

The Believing Boy and the Doubting Dad

20-DE07-W38

A father at the end of his rope is brought to faith by his son's  
simple act of faith.

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A hand grasps a large stamp. The stamp slams down on a paper employment form. The stamp lifts. "Fired" in bright red ink.

INT./EXT. CAR - JIM'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

JIM, early 30s, slumps his head onto his steering wheel. He looks at the employment form then in the mirror.

JIM  
(rehearsing)  
Son. I was fired. Psh. No. Son. I  
was laid off. Grrrr. That's a lie.  
Son. I lost my job. It happens all  
the time. No. It wasn't your fault.

Jim exits his vehicle. He inadvertently slams his fingers in the car door and squeals in pain.

EXT. FRONT OF JIM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jim walks across his lawn toward his front door. He slips and falls on his butt. Jim lifts his shoe. Dog-poop. Sprinklers turn on. Jim isn't sure whether what drips down his face is water or tears of rage. Jim rips the sprinkler head off in a fit of rage. It spews water.

JIM  
(yelling to heaven)  
Why God?!

BARK. Jim looks to his left and sees a little CHIHUAHUA being held by its human, MARGE, old-lady next door type wearing curlers, silk robe, and thrift store slippers. Marge sips her coffee.

MARGE  
Havin' a bad day, Jim?

JIM  
(accepting his fate)  
Yeah, Marge.

He sighs.

JIM (CONT'D)  
And it's about to get a lot worse.

INT. JIM'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

TOMMY, 7ish, glasses-too-big, awkward kid with an earnest face, lies on the couch. His crutches lean against the couch. His toes stick out of his leg-cast that sticks out of his blanket, raised on a stack of books. He looks intensely at Jim over the E book of an encyclopedia.

He's not happy about what he's just heard.

TOMMY

You lost. Your. Job?

Jim, miserable and soaking wet, sits on the coffee table.

JIM

Yes.

TOMMY

(throwing up his arms in  
despair)

We're going to be homeless!

JIM

No! Son. No.

TOMMY

It was because of me! I know it!

JIM

What? Tommy, no! Come on, son, why would you think that?

TOMMY

You were late to work all the time when I broke my leg, dad.

JIM

Nahhh. I mean yes. I was late to work but it wasn't because of-

Tommy's stern look makes Jim nervous.

JIM (CONT'D)

Look, Tommy. It's complicated adult stuff. You wouldn't understand.

TOMMY

Dad. How many books have you read this year?

JIM

Tommy, come on.

TOMMY

Dad.

JIM

Ok. I dunno. Like ummm...

TOMMY

Have you even read one book this year?

JIM

Ok fine. No, but it's only March. How many have you read?

TOMMY

Two Hundred Thirteen.

JIM

Two Hundred Thirteen?! It's only March!

TOMMY

Yeah. I'm smart, dad. I know when you're lying.

JIM

Ok, ok. Listen I'm not lying to you. Sometimes adults try to smooth things over.

TOMMY

I knew it. It's because of me. We're gonna be homeless because of me.

JIM

Tommy, no. Listen. Everything is going to be fine.

Tommy's not having it. He crosses his arms. Standing behind Jim is JILL, 17ish, babysitter. No one's really sure how long she's been standing there.

JILL

(awkwardly)

Uh. Mr. Peterson?

Jim drops his wet head. Can this day get worse?

JILL (CONT'D)

Since you're home early can I leave?

JIM  
Yeah, Jill. How much do I owe you?

JILL  
Fifty.

Jim takes the money out of his wallet and hands it to Jill. She ponders soaking wet Jim. Pity. She takes a ten off the top and offers it back to Jim.

JIM  
What? No! You are both over-reacting. I'm gonna find a job!

INT. JIM'S KITCHEN - DAY

Cleaned-up Jim stares proudly at his filled out application on his laptop. He hits submit. The form empties. A pop up says, "please fill out form again."

Jim groans in despair.

Jim has filled the form again. He hits submit. A popup reads, "please fill all required fields."

JIM  
God, please. I need a job. Make it easier, huh?

TIMELAPSE:

Day turns to night as Jim alternates between typing and being frustrated.

END TIMELAPSE

Jim has his head in his hands.

Tommy appears in the doorway in pajamas.

TOMMY  
Dad, it's time for night prayers.

JIM  
Ummm. Ya know what, bud? Go ahead and say them on your own tonight.

TOMMY  
(crestfallen)  
Ok, dad.

As Tommy crutches upstairs the screen splits.

SPLIT SCREEN - Tommy on top, Jim on the bottom:

Jim is in a LAPTOP JOBSEARCH TIMELAPSE from hell. Day turns to night twenty times. He gets more raggedy as the days go on. REJECTED EMAIL after rejected email. Please fill all fields. Submission rejected, start over, please. The hamster wheel of despair.

Above, Tommy enters his bedroom, shoulders slumped. He approaches his bed, sets his crutches aside, and kneels down. He folds his hands like a good little boy. He tilts his head back and begins to pray.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Hi, Jesus. Hi, mom. It's pretty rough down here. I think I lost dad his job. Jesus, please get my dad a job. Amen.

Tommy walks off. He walks back on with different pajamas. And kneels down.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Hi, Jesus. Hi, mom. Dad still hasn't found a job. He hasn't taken a shower for a few days and he's starting to smell. Jesus, please give me a sign. Or a call. Are there phones in Heaven? Hm. I guess not or you and mom would have called. Good night, Jesus. Good night, mom. I love you both.

Tommy walks off. He walks back on with different pajamas and kneels down.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Jesus, pleeeeeeease help me get my dad a joooob. He doesn't even pray with me anymore. It's kiiiilling me. Oh and Mom, if you could whisper a recipe in dad's ear besides cereal that would be great. I love you both. Goodnight, Jesus. Goodnight, mom.

Tommy starts to walk away. He remembers something and kneels back down.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Hi, Jesus. Hi, mom. Sorry to bug you again. I'm back.

(MORE)

TOMMY (CONT'D)

I normally tell dad awesome facts I read but he's too busy. I read that elephants fart about 3400 liters of methane a day. Isn't that a lot of methane? Ok. Goodnight.

Tommy climbs into bed. As the night turns into day, the split screen merges on Jim's timelapse.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Jim sleeps, slumped on his laptop. The doorbell rings. Jim arises and saunters over to the front door. Jim opens the front door.

GRANDMA, heavy on the hairspray and eyeshadow and more lipstick than humility, obviously your favorite grandma but not your parents' favorite mom, stands on the front porch.

GRANDMA

Good morning, Son. Is our boy, Tommy, ready?

JIM

Morning, mom. Yea, he'll be right out.

(yelling over his shoulder)

Tommy! Your Grandma's here to take you to church!

TOMMY (O.S.)

(from down the hall)

Be there in a minute, dad!

GRANDMA

You look like shitake mushrooms, son.

JIM

Ah, ma! Don't start. How's your bingo debt?

GRANDMA

Oh son. I've come to accept my shortcomings.

JIM

Ya know you could've retired ten years ago if you didn't play bingo so much.

GRANDMA

Always changing the subject. Jim, you know you should be coming with us. If Tommy's mother were still here she would have wanted you to go.

JIM

(hushed tone)

I told you last night on the phone I'm just worn out. It seems like when life is good, this God stuff makes sense, but now... I dunno.

Tommy hobbles down the hall towards the front door in his Sunday best and stops behind Jim who doesn't notice.

JIM (CONT'D)

I haven't been able to catch up on Tommy's medical bills. I don't know how much longer I can do this.

Tommy's face morphs into an expression of sadness. His crutch slips and he crashes to the ground. The loud noise clearly announces his presence. Jim and Grandma turn and see Tommy fumbling to get up. Tommy looks up, glasses catawampus.

TOMMY

Uh, hi, Dad. Hi, Grandma.

JIM

Tommy, are you alright, son?!

TOMMY

(brushing himself off)

Yeah I'm fine, dad. Come on, Grandma, we don't want to be late to church.

GRANDMA

You're right, Tommy. Go on to the car.

Tommy walks through the front door passing Grandma. Grandma's eyes follow. Tommy passes her and then she turns to address Jim.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

We'll finish this later. Faith, son.

JIM

Yea, I know, ma.

Grandma turns to walk to her car.

JIM (CONT'D)  
 (calling out to Tommy from doorway)  
 Bye bud!

TOMMY  
 Bye dad!

JIM  
 (to himself dismissively)  
 Faith.

Jim shuts the front door.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Grandma and Tommy sit in a pew, focused intently on the PREACHER, a wisened, white-bearded virile man with a voice to match.

PREACHER  
 Faith.

Tommy perks up.

PREACHER (CONT'D)  
 Oh! Ye of little Faith.

It is clear these words resonate with Tommy.

PREACHER (CONT'D)  
 The Lord speaks to us in these words taken from Matthew 14:24-32...

Tommy's eyes widen.

TOMMY'S DAY DREAM:

EXT. FISHING BOAT AT SEA - DARK AND STORMY

Tommy, sitting in the boat, rubs his fake beard in thought. He notices he has a beard and finds it weird. A light shines through the storm. He rubs his eyes, looks out on the water.

He ducks behind the rim of the boat, eyes wide with fear.

TOMMY  
 (to himself)  
 It's a ghost!

CHRIST'S/PREACHER'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Tommy! Take courage! It is I, the  
Lord!

Tommy's eyes open wide with wonder. He peeks tentatively over the edge of the boat. His jaw drops.

TOMMY  
Lord! If it is you, My dad needs a  
job!

CHRIST'S/PREACHER'S VOICE (O.S)  
Come, Tommy.

TOMMY  
But Lord! I can't walk on water.

CHRIST'S/PREACHER'S VOICE (O.S)  
Tommy. Oh ye of little faith. Come  
to me.

Tommy clambers, casted leg and all over the edge of the boat. He begins to walk on the water. He gets excited.

PREACHER'S VOICE (O.S) (CONT'D)  
Then the winds began to blow!

The winds pick up. Tommy is afraid and begins to sink.

TOMMY  
Lord! I can't swim!

Christ's HAND reaches into the frame.

CHRIST'S/PREACHER'S VOICE (O.S)  
Tommy. Why dost thou doubt?

Tommy grasps Christ's hand.

END TOMMY'S DAY DREAM.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Tommy's eyes snap open. He jumps up in excitement with his crutches held high.

TOMMY  
Thank you, Jesus!

Everyone looks at him. An embarrassed Tommy slowly slumps into his seat. Grandma leans in.

GRANDMA  
 (whispering to Tommy)  
 It's ok. One time I came to church  
 and forgot my skirt.

INT. CHURCH - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Grandma walks into the front door of the church with a lovely blouse and large purse, oblivious to people's reactions as she surveys the pews for an empty spot. Her nylon-clad legs frame the preacher behind the pulpit. He is aghast.

INT. CHURCH -DAY (BACK TO PRESENT DAY)

Tommy is mortified.

INT./EXT. JIM'S LIVING ROOM/JIM'S BACKYARD - DAY

Jim sits on the couch with his laptop. A storm rages outside his window. A drenched Tommy enters front door. Car engine is heard outside driving off.

TOMMY  
 Hey, dad. Did you know grandma went  
 to church without a skirt on one  
 time?

JIM  
 (distracted by computer)  
 That's awesome, son.

Tommy smiles knowingly.

TOMMY  
 Nevermind. Dad. Everything's gonna  
 be ok.

JIM  
 Ok, son.

Over a frustrated Jim's shoulder, the backyard window reveals a determined Tommy hobble with crutches towards the pool diving board. Tommy clumsily steps onto the diving board and limps to the edge. He puffs his chest, closes his eyes, raises his head high, and tosses his crutches off to the side.

Jim looks up and notices Tommy on the diving board. He rubs his eyes.

JIM (CONT'D)

What the -?

Tommy deliberately steps into space with his bum leg off the diving board and plummets into the water.

JIM (CONT'D)

Tommy!

Jim jumps up and rushes toward Tommy but is abruptly stopped by crashing into the sliding glass door. Jim quickly composes himself, opens the slider, and runs to Tommy. Jim pulls Tommy from the water.

TOMMY

(coughing up water)

No, dad! Let me be! I need to go back into the water!

JIM

Tommy, what are you doing? What were you thinking?!

TOMMY

I need to get more faith!

JIM

(confused)

What?

TOMMY

It's all my fault, dad. You don't have a job because I don't have the right amount of faith!

JIM

Oh, Tommy! This has nothing to do with you. I'm sorry for not making that clear enough, bud. This is between me and God. Come here.

Jim embraces Tommy. The phone rings from inside the house.

TOMMY

(eyes lighting up)

Dad. It's a job!

JIM

(slightly amused, hurrying for the phone)

It's probably your grandma. And no more walking on water, huh?!

Jim leaves Tommy's side and enters the house. Jim answers the phone in view of Tommy.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hello.

We hear BOB, middle aged man with New York accent, on the other end.

BOB (V.O.)

Yea, hi. This is Bob Jones with Child Protector Pool-fencing. Is this Mr. Peterson?

Jim, surprised, glances at Tommy. Tommy stares back eagerly.

JIM

Uh, yes sir. This is Jim Peterson.

BOB (V.O.)

Yea, sorry it took so long to get back to you regarding your resume. We've been real busy. I'm calling now because I wanted to bring you in for an interview and was wondering if you had time tomorrow.

Jim is somewhat dazed as if staring at headlights. Understanding what's happening, Tommy's face grows with excitement.

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

Uh, hello? Jim you there?

JIM

(mild stutter)

Um, yes. Yes sir. Tomorrow would be great for an interview.

Tommy hears "interview" and jerks back in jubilation. He falls backward into the pool.

JIM (CONT'D)

Tommy!

Jim drops the phone on the ground and rushes to help Tommy. We see the phone on the floor.

BOB (V.O.)

Hello? Jim? Hello?

FADE OUT.