

RussellNess

*a half-hour television comedy
by*

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Revised Draft

COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCH STREET - AUSTIN, TEXAS - NIGHT

MUSIC: "WHAT IF GOD WAS ONE OF US" BY JOAN OSBORNE.

RUSSELL NESS, mid-30s, handsome even when drunk, wobbles down the sidewalk past churches and other houses of worship, each with a back-lit message board. The Baptists, **SHOUT AND GIVE PRAISE!**; The Mormons, **GOD DOESN'T LOVE BIG FAMILIES MORE, JUST MORE OFTEN**; and in front of the synagogue: **GUILT, A LOVE STORY**. Russell turns up the driveway of the only house on the block. He stops to read the sign of the mega-church next door: **GOD IS CALLING. WILL YOU PICK UP?**

SFX: RUSSELL'S CELLPHONE RINGS.

Russell looks from the sign to his phone, his mind blown.

RUSSELL
Hello...? God?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

GRACE GOODROE, 29, a lovely woman when she's not stranded in the median strip of a highway, is completely justified in wanting to tear Russell's balls off.

GRACE
You son of a bitch!

RUSSELL
Whoa, whoa, hold up. The profanity is one thing. But God's a woman?

GRACE
Three months you beg me to go out with you! Three months of enduring your tortured innuendos.
(mimicking Russell)
I'd like to put a head on your Guinness!

Russell laughs.

RUSSELL
It's funny because it's dumb.

GRACE

I finally say yes and you leave me
in the middle of a frigging highway
in your stupid mobile DJ van!

RUSSELL

What's stupid about my van?

Now we see the full glory of Russell's vehicle and business. It's an old bread truck with *Mobile DJ* emblazoned on the sides. The rear door features Russell's deliriously smiling face with: **WARNING - Lock up your daughters, Russell Ness is in town.**

GRACE

Where are you? You said you were
going to take a piss.

RUSSELL

You're going to love this part. I
realized while peeing in the center
of a highway that I was too drunk
to be driving. "Russell," I said to
myself, "do the right thing."

GRACE

And the right thing was deserting me?

RUSSELL

No... Well... See...
(hopeful)
You looked very nice tonight.

Russell reacts to being hung up on.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

No good deed goes unpunished.

He looks up at a statue of Jesus on the crucifix.

Look who I'm telling that to!

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - NEXT MORNING

A modern worship hall with an enormous video screen above the altar. **BARTHOLOMEW**, 33, a substantial African American man with the voice of an angel dipped in butter, belts out *They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love*. He's backed by a kick-ass CHOIR and ROCK BAND.

EXT. RUSSELL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The music from next door is very loud.

INT. RUSSELL'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Russell tries to smother the noise with his pillow.

INT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - MOMENTS LATER

The jubilant performance continues as the congregation claps along. Russell enters the back of the church, wrapped in a blanket.

RUSSELL

Excuse me?

He goes unnoticed. Russell is blinded by a shaft of light streaming through a stained glass window.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Damn, that's bright.

(steps out of the light)

Pardon me? Could you turn down the--

The song ends.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Thank you.

(to a parishioner)

It's a bit loud for Sunday morning,
don't you think? People are trying
to sleep, for God's sake.

PASTOR DAVE, the young and oh-so-with-it preacher, sees Russell, again illuminated in the shaft of sunlight.

PASTOR DAVE

Can I help you?

RUSSELL

What's with this light?

(steps to his right)

That's better. No it isn't.

(the light's back)

I didn't mean to interrupt. I'm
your new neighbor. Russell.

On Pastor Dave's signal, the congregation speaks in unison.

CONGREGATION

Hel-lo Rus-sell.

RUSSELL

Hel-lo church peo-ple.

(then)

Grace?

Grace sits with her parents, trying to become invisible.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

So good to see you! You're not still angry...? Oh, you are.

(to Pastor Dave)

Anyway, I moved in Friday. It's my granny's old house. I had to leave my apartment. Someone had a big party and wrecked the place. Girls, a mobile DJ, wet trouser contest...

(modestly)

I won.

A few in the congregation laugh.

PASTOR DAVE

Russell, we're in the middle of a service. Why don't you stay?

RUSSELL

Thanks but I'm not much of a church goer. I'm like Jesus that way.

The parishioners nearest him react. MATT, 36, sitting next to his twin brother, PAT, strains to hear.

MATT

I didn't hear that!

PAT

What did he say?

Bartholomew hands Russell his microphone. Instantly, Russell's image appears on the big screen.

RUSSELL

It was nothing. I just said I'm not a church guy and that's one thing I have in common with Jesus.

(a beat)

You know, because there's hardly anything in the Bible about Jesus going to church. Except for that time he tore the place up. On the other hand, the Bible has lots of stories about Jesus drinking wine and fishing with his buddies.

Matt and Pat nod at each other.

PASTOR DAVE

Am I to believe you read the Bible?

RUSSELL

I've read all the good books. The Bible, Koran, Baghavat Gita, Fifty Shades of Gray.

REBECCA, a fit and attractive 50 year-old woman, smiles.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

They're surprisingly similar. Well, not the last one. It's more about holes than holies.

PASTOR DAVE

Okay, that's enough. Bartholomew?

He signals to cut him off. Bartholomew steps closer.

RUSSELL

It's funny, there are so many holy books and inside they all push the same basic things: Love each other. Honor God. Don't let the gays marry.

BERTRAND, 38, a snappy dresser, glances around uncomfortably.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Kidding. That's not in any of the books.

PASTOR DAVE

Bartholomew, the microphone! He's inflaming my irritable bowel.

Bartholomew reaches for the microphone but stops as the shaft of light hits Russell again, casting him in a celestial glow.

RUSSELL

Something else I noticed: Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Abraham - they're all a lot less judge-y than the people who claim to interpret their words. They didn't even have to say, "Follow me." People just did.

Assorted people in the congregation react to Russell's words.

EXT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - MOMENTS LATER

Russell walks down the driveway. He turns to see Matt, Pat, Bartholomew, Rebecca and others following him.

RUSSELL

Where are you going?

MATT

Wherever you lead us.

Russell looks at Bartholomew, who nods. Russell takes another step and the followers step with him. He starts and stops and they stay in unison. Russell sighs.

RUSSELL

Anyone know how to cook breakfast?

BARTHOLOMEW

I do.

Russell shrugs.

RUSSELL

Alright. Follow me.

Matt whispers to **MJ**, his 14 year-old son.

MATT

Followeth me, said Russell. So we did. And it was good.

MJ types into his phone as they catch up with the others and we...

FADE OUT.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONEINT. RUSSELL'S HOUSE - DAY

Bartholomew sings as he cooks. Russell enters from his bedroom, just finishing getting dressed.

RUSSELL

I'm flattered, really, but you have the wrong guy. I agree with whoever said "I'm spiritual but not religious." Who was that?

BARTHOLOMEW

I'm not familiar.

RUSSELL

Wait, I remember. It was the centerfold in my favorite teenage whack-mag. She also articulated the opinion that mean people suck.

BARTHOLOMEW

Religion is a personal thing. I go to church because I love to sing. It makes me feel closer to God. I also have a fondness for plus-sized women and in my experience, the real fine ones are tight with the Lord.

Bartholomew hands Russell a plate of eggs, sausage and potatoes.

BARTHOLOMEW (cont'd)

What you said this morning made sense. I like church but I've never been big on the judge-y parts.

Russell digs into his plate of food.

RUSSELL

Did you make this? From things I own?

BARTHOLOMEW

Sister Rebecca made a run to the market. My name's Bartholomew.

RUSSELL

Do people call you Bart?

BARTHOLOMEW
(menacing)
No they do not.

Russell takes a huge bite and talks with his mouth full.

RUSSELL
This is fantastic, Bartholomew.
But I'm not a church. You guys
can't stay here. I have things to
do. Actually, I don't. But you
still can't stay.

Matt enters with MJ in tow.

MATT
Russell, where's your hose?

RUSSELL
I don't know, I just moved in. Why?

MATT
We're tidying up the yard and
cleaning out that old chicken coop.

BARTHOLOMEW
Brother Matt, Russell would like
everyone to leave.

RUSSELL
Unless Brother Matt wants to finish
what he started...

MATT
(to MJ)
Finisheth what thy start.

EXT. RUSSELL'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Russell follows Matt and MJ into his backyard where a dozen or so people pick up trash, pull weeds and clean out a large chicken coop. Russell continues to eat as he watches the bustle of activity.

RUSSELL
Don't make it too nice, my
relatives will want to visit.

Everyone laughs. Not fake laughter, but more than the joke deserves.

RUSSELL (cont'd)
I like you people.

DANIEL, 24, a skater dude, finds a bong under the stairs.

DANIEL

Score!

RUSSELL

That's mine.

DANIEL

(stoked)

We can smoke weed here?

RUSSELL

Why would I care? Smoke away.

Daniel immediately sparks up the bowl.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

I assumed you meant your own weed.

BARTHOLOMEW

Brother Daniel never has his own weed.

(calls off)

Brother D, don't be Bogartin' now.
Pass that over here.

Bartholomew crosses off to get a hit on the bong as we...

CUT TO:

EXT. GOBEL'S BAR - THE FOLLOWING EVENING

Russell walks toward the front steps. **JOHN MITCHELL**, 38, drinks a beer in his wheelchair out front.

JOHN

Hey, Russell, I heard you're starting a church.

RUSSELL

You heard wrong. Wait. I heard you died.

JOHN

Nah. Just can't use my legs. I drove off a bridge but the doctor said all the beer in my system kept me loose.

(raises his bottle)

This stuff saved my life.

RUSSELL

After it made you drive off a bridge.

JOHN

I don't question science.

RUSSELL

You coming in?

JOHN

Nah. Can't get my chair up the steps and I'm a tad too hetero to let a man carry me over the threshold.

INT. GOBEL'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Grace is behind the bar serving drinks. Russell tries to get her attention from the other end of the bar.

RUSSELL

Psst! Grace?!

Russell stands with **GLENN**, 34, his heavysset and socially awkward friend. Whatever the occasion, Glenn wears a superhero t-shirt because once he got laid wearing a superhero t-shirt. Tonight, it's Batman.

GLENN

What do you mean, they followed you? Like disciples?

RUSSELL

(focused on Grace)

No, not disciples. They're just people who followed me to my house.

GLENN

Sounds like disciples. How many were there?

RUSSELL

I don't know. Twelve?

GLENN

There you go.

Grace comes to their end of the bar, makes a point of avoiding Russell.

RUSSELL

Hi, Grace.

GRACE

Hey, Glenn. Nice shirt. Whiskey sour?

Glenn nods and smiles.

RUSSELL

I would love a Guinness, thank you.

Grace walks away.

GLENN

Did you hear that? Grace likes my shirt.

RUSSELL

She was being ironic. You wear the same shirt every night.

GLENN

I do not! Last night was Aquaman and the night before was Green Lantern. Women dig superheroes.

RUSSELL

Yes, almost as much as they dig fat men in delayed adolescence.

GLENN

Ouch. I hope you don't talk to your disciples that way.

Grace comes back with Glenn's drink.

RUSSELL

Grace, can I--

GRACE

I'm off in fifteen minutes. Don't go anywhere.

RUSSELL

Thank--

But she's already gone. Russell sees Glenn check out her ass.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

You don't have a chance.

GLENN

Feeling me gaining on you, aren't you?

Rebecca enters the bar and walks past Russell.

REBECCA
Hello, Russell.

She smiles at Glenn.

GLENN
Who is that?

RUSSELL
One of my "disciples".

GLENN
No way. She smiled at me.
(excited)
Dude, you can achieve what every
man dreams of - Having your own
mind-control sex cult!

RUSSELL
I've never dreamed of that.

GLENN
Right. Like I'm the only one.

Glenn crosses off in the direction Rebecca went. Pat steps up with his vivacious and flirty wife, **CHERYL**.

PAT
Excuse me, Russell?

RUSSELL
Oh hey, Matt. Thanks for cleaning
my yard yesterday.

PAT
I'm Pat. Matt's my twin.

RUSSELL
Right. Adult twins! Freaky.
(shudders)
Except for girls. Twin girls can be
hot. But still freaky, you know?

PAT
I don't.

RUSSELL
Anyway, sorry I mistook you for
your brother.

Cheryl grabs Russell's arm.

CHERYL

Don't be. I sometimes get them confused myself. Last New Year's I accidentally went home with Matt!

PAT

Cheryl, we agreed you wouldn't tell that story anymore.

CHERYL

Oh, lighten up, Patrick. It was an accident.

(touches Russell)

Short men are so paranoid.

RUSSELL

I've noticed that. Do you think it's an atmospheric thing?

PAT

Russell, shouldn't you be home? It's Monday night.

(off Russell's confusion)

Men's Fellowship?

LATER:

Grace walks over to where Russell was standing. The men are gone. She turns to Cheryl and Rebecca at the bar.

GRACE

Did Russell leave?

CHERYL

Yeah. They went to his house for Men's Fellowship.

GRACE

His house?

Cheryl shrugs. Grace grabs her keys and heads out.

CHERYL

I want to come with!

Cheryl and Rebecca follow Grace out.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - LATER THAT NIGHT

Pastor Dave sits with TWO MEN beneath a banner advertising *Monday Night Men's Fellowship*. Judging by the empty chairs, he was expecting a bigger crowd.

EXT. RUSSELL'S BACKYARD - SAME TIME

Pat leads Russell up the driveway. Glenn follows behind, pushing John. A GROUP OF MEN stand outside the renovated chicken coop. There's a murmur among the men.

MEN

He's here./Russell's here./Make way.

INT. RUSSELL'S CHICKEN COOP - CONTINUOUS

Russell enters to find MORE MEN. **SETH**, 40, a bearded man wearing a yarmulke, and **IMRAN**, 24, a Sikh, play Pop-a-Shot.

RUSSELL

What's going on? You can't be here.
(looks around)
When did I get Pop-a-Shot?

Bartholomew stands.

BARTHOLOMEW

I donated it to House of Our Lord
but since we're coming here now...

RUSSELL

Who are all these guys?

BARTHOLOMEW

Some are from the church. Some saw
you online.

RUSSELL

(panicked)
People can see what I do online?

Bartholomew puts a comforting arm on Russell's shoulder.

BARTHOLOMEW

It's not like that, my brother.

Imran walks over to Russell.

IMRAN

My cousin sent me a video of you
speaking at the church. I shared it
with the guys in my Wednesday night
basketball league.

Seth joins them.

SETH

Pretty powerful stuff, Russell. If you can bring a Jew and a Muslim together.

IMRAN

I'm not Muslim. I'm a Sikh.

SETH

Aw, man, I've been bragging to people that I had a Muslim friend.
(hopeful)
Do Sikhs hate Jews?

IMRAN

Sikhs don't hate anyone.

SETH

What kind of religion is that?

CARLOS, a tough guy who looks like Danny Trejo, steps up.

CARLOS

I'm spiritual but not religious.

BARTHOLOMEW

(to Russell)

Carlos shares your taste in whack mags.

Carlos offers his hand. Russell looks at it and bumps elbows with him instead. Daniel walks by with Russell's bong.

BARTHOLOMEW (cont'd)

For Daniel, it's all about the weed.

Bartholomew takes the bong. Russell takes it from him.

RUSSELL

Look, I told you, this isn't a church.

BERTRAND

Then what should I do with the collection?

Bertrand holds up an empty 12-pack carton stuffed with cash.

BARTHOLOMEW

Russell, this is Bertrand. He just finished Pastor Dave's Gay Aversion Therapy.

RUSSELL
(to Bertrand)
You really did that?

BERTRAND
(too quickly)
No!
(then)
Oh you mean the therapy? Yes but I
didn't need it. It was research.
(super gay)
I'm not gay!

RUSSELL
I don't care.

BERTRAND
Well, I care!

MATT
Should we say a prayer?

RUSSELL
Whatever makes you happy.

The men bow their heads. Russell does likewise. After a beat, he looks up to see everyone waiting for him.

RUSSELL (cont'd)
What? Who, me? Oh no, I'm not holy.
I'm just a mobile DJ in a chicken
coop.

MATT
I know a certain carpenter who
started life in a manger.

GLENN
He makes a good point, Russell.

RUSSELL
No, he doesn't.
(to the group)
Look, I'm not the man you want me
to be. I'm just a guy. Not a bad
guy, but... A guy.

MATT
Amen.

The other men ad lib amens. MJ types furiously on his phone.

MJ
Not a bad guy...

RUSSELL

In fact, I've been known to be a dog. You know? A player. A cad. A bullshitter of women.

(starting to feel it)

Fellatiator par excellence! The Intercourser in Chief!

MJ

Can you talk slower?

RUSSELL

What I'm saying is, I've been with a lot of women.

Daniel shoots up his hand. Russell nods at him.

DANIEL

I'm glad you brought that up. How many before you can say you've been with "a lot" of women?

RUSSELL

I don't know...

Glenn jumps in. They answer together.

GLENN/RUSSELL

Six! / Forty?

John looks up at Glenn from his wheelchair.

JOHN

You should not have jumped in.

GLENN

I know. I have to learn that.

Now Matt's hand is raised.

RUSSELL

We don't need to raise hands.

The men smile and chat between themselves. At other Men's Fellowships, they have to raise hands.

MATT

While we're defining terms, what does "been with" actually entail?

GLENN

You know, make-out and stuff.

The others disagree. Glenn immediately regrets his decision.

JOHN

I have a bag of urine strapped to my leg and I'm still cooler than you.

BERTRAND

"Been with" is all the way. Anything short of full penetration and a release of fluids doesn't count as sex.

(to no one in particular)
It really doesn't.

DANIEL

This is the best Men's Fellowship ever!

The others agree exuberantly.

RUSSELL

I have a question. Why is it just Men's Fellowship? What's with churches always splitting up the boys and girls?

The men look at each other and shrug.

BARTHOLOMEW

All in favor of inviting women to Fellowship?

The men raise their hands. Grace, Cheryl and Rebecca walk in.

GRACE

Russell, what are you doing?

RUSSELL

Grace! Hey everyone, Grace is here!

MATT

(to MJ)
Russell said "Let there be women" and there were women.

Rebecca smiles at Glenn, who looks behind him to see if there's someone else. Cheryl walks up to Matt and kisses him.

CHERYL

Hi, honey.

PAT

Sweetheart, I'm over here!

Grace gets in Russell's face.

GRACE

What are you doing? Is this some
sort of twisted game for you?
You're the last person to be giving
guidance, spiritual or otherwise.
You're a phony. A fraud. A self-
obsessed, never-will-amount-to-
anything... prick!

RUSSELL

Thank you! That's what I've been
trying to tell them!

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOEXT. RUSSELL'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Grace walks down the driveway. Russell follows.

RUSSELL

Grace, please, don't go.

GRACE

I'm not going to be part of your scam.

RUSSELL

I'm not scamming. I swear. These guys just showed up. I told them I'm not a church.

GRACE

Good for you.

RUSSELL

Grace, please. I'm sorry I left you Saturday night. And I'm sorry I took off from the bar tonight when I said I'd wait for you.

(screams in frustration)

Gaaaugh! I mess everything up! Look at me, I'm a fucking loser. I had big plans about how I was going to change the world and what am I? A mobile DJ!

MJ is crouched behind Russell, typing into his phone.

MJ

Fucking... loser...

RUSSELL

MJ? Not now.

MJ nods and leaves. Russell turns back to Grace.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Apparently, I have a scribe.

(off Grace's half-smile)

Is that a smile? And it's gone.

(then)

Look, I never meant to make fun of anyone's faith. I was just trying to get some sleep on a Sunday morning.

Grace is stunned to see Carlos walking down the driveway.

GRACE

Carlos?!

Grace runs to hug him.

RUSSELL

I'd watch out for his hands--

GRACE

It is so good to see you!

CARLOS

How's your father? Will you tell
him hello?

Grace nods, on the verge of tears. Carlos turns to Russell.

CARLOS (cont'd)

This was nice, tonight. Thank you.

Carlos offers Russell his elbow to bump before walking away.
Grace looks from Carlos, to Russell, and back again.

GRACE

Oh my God.

RUSSELL

What?

GRACE

Carlos worked with my dad for more
than twenty years. He's like my
uncle. He lost his wife and son in
a horrible accident, maybe six
years ago. I don't think he's left
his house since.

RUSSELL

With the internet nowadays, you
really don't have to.

Glenn walks down the driveway holding the collection box.

GLENN

Yo, Russell! What should I do with
the collection box?

GRACE

You took a collection?

RUSSELL

(busted)
Oh. Yeah. Wasn't my idea.

Grace takes the box.

GRACE

That's a lot of money.
(looks inside)
There's a twenty in here!
(accusingly, to Russell)
But you're not a church?

RUSSELL

No.

GRACE

Can I ask you something? Why the hell not?

As Russell reels from Grace's change of attitude, we...

CUT TO:

INT. RUSSELL'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Russell and Grace sit on the couch, counting money.

GRACE

What do you say to make them give this much?

RUSSELL

I don't know. A lot of nonsense, really. We had a lively discussion on how many sexual partners constitutes "a lot".

GRACE

And your answer was...?

RUSSELL

Fort--
(re-calibrates)
Um... Three?

Grace laughs.

GRACE

Pastor Dave doesn't rake in this much. You hear a lot of change hitting the collection plate Sunday morning.

RUSSELL

I told Glenn we should do a charity project. We're building a wheelchair ramp for John Mitchell.

GRACE

Russell, that's very nice. There may be hope for you, yet.

(off Russell's smile)

Wait, does John's house have stairs?

RUSSELL

Not at his house. At Goble's.

GRACE

That's your charity? Helping a man with a near-fatal drinking problem get into a bar?

THE DOORBELL RINGS.

RUSSELL

It sounded more charitable when Glenn and I were talking.

RUSSELL OPENS THE DOOR TO REVEAL PASTOR DAVE.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Pastor Dave!

PASTOR DAVE

Hi, Russell. Oh, hello, Grace. I just came by to thank Russell for hosting the Men's Fellowship this evening.

(sees the box of money)

Is that the collection?

RUSSELL

Most of it. We're taking on a charity project.

PASTOR DAVE

Oh, you can't do that. There are strict rules about how we spend the church's money.

RUSSELL

It's not the church's money. It's what we collected in my backyard.

PASTOR DAVE

From my parishioners during a church sanctioned event.

He starts toward the cash. Russell speaks with gravity.

RUSSEL

Don't touch the money, Pastor Dave.

PASTOR DAVE

Or what? Is that a threat? Are you threatening me? Because Grace is my witness.

GRACE

Don't touch the money, Pastor Dave.

PASTOR DAVE

Grace! What are you doing? This isn't a real church.

GRACE

He never said it was.

RUSSELL

You have nothing to worry about, Pastor. I'm not starting a church. Your turf is safe. I'm not going to pretend I can make a gay man straight. Or even make a straight woman agree to go out with me again.

Russell looks hopefully at Grace. She mouths "no way." He turns back to Pastor Dave.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

I'm not starting a church.

GLENN (O.S.)

A church is a great idea!

INT. GOBLE'S BAR - THE NEXT NIGHT

Russell sits with Glenn and Bartholomew as Grace tends bar. Rebecca snuggles close to Glenn.

GRACE

That's what I told him.

RUSSELL

I can't start a church. I don't even have a religion.

BARTHOLOMEW

That's what I like about you. The only thing you've told us we can't do is take your weed.

Matt joins them.

MATT

"Pincheth not from thy master's
stash."

RUSSELL

So it is written.

REBECCA

There are plenty of churches that
don't belong to a specific faith.
Do you believe in a higher power?

RUSSELL

I suppose.

REBECCA

And you live by some sort of moral
code?

GRACE

Let's skip that one.

RUSSELL

(protests)

I have a moral code! It's not about
telling people not to drink or do
drugs or other fun stuff, though.
My moral code is like, "Don't be a
dick" and "If you're tall, help the
shorties."

Matt has been trying to climb onto a bar stool. Russell picks
him up.

MATT

Thanks.

GRACE

How about, "Don't leave your date
in the middle of a highway"?

RUSSELL

That's going in. It's an evolving
code. But guys, this is crazy. I'm
not a preacher.

GRACE

Here's how I see it. You're vain and
stupid, you don't believe in much
and your lifestyle is pathetic...

RUSSELL

Go on. You had me at vain and
stupid.

GRACE

But you made a grieving man come out of his house. And however misguided, you did build John a ramp. Plus, you have something that every religious leader longs for.

RUSSELL

A make-me-cum smile and an ass that doesn't quit?

GRACE

A following.

John wheels by.

JOHN

Russell Ness, you're a good man!

BAR PATRONS cheer as John heads for the door.

GRACE

Careful going down the ramp--

Suddenly John picks up speed and zooms down the ramp, slamming into a parking meter.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - NEXT EVENING

Pastor Dave hosts a meeting of the Interfaith Council. **RABBI SHEINBAUM**, 68, speaks.

RABBI SHEINBAUM

If it's not a recognized church, he can't solicit contributions. That's the law.

IMAM NASSIF, 32, is always trying to find consensus. Too bad none of the others trust him.

IMAM NASSIF

Rabbi Sheinbaum has never been more right.

RABBI SHEINBAUM

What's that mean? I'm usually wrong?

IMAM NASSIF

No... I was agreeing with you.

RABBI SHEINBAUM

(to Pastor Dave)

These are supposed to be friendly meetings.

A **LUTHERAN WOMAN PASTOR**, an **AFRICAN AMERICAN REVEREND**, a **CLEAN CUT MORMON BISHOP** and a **CENTRAL AMERICAN CATHOLIC PRIEST** all shake their heads sadly.

PASTOR DAVE

Personally, I think Russell is just misguided. But I wanted you all to know the situation in case we have to take more forceful action.

IMAM NASSIF

Like when the Wiccans tried to move in. An anonymous call to the police about human sacrifice and a bag of marijuana planted in the priestess' Volvo cured that problem.

The others nod. Except for the Mormon.

MORMON BISHOP

Wait. When we were building our Mormon Temple, the police were told we were doing human sacrifices.

(recalling)

And a bag of marijuana was planted in my car.

RABBI SHEINBAUM

It was a different time, Merle. That was before Mitt Romney!

The Mormon nods. Gee, they're agreeable folks.

INT. RUSSELL'S CHICKEN COOP - SAME TIME

Russell plays Pop-a-Shot with Glenn and Bartholomew.

RUSSELL

It just doesn't seem honest to me. I can't be what I'm not.

BARTHOLOMEW

And that is the essence of Russelness.

GLENN

Russellness. I like that.

RUSSELL

Alright, that is cool.

BARTHOLOMEW

So, no church?

RUSSELL

No.

(off Glenn's deep sigh)

You alright?

GLENN

Yeah. It's just that ever since you've had disciples my life has been really good.

BARTHOLOMEW

Rebecca?

GLENN

Sweet Rebecca.

(to Russell)

It's not like you're going to get any sleep on Sunday mornings, anyway.

BARTHOLOMEW

The man makes a good point.

RUSSELL

I never liked going to church, why would I want to start one? You know how I like spending my Sundays? Playing basketball with my friends. Hungover, sometimes still up from Saturday night, we'd get together, shoot hoops, throw up in the bushes and shoot some more hoops.

BARTHOLOMEW

Sounds like a plan. You have the concrete slab. I'll paint some lines.

RUSSELL

Really?

GLENN

We just need something to hang a hoop on.

RUSSELL

There's an old telephone poll in the ditch at the end of the driveway.

EXT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - A SHORT WHILE LATER

The interfaith meeting is over and Pastor Dave escorts the other clerics to their cars.

PASTOR DAVE

It's out of an abundance of caution. Like I said, I don't think Russell is the religious type.

MORMON BISHOP

What the fudge?

The others look to where the Mormon is staring. Russell trudges up his driveway, dragging a telephone pole with a cross-beam and looking very much like Jesus with his crucifix. Out of habit, the Catholic priest crosses himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH STREET - SUNDAY MORNING

It's bright and early as cars pull into the parking lots of various houses of worship.

EXT. RUSSELL'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Russell's front lawn sports a new light-up message board that reads, *RussellNess - Mobile DJ. Then underneath: Sunday Morning Basketball - All are welcome.*

EXT. RUSSELL'S BACKYARD - A SHORT TIME LATER

A basketball game is in progress. Russell, Grace and Imran compete against Bartholomew, Pat and Seth. Other men, women and children watch, prepare food or play in the chicken coop. The game finishes and Glenn opens up the back of the Mobile DJ van. He comes over to Russell.

GLENN

People are asking when you'll say something.

RUSSELL

See, that's what I didn't want to have to do.

BARTHOLOMEW

It doesn't have to be a prayer.
Just a little dose of Russellness.

RUSSELL

Russellness.
(smiles)
Okay.

Russell climbs onto the rear bumper of his van, takes the microphone.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Welcome, everyone.

FOLLOWERS

And also with you.

RUSSELL

Okay, that's weird.

FOLLOWERS

Amen.

Russell looks at the people, trying to decide what to say.

RUSSELL

Thanks for being here. I'm warning you, though, I've failed at a lot of things, so there's no guarantee this will last.

The followers laugh, ad lib amens.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

I'm serious. In the last six years I've managed a band, been a guinea pig for drug companies, spun the spinny sign outside a cellphone store... Now I have this mobile DJ thing and -- Oh, make sure to take a business card. I do weddings, quinceaneras, coming out parties... Anyway, the point I'm trying to make is, I'm wholly unqualified to tell anyone what to do or how to do it. But if you want to hang here on Sundays, who am I to say no?

The crowd cheers.

GRACE

Where's that beer box? Let's a get a collection going!

Grace goes to start the collection. There's a rustling in the crowd. Two POLICE OFFICERS enter.

GLENN

Cops are here!

RUSSELL

Whew! I was beginning to think I'd forgotten how to throw a party. Is there a problem, officers?

OFFICER CARROLL

No. We just got some calls saying there was a human sacrifice going on back here.

REBECCA

Human sacrifice? What the--

OFFICER CARROLL

No worries. If a mysterious bag of marijuana turns up in your car will you give us a call?

RUSSELL

I most certainly will not.

DANIEL

I'll go check!

Daniel starts to run off.

RUSSELL

Officer, please tase that bro.
(then, to group)
Next game. Who's up?

BARTHOLOMEW

Hang on. One more thing.

Bartholomew takes the microphone and starts singing an upbeat gospel-y version of Johnny Cash's *God Gonna Cut You Down*.

BARTHOLOMEW (cont'd)

YOU CAN RUN ON FOR A LONG TIME,
RUN ON FOR A LONG TIME
RUN ON FOR A LONG TIME...
SOONER OR LATER, GOD'LL CUT YOU DOWN.
SOONER OR LATER, GOD'LL CUT YOU DOWN.

Others join in. A guy plugs a bass guitar into the van's sound system and two others pull out horns. It gets loud real quick.

INT. HOUSE OF OUR LORD - SAME TIME

Pastor Dave is having trouble being heard because of the music coming from next door.

PASTOR DAVE

The lesson we learn from Job is--

(gives up)

Someone go over there and tell them
to turn it down. It's Sunday
morning, for God's sake!

EXT. RUSSELL'S BACKYARD - SAME TIME

The music plays as Glenn dances with Rebecca. Cheryl dances with Matt until Pat cuts in. Grace comes over and hands Russell a full collection box. They share a smile and Russell misreads it. He puts an arm around Grace and she immediately takes it off. The party continues as we

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

TAGEXT. ROOFTOP PARTY - NIGHT

DANCE MUSIC PULSATES as MANY MEN are packed onto a crowded dance floor. At the bar, John sits next to Matt. Across from them, TWO MEN make out.

JOHN

I am not comfortable here.

MATT

It's for a good cause. It's our weekly act of charity. Plus, there's beer.

JOHN

I have nothing against the beer.

On a small stage, Russell spins discs on his mobile DJ set-up. The song ends.

RUSSELL

Are we having a good time, Austin?!

The crowd cheers.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Just a quick announcement:

(reads from a napkin)

To "Andrew", yes you can buy me a shot and no thank you on the second offer.

At the bar, a GOOD LOOKING MAN shrugs and orders a shot.

RUSSELL (cont'd)

Thank you for joining us on this very special Men's Fellowship. Now, please help me welcome... the reason we are partying tonight... the lovely and available... Bertrand!

Russell cranks up the music as Bertrand makes his entrance, hoisted on a chair being carried by Bartholomew, Glenn, Carlos and Daniel. Bertrand blows a grateful kiss to Russell, who makes a big deal out of catching it and putting it in his pocket.

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW