.

CARMEN: I could see how that would be easy for him.

ADOLPHUS: Through Him we can do the same things he does. Especially as it relates to true forgiveness. You can't say you forgive, if you still hold on to the offense.

JOSEF: That's right.

ADOLPHUS: But it is also wise to avoid the very thing that will cause you to make the same mistakes again.

CARMEN: That's right.

ADOLPHUS: So, you two need to compromise.

Pause.

CARMEN: I am willing to compromise, as long as it doesn't involve giving him access to our accounts.

JOSEF: That makes no sense.

ADOLPHUS: How about accountability?

Pause.

CARMEN: How about it?

ADOLPHUS: Well, one of the issues that came up when your husband developed his...bad habit, was that money was going but he would not say where it went.

CARMEN: Yeah.

ADOLPHUS: So, you can give him his card and monitor the account. Ask him when there is a withdrawal and he can tell you or show you what he did with the money.

JOSEF: That sounds like too much work.

CARMEN: I don't know if that would work. No man likes to be accountable for how he spends money.

JOSEF: True that.

ADOLPHUS: But in this case, it might work. Unless you have a better idea?

CARMEN: I would want to stick to my original plan. Keep him away from our money.

ADOLPHUS: But it's causing a problem between you too.

CARMEN: Why would you think it's a problem?

ADOLPHUS: Because you are here, now. Taking counseling from me.

Pause.

JOSEF: I would give it a try. Anything is better than this.

Pause.

CARMEN: Fine. But if...you ever gamble away any of our money again, you will never, ever get access to our accounts ever again.

JOSEF: Fine. I will show you that I am different.

CARMEN: Fine. You better.

ADOLPHUS: This was a very productive session.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: How are things at home with Jennifer?

CARMEN: She locks herself in her room and cries every day. We can't get her to talk to us, but at least she is still coming to church.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: I think she may be meeting on a little opposition here.

JOSEF: What do you mean?

ADOLPHUS: There are those who think she should be put to sit on the back bench indefinitely. She wants to still be involved.

CARMEN: I could see the conflict that could cause. It was the reason when I got pregnant so young I...well, considered other options.

Josef holds her hand.

ADOLPHUS: She has a strong spirit. I am trying to figure out how to address this without coming across as biased.

CARMEN: We really don't understand forgiveness, do we?

ADOLPHUS: No, we don't. We hold things against each other, that God has forgiven and forgotten. It's a terrible reality.

Pause.

CARMEN: What can we do?

ADOLPHUS: Pray. I sense the Lord wants to teach us, through this, what it really means to forgive.

Pause.

CARMEN: Ok.

ADOLPHUS: Well, you guys enjoy the rest of your day now.

Carmen and Josef shakes Pastor's hand and exit through the auditorium.

Roger sees them go. He gets up off his knees and goes into the Pastors office.

ROGER: Busy, sir.

ADOLPHUS: Roger. I only have a minute. I have another appointment in the next hour, and need to get through a few things first...

Roger sits.

ROGER: Roger that. A minute is all I need. Just wanted to know what you intend to do about...well, Robert and Jennifer.

ADOLPHUS: What do you mean?

ROGER: They have done a terrible thing, and I think as a church we should take action and not just allow them to continue on as if nothing happened.

ADOLPHUS: Have you ever done anything wrong?

ROGER: Well, yeah.

ADOLPHUS: Did you ask God to forgive you?

ROGER: Well, yeah.

ADOLPHUS: How long did He take to do it?

ROGER: Sorry?

ADOLPHUS: How long did God take to forgive you?

Pause.

ROGER: I guess He did it the same time.

ADOLPHUS: Did the church take any action against you?

ROGER: There was one incident where they did. But most times, the church didn't know that I sinned.

ADOLPHUS: Now that I know that you did something wrong, do you think I should take action against you.

ROGER: Well, it wouldn't make any sense for you to do that now.

ADOLPHUS: Why not?

ROGER: Because God has forgiven me.

Pause.

ROGER: Okay, I see where this is going. But I don't think it's the same thing.

ADOLPHUS: Maybe not for us.

ROGER: Every sin has its consequence.

ADOLPHUS: I'm sure they know that by now with how they are treated, and even worse days are ahead. It's not easy being a pregnant teen, but she chose to carry the child and bear the consequence. Most people would have found a way to cover it up...so the church doesn't know.

Pause.

ROGER: Nice talking to you, sir.

Roger leaves.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 4**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Pastors Office

Jack and Gene sit in chairs opposite the Pastors desk.

Pastor Adolphus enters with two glasses of water. He hands them to Jack and Gene who drinks, then puts the glasses on Adolphus desk as he sits in his chair.

People begin to gather in the Auditorium for rehearsals.

ADOLPHUS: So, where were we?

GENE: This is a nice church...small but nice. And the people are so friendly.

JACK: Most of the people.

ADOLPHUS: It's not a perfect church...a work in progress you might say.

GENE: Thank you for seeing us at such short notice.

ADOLPHUS: It's what I do. So tell me why you think you need counseling.

GENE: Well, to be honest, I think my husband is not telling me the truth about some things.

JACK: And I think my wife is paranoid.

GENE: I am not. I just need you to come straight with me, just as I came straight with you.

JACK: After how many years.

GENE: But you don't want to make the same mistakes I did.

JACK: I am just aware of one mistake.

GENE: That's what I meant.

JACK: Why should you get let off so easily?

GENE: So you do have something hiding from me?

JACK: No.

GENE: This is so frustrating.

JACK: So you dragged me all the way over here thinking somehow us sitting before a Pastor can get me to tell you a secret that isn't even there.

Pause.

GENE: I just know you are hiding something.

ADOLPHUS: Why do you think he is?

GENE: Well, the text messages for one.

JACK: Wha -- Have you been going through my phone?

GENE: Maybe.

JACK: Why?

ADOLPHUS: Let's just try to stay calm.

GENE: I know your ex has been texting you. And sending you emails.

JACK: You have been in my emails too.

Jack gets up.

JACK: This has gone too far.

ADOLPHUS: Hold on Jack. Don't leave on this note. It won't help your marriage to walk away from the difficult stuff instead of talking it through.

Pause.

Jack sits. Folds his arms.

JACK: I feel violated. And this from the woman who deceived me for years that she could cook.

GENE: Why bring that up?

JACK: Why couldn't you just tell me the truth?

GENE: But now I am cooking for you and you have never complimented me once.

Pause.

GENE: This would be a good place to say, "honey I like your cooking."

Pause.

GENE: You do like it, right?

JACK: It's a work in progress.

GENE: What does that mean?

JACK: Pastor, would you lie to your wife if her cooking wasn't very good.

ADOLPHUS: My wife went to be with the Lord over 3 years ago.

JACK: Sorry, but when she was here. Did you always like her cooking?

ADOLPHUS: No.

JACK: Did you tell her the truth?

ADOLPHUS: No. Well, there are ways to say it without saying it.

JACK: For example.

ADOLPHUS: I would say, "This is...different." Or "Honey, you really outdid yourself. I have never tasted anything like this before." Usually she takes that as a compliment.

GENE: You really don't like my cooking?

JACK: I am sure you will get better with practice.

GENE: Whatever. Why is your ex texting you?

JACK: I can't stop anybody from texting me.

ADOLPHUS: He is right. The question is, how does he responds to the text.

JACK: Yeah, how do I respond?

GENE: I didn't check the outbox.

ADOLPHUS: That's usually where you will find the truth.

JACK: Don't give her a license to check my phone.

ADOLPHUS: I was just saying. See the difference it makes to just talk about stuff.

GENE: I feel worse now than when I just got here.

ADOLPHUS: That feeling will pass and give way to appreciation. I can tell you from observation and experience that honesty is always the best policy. So, if there really is anything you two need to get off your chest...this would be a good time.

Pause.

Gene looks at Jack, and then looks away.

Jack looks at Gene, and then looks away.

JACK: There is one thing.

GENE: I knew it. I knew it. What is it? Huh? Did you go on a date with your ex? Huh? Did you? Cmon, let it out. What have you been hiding from me, huh? Pretending as if I am the only one with a secret. Spit it out.

JACK: I want to be a father.

Gene quiets down....slumps into despondency.

ADOLPHUS: Well, that's not a bad secret, is it?

GENE: It is, when doctors say I can't have any children.

ADOLPHUS: Oh.

Pause.

ADOLPHUS: I am scheduling you two for another appointment.

Pause.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 5**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Church Auditorium/Pastors Office

Pastor Adolphus sits behind his desk looking over some notes.

Young people are gathered in the Auditorium for rehearsals. Marsha is handing out the scripts to Roger, Paul, Jen, Robert, and others.

MARSHA: I am glad to see that you all have come to your senses, and we are ready to go.

ROGER: We thought about it, and we are willing to compromise.

MARSHA: What do you mean?

ROGER: We will share our thoughts in due course.

Pause.

MARSHA: Please, don't do anything stupid.

Marsha walks back to the front of the group. Everyone is briefly scanning through the script.

MARSHA: This year, we want to take on the challenge of doing the biblical account of the crucifixion. We have always done a contemporary Easter Play, but Pastor wants us to do the undiluted story.

ROBERT: I like what I am seeing here.

MARSHA: Believe me when I say, this script is well written...and it documents the journey of Christ in a chronological order. It's somewhat His last few days on earth as a man.

ROBERT: I can't wait to sink my teeth into this character.

MARSHA: So you are all set to play Jesus?

ROBERT: Oh yes.

Roger's hand goes up.

MARSHA: Yes, Roger.

ROGER: I want to recommend, and I am sure others here would agree that Robert choose a more suiting role. I want to play Jesus, and I think I am more than qualified to.

MARSHA: And what role would Robert play?

ROGER: Judas seems fitting.

Paul high fives him. Robert and Jen are not laughing. Marsha folds her arms.

MARSHA: Guys seriously.

ROGER: Well, we have always done the selection as a group. All in favour of me playing Jesus and Robert playing Judas raise your hand.

More than half the group lifts their hands.

ROGER: See, it's the will of the people.

MARSHA: And I assume you don't want Jennifer to reprise her role as Mary.

ROGER: Oh yes, just not the mother of Jesus. Mary the prostitute would suit her skill set more.

Pause.

Robert jumps to his feet.

ROBERT: This is all just a game for you, isn't it?

Roger stands to address him.

Pastor Adolphus hears the ruckus outside his office and goes by the door.

ROGER: No brother. We take the work of the Lord very seriously.

ROBERT: You think Jesus would act like this?

ROGER: Jesus embraced the prostitute, had supper with the betrayer and washed his feet. I think this is a grand opportunity for you to highlight his love.

ROBERT: You of all people. We were friends. You even had a soft spot for Jen.

ROGER: Had!

Pause.

ROBERT: Is that what this is about?

ROGER: We are called to live holy and blameless. You don't break God's commandment and get away with it, because you are the son of a minister.

JEN: Does it matter to you that God has forgiven me for what I did?

ROGER: Are you sure about that?

JEN: It is amazing how easily friends can turn their backs on you. You all avoid me and treat me like some walking disease.

MARSHA: Not all of us.

JEN: Sorry Marsha. I didn't mean you, but I thought the kind of relationship we all had meant you would have my back. We all make mistakes.

ROGER: If we were living in Bible days, we would be the same ones who would have stoned you to death.

JEN: Then I am grateful that God is nothing like you.

Jen exits in tears.

Adolphus shakes his head and goes back to his seat. He looks up to heaven.

ADOLPHUS: Father, I could use an extra measure of your wisdom to handle this situation.

Robert exits after Jennifer. Roger sits folding his arms. Marsha shakes her head at their ignorance.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 6**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Church Auditorium

Young people are gathered in the Auditorium for rehearsals.

Roger is onstage dressed like Jesus. He reads from a script. Paul kneels down also reading from a script. Both are terrible actors.

PAUL: Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

ROGER: Why do you call me good? No one is good --- except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'

PAUL: Teacher, all these I have kept ---

MARSHA: Ok, stop.

Marsha rubs her forehead in frustration.

ROGER: So, how was that?

MARSHA: Terrible.

ROGER: I'm not really feeling the part yet, but I will get it.

MARSHA: You are standing on the stage wearing a dress. If you are not feeling it now, when do you think you will start to feel it?

ROGER: These things take time.

MARSHA: Unfortunately we don't have a lot of time. I am switching your role with Robert's.

ROGER: I am not playing Judas.

MARSHA: Then we will eliminate his role. I can't subject our congregation to a bad acting Jesus...and I am not convinced you are putting any effort into this role.

ROGER: I'm giving it all I got.

MARSHA: That's exactly what I didn't want to hear. Robert, get up there. You are Jesus again.

Roger shakes his head and takes off the dress handing it to Robert who takes his place. Roger goes to one side and stands folding his arms. There is a smile on Jen's face.

Robert speaks without a script. He is an excellent actor.

PAUL: Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

ROBERT: Why do you call me good? No one is good --- except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'

PAUL: Teacher, all these I have kept ----

MARSHA: Paul, can I get a little more umph.

PAUL: What's umph?

MARSHA: Extend yourself. You are playing a rich young man, you have to feel the role...be absorbed by it.

PAUL: I have no idea what it feels like to be a rich young man.

MARSHA: Well, use your imagination.

Paul closes his eyes for a minute, then resumes his role.

PAUL: Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.

ROBERT: One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

PAUL: Did Jesus really tell him that?

MARSHA: It's in the bible.

PAUL: Well, maybe it was a parable.

MARSHA: Can you try to focus, Paul?

Paul gets back to the script.

PAUL: Sell everything?

ROBERT: Yes.

Paul's face droops.

MARSHA: Okay Paul. Your countenance is supposed to fall, which means there has to be some form of expression there that can fall.

PAUL: I don't get it.

MARSHA: Okay well you are asking Jesus what you must do to be saved. How about you look a little excited at the prospect, and then your countenance can fall when you hear the instructions.

PAUL: Ok, but I don't want to redo this scene again right now. I'm tired.

MARSHA: You have been on the stage five minutes.

Pastor Adolphus enters. He stands and watches. Marsha sees him.

MARSHA: Ok, we will take a little break, but nobody leaves. Pastor wants to have a word.

ROGER: Oh boy.

Marsha sits. Adolphus takes her place.

Roger finds a seat towards the back.

ADOLPHUS: Rehearsals seem to be going well.

MARSHA: We have to be making little adjustments here and there, but we will be ok.

ADOLPHUS: Wonderful...well I will be as quick as possible. Team, some things have been brought to my attention, and from observation and I think I should address them.

ROGER: About time.

ADOLPHUS: It's no secret. Jennifer is pregnant. Robert is the father. They both confessed to me, and to the church. They have both repented. So what exactly is the problem?

ROGER: Jesus lived a sin free life. That role should not be played by just anyone.

ADOLPHUS: And if I agree with you.

ROGER: Then I won't see you as a pastor who condones sin or shows favoritism.

ADOLPHUS: Ok, so Robert is unworthy because he sinned?

ROGER: Yes.

ADOLPHUS: Fair enough. So who should play Jesus?

ROGER: I am willing to do it.

ADOLPHUS: And you have never sinned?

Silence.

ROGER: I wish you would stop doing that.

ADOLPHUS: I'm trying to make a point. The Bible says we are to help each other because we are all prone to the same mistakes. Those who are strong, help those who are weak.

ROGER: Who helped me in my time of weakness? I made one mistake and I lost everything.

ADOLPHUS: You took money out of the youth ministry offering.

ROGER: So I was removed as treasurer for youth ministry. Fine, I get it. So now my question is, why isn't Robert and Jennifer removed from active ministry because of their sin?

Pause.

ROGER: If you argue that being truly forgiven is treating one as if they never made a mistake, then that would not justify my removal from a ministry I loved.

ADOLPHUS: You are right. I guess this lesson really is for all of us. I won't take up anymore of your time.

Adolphus leaves.

Roger high fives Paul.

ROGER: One for the team. Yeah.

Marsha shakes her head.

MARSHA: Let's get back to this script please and thank you.

Pause.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 7**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Church Auditorium

Young people are gathered in the Auditorium for rehearsals.

Robert is onstage dressed like Jesus. He reads without a script. Jennifer dressed as Mary comes out to meet him. Both are exceptional actors.

Pastor Adolphus sits with Marsha proudly watching. Roger and Paul huddle together putting on Roman Soldiers costumes.

JEN: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

ROBERT: Where have you laid him?

JEN: Come and see.

Jen leads him to the edge of the stage and points.

JEN: There.

Robert weeps.

ROBERT: Get someone to roll away the stone.

JEN: But Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.

ROBERT: Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?

Jen nods.

ROBERT: *(looks to heaven)* Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.

Robert looks offstage. Reaches out his hand.

ROBERT: Lazarus, come forth.

Marsha jumps up excitedly and claps her hand gleefully.

MARSHA: Marvelous. Simply marvelous. Wow! I love it. I absolutely love it. Yes (*looks at script*) I think we have that scene locked down. Wow!

Marsha glances at a frowning Roger for a moment.

MARSHA: Ok. Let's take the crucifixion scene. Are my soldiers ready?

Robert looks at the two playing Roman Soldiers. They shot him a sinister look.

ROBERT: Oh boy.

MARSHA: Robert, go to the back of the church. The cross is waiting for you there. I need you to march up this aisle with the soldiers behind you momentarily whipping you with their whips.

ROBERT: Real whips?

MARSHA: Ropes...but they won't be hitting you for real. It just needs to look like they are. Right guys?

ROGER & PAUL: Yeah sure. We got this covered.

MARSHA: Ok. Take one.

Robert goes to the back and picks up the cross. He puts it on his shoulders. Roger and Paul stand behind him. They whisper something to each other, and chuckles.

MARSHA: Let's go guys. We don't have all night.

Robert crawls up the aisle with the cross. Roger lifts his rope and brings it down over Robert's back.

ROBERT: Oooo.

ROGER: Aww, don't be such a girl.

ROBERT: You are not supposed to hit me for real.

PAUL: But they hit Jesus for real.

MARSHA: Guys, guys. We talked about this.

ROGER: Sorry. It was an accident.

Robert starts up the aisle again. Paul hits him with the rope. Robert drops the cross and grabs Paul.

PAUL: Is Jesus supposed to do that?

Marsha runs up and separates them.

MARSHA: What is the problem?

ROBERT: They keep hitting me with the ropes.

MARSHA: Ok...this is my last warning to you two. I will find replacements.

ROGER: It's fine. Man, nobody has a sense of humor anymore.

Marsha returns to her seat. Robert picks up the cross and makes his way to the stage. The soldiers follow behind hitting the ground with their ropes.

They get to the stage.

Robert drops the cross, and falls over on it.

MARSHA: Very good. Now you two position him on the cross.

Paul and Roger positions Robert on the cross.

MARSHA: Good. Now take up those nails and hammer.

They take up the nails on hammer.

MARSHA: Now, Robert you need to position the nail in such a way that you can really drive those nails in the cross and make it look real.

Roger positions one of the nails on the cross beside Roberts's hand.

ROBERT: I think that's too close.

ROGER: Nonsense.

ROBERT: If you miss the nail you will hit my hand.

ROGER: I won't miss the nail then.

Robert removes his hand.

ROBERT: I would be stupid to keep my hand there with your hammering.

MARSHA: Guys, can we please just co-operate.

Pause.

ROBERT: Ok.

Robert puts his hand back. Roger pulls the nail back a bit.

ADOLPHUS: Hold it!

Adolphus goes to the scene.

ADOLPHUS: I think I like this scene. It's an almost perfect picture.

MARSHA: Sir?

ADOLPHUS: Here is the Son of God dying on a cross. Why?

MARSHA: Well to save man from sin.

ADOLPHUS: Exactly. The ultimate price for sin was paid for in full. So why do we still hold our offences against each other.

ROGER: I don't think this is the right time to preach sir.

ADOLPHUS: Roger, you are physically demonstrating what you have been verbally doing these past few months, and I am sure, if you could have your own way, you would be driving that nail for real.

ROGER: Well ---

ADOLPHUS: Look, guys. If we can't learn anything from this...what is the purpose for doing it? Look at what Jesus went through for us. It would be impossible to re-enact it on a stage or even on a movie screen...but he did it for us. No self, no pride...no anger, no judgment. It was simple, plain love.

ROGER: We get that part.

ADOLPHUS: But we miss the part where we are told to do likewise. If we are to follow Christ, we should deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

Adolphus extends his hands to Robert and Jen. They take and he places them by his side.

ADOLPHUS: Two young people like yourselves who committed a sin that Jesus completely paid for. God has forgiven them. The Spirit of God would want to know right now...can we forgive them as well.

Pause.

Adolphus looks at each face standing in the room

MARSHA: I can.

Pause.

PAUL: I can.

OTHERS: I can. I can. I can.

Pause. Roger is the only one who hasn't said anything, but his expression reflects remorse.

ADOLPHUS: We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

ROGER: Forgiveness can't be this easy.

ADOLPHUS: Oh but it is. Because of the cross. Jesus was God's perfect gift to humanity.

Pause.

Roger is on the spot. Everyone is waiting for him to respond.

ROGER: Ok, ok. As God has forgiven me, so I forgive you.

Jen goes to him and hugs him. Reluctantly he hugs back. He extends his hand to Robert. They shake hands.

ROGER: I still think I could have done a better Jesus.

ROBERT: Really?

ROGER: Nah. You are actually pretty good.

Pause.

ROGER: You know, this forgiveness thing is quite liberating.

MARSHA: Alright. Can we get back to rehearsals now please?

Everyone takes their place. Robert lies down on the cross, Roger positions himself with nail and hammer.

Marsha gives a thumbs up to Pastor Adolphus as he exits.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 8**LIGHTS UP**

Setting: Church Auditorium

Production night.

The audience is in place. Gene and Jack, Josef and Carmen sit up front. Others are behind them.

The play has almost run its course.

Jen as Mary enters, followed by Marsha as Salome.

JEN: Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb...

They stop, staring at something offstage. Jen points.

JEN: Do you see, Salome?

MARSHA: There is no stone.

Paul as Angel comes on dressed in a sparkling white dress.

PAUL: Who are you looking for?

Mary and Marsha hold each other in fear.

PAUL: Don't be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.

MARSHA: This is where they buried his body.

PAUL: He is not here. He has risen. Go, tell his disciples and Peter that He is going ahead of them into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.

JEN: Risen? Jesus is alive?

PAUL: You are looking for the living among the dead. Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Now go.

Paul exits.

Jen and Marsha look at each other.

JEN: He's alive!

They quickly exit.

LIGHTS FADE

LIGHTS UP

The play has ended. The auditorium is almost empty.

Carmen and Josef hug Jen.

JOSEF: We are so proud of you. You did well.

JEN: I tried.

CARMEN: We have some good news. After much talk and negotiation, the principal has agreed to let you finish school.

JEN: God is awesome.

They hug again and exit.

Gene and Jack are sitting in Pastor's office.

ADOLPHUS: It's really late.

GENE: We just really wanted to get your blessing, sir.

ADOLPHUS: Are we talking about anything specific?

Gene takes Jack's hand.

GENE: Well we have been thinking...maybe extending our faith for the first time...but if God can put a baby in the womb of a virgin; surely he can put one in the womb of a happily married woman.

ADOLPHUS: He sure can. *(smiles)*

JACK: Would you pray for us?

ADOLPHUS: Sure.

Pastor gets up from around his desk, and lays his hand on the couple's shoulders. He begins to pray.

Pause.

Deacon Brown enters. He looks around the church, touches a chair and smiles.

Robert quickly comes in.

ROBERT: Hey Pops.

BROWN: Hey son.

Pause.

ROBERT: I didn't know you were here.

BROWN: Yeah....I came to watch the play.

ROBERT: Pops, I am sorry I disappointed you ---

BROWN: I have been where you are...and I didn't handle it quite as well as you did...by sticking around and facing up to the repercussions. I think that's commendable.

Pause.

ROBERT: So, you're not mad at me?

BROWN: I was, for a while...but who can stay mad at you indefinitely. You are a brave young man. I don't know where you got it from ... but just maybe there is something even I can learn from you.

Robert hugs him.

ROBERT: So you liked the play.

BROWN: I think you nailed the role of Jesus.

ROBERT: It comes natural.

BROWN: I don't know where you got that from either.

They laugh and exit.

CAPTION: Message from God:

“I paid the price for sin. Forgive others, as I have forgiven you.”

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK