

JESUS FREAKS

"Pilot"

by

Nathan Nix

nathan@nathannix.com
832.576.8675

INT. CHURCH CLASSROOM - NIGHT

As a SONG PLAYS, two teenage boys silently walk in place, side by side: LEVI HILL (15) and BRIAN ACKER (16).

They're products of the late '90s: frosted tips, pukka shell necklaces. Both wear t-shirts featuring a logo that says "Unspoken Word" and the comedy/tragedy masks. Levi also wears a purple sash that says JESUS.

We're watching a "human video" -- a silent skit using mime and set to a song.

One by one, three teens tempt Brian with a vice. TIM GARCIA (17) introduces Brian to smoking and drinking. MOLLY MCKENZIE (15) introduces Brian to heroin, though she mimes shooting it into her forearm with a gun instead of a needle. When Brian mimics her, he makes it look more like a needle.

After each temptation, Jesus uses sign language to tell Brian "I love you." Brian doesn't care. Jesus moves farther away from him as the temptations progress.

APRIL MILLER (16) "seduces" Brian the way only a virgin who's maybe kissed two boys in her life can -- the way she's seen it on TV. It culminates in a hug. She reveals she's pregnant. She hands him the baby and walks off.

As Brian holds his baby, the three temptations circle him like witches dancing around a fire. He droops, and when he tries to rise, they push him back down.

After a moment, Levi (Jesus) holds up his arms, as if to say "enough!" The temptations pause. Levi reaches out to Brian, who gratefully takes his hand. Levi pulls Brian out of the circle...and then steps in it himself!

While Brian shakes his head "no," the temptations circle Levi. Suddenly, they crucify him. They back off as Levi dies. With a last look at Brian, he gives up his ghost.

TORI (O.S.)

Cut it, Jason.

JASON GILMAN (15) stops the CD on a boombox. All the actors relax as TORI DRAKE (23), cool teacher vibe, steps up.

TORI

We've almost got it, y'all. Brian, when you smoke the cigarette, can you do the choking thing, like when a smoker inhales too much?

Off his blank look, Tori mimes taking a big drag, stumbling around, and choking.

TORI (cont'd)

And Molly? People shoot heroin with a needle, not a gun. Otherwise, great job. April? Brian? I'm not buying it, guys. This lightweight hug makes it seem like y'all are friends, not a couple. I know you're trying to limit contact so you don't tempt each other for real, but we need just a little more. Brian, really get in there and hug her tight. We've gotta believe this baby came from somewhere.

(to everyone)

Ok, back to one. Let's try again.

Everyone moves back to their starting points.

LEVI

Any notes for me?

TORI

(thinks, then...)

Yes. I love the way you die. You're my favorite Jesus ever.

Levi is disappointed. Not what he wanted to hear.

TITLE CARD: JESUS FREAKS

INT. CHURCH CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Drama practice is done. Kids mill about. Levi takes his Jesus sash to Tori and hands it to her.

TORI

Oh, thanks, Levi.

LEVI

Tori, I was wondering...um...

He looks over at Brian and April, who are practicing their hug. His eyes linger on April.

LEVI (cont'd)

I thought if maybe you wanted to switch things up or give Brian a break, I could fill in as the bad boy sometime.

Tori puts a comforting hand on Levi's shoulder.

TORI

Oh, honey, I love your servant heart. I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but I don't think you'd be a very convincing bad boy. That's a good thing though! It's not because of your drama skills. Every actor has an "essence" about them. And your essence is good. Safe. You don't have a "danger" to you like Brian does.

They look over at Brian, who's struggling with the hug.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The team files out of the classroom, one of a series of exterior doors on the church, an older building the popular Evangelical non-denominational congregation is outgrowing.

SUPERIMPOSE: HOUSTON, TEXAS 1997

In the parking lot next to them, pre-service youth group activities are in full swing. Some teens play basketball, others skate on small ramps, while others bump a volleyball.

Prowling the parking lot is ROBBIE ROBERTSON (23), a doughy leader who takes his minor authority too seriously. He wears a t-shirt with rolled-up sleeves that says "Lord's Gym" and depicts Jesus doing push-ups with a cross on his back.

Robbie BLOWS a coach's whistle as a skateboard rolls past. A skater named REESE TUCKER (15) retrieves it.

ROBBIE

(yelling)

Boards out of the basketball area!
Don't make me tell you again, Reese.

Reese gives Robbie a Nazi salute.

April and Molly walk arm-in-arm, trailed by Levi and Jason.

APRIL

There's just too much Jesus inside you. Probably because you're a pastor's kid. You know what they say about PKs -- they're either really good or really bad. So be happy you're one of the good ones.

LEVI
I'm not as good as you think.

April exchanges an amused look with Molly.

APRIL
Oh, really? What's something bad
you've done? Name a single thing.

JASON (O.S.)
One time...

Levi rolls his eyes. Jason is their tag-along. Easily excited, gangly, and oblivious to social cues. Homeschooled. Chick-fil-A employee of the month.

JASON
...I was playing Sims, because I'd
finished the schoolwork my mom gave
me for the day. And she made me stop
playing and take out the trash. I was
so mad I gave her the middle finger.

The rest of the group is part amused, part genuinely shocked that he'd actually do that.

MOLLY
Jason! What'd she do?

JASON
Oh, she didn't see me. I was already
outside at the trash can. But then I
felt really convicted later and
confessed. She grounded me from
computer games for a week.
(rueful)
Never doing that again.

APRIL
Well obviously Jason should play the
bad boy.

April gives Levi a knowing grin. An early '90s Mustang 5.0 parks near them. Out steps WES FILIP (23). The coolest Christian you've ever seen (and he knows it). Tall, goatee, sideburns, Structure vest over a white t-shirt.

WES
(to the quartet)
Look at this bunch of hooligans. Is
it safe to park the 'Stang here?

He smiles as they make their way towards him. Tori walks up.

WES (cont'd)
 (to Tori)
 Hey, babe.

They share a quick kiss. The teens go "oohh," teasing them.

WES (cont'd)
 Alright, alright, alright...

After pulling a guitar case out, Wes closes his trunk and passes our teens.

WES (cont'd)
 (to Levi)
 Hey -- Thursday. Accountability
 breakfasts. We starting back up?

LEVI
 (feeling special)
 Yeah, totally. Sure.

WES
 Word. All right, ladies, let's get
 this rehearsal going. Boys, see y'all
 on the flip side.

LEVI
 (to April)
 Hear that? He's keeping me
 accountable. From being bad.

As April and Molly walk off with Wes, April rolls her eyes. A skateboard ZIPS over and BANGS into Robbie's ankle.

ROBBIE
 Aaargh! Dagnabit, Reese! No more
 skateboarding! You're all done!

He blows the whistle and picks up the skateboard. Reese tries to get his skateboard back.

REESE
 Dammit, gimme my board, man!

ROBBIE
 Language!

Jason pulls out a \$10 bill.

JASON
 My mom gave me ten dollars to get
 something from the snack bar. You
 want anything?

Levi shakes his head.

JASON (cont'd)
Cool. More for me.

Jason SPRINTS off, looking like he's never run in his life.

INT. YOUTH ROOM - NIGHT

An old fellowship hall is now a youth room. Band posters on the wall, foosball and ping-pong tables, a couple of PlayStations hooked up to TVs, a snack station in a corner.

Christian ROCK MUSIC blares as kids shuffle in to find seats. Multi-colored stage lights are the only illumination in the dark and hazy room (thanks, fog machine).

Adult leaders in t-shirts bearing the youth group's name, IGNITE YOUTH MINISTRY, awkwardly try to engage the teens.

Levi sits on a row of padded chairs, right in the front. Jason appears and plops down next to him. Jason's arms are filled with \$10 worth of fifty-cent snacks (including three Cokes). He dumps it all on an empty chair.

LEVI
April's sitting here.

Jason slides all the candy a couple seats over. He tears into it, already on a sugar rush.

On a video screen, over the youth group logo, a countdown. Kids yell: FIVE! FOUR! The band gets on stage.

THREE! TWO! ONE!

The band, led by Wes, starts a high-energy rock song. April sings backup with him while Molly plays piano.

WES
(into a microphone)
Alright, alright, alright! Welcome to
Ignite! Everybody on your feet!

The lyrics appear on the video screen as everyone begins singing along with the song. Welcome to worship.

INT. YOUTH ROOM - LATER

During a slower, contemplative song, many teens have their eyes closed and hands raised to the sky, reaching out to heaven and surrendering themselves.

Levi sings, but his arms aren't raised and his eyes aren't closed. He looks at April, her eyes shut tight, her arms up.

She sings with all her heart, feeling every word of the song, like she's singing it directly to God himself. It's a deeply spiritual moment for her. She's somewhere else.

Levi knows what he's supposed to be feeling, but he doesn't feel it. Though he wants to. He raises his arms and closes his eyes, trying to force it. But his eyes open again and he continues through the motions.

INT. YOUTH ROOM - LATER

PASTOR CHRIS KEMP (early 30s) is in the middle of his sermon. The type of guy who, if he hadn't become a youth pastor, would've been a personal trainer or a coach. Charismatic, commands respect, but isn't necessarily cool. More like Wes's older brother than a peer.

PASTOR CHRIS

Summer's over, so what are you gonna do with all that passion you felt for God at camp? When you get to school, that fire that was burning so bright last month, are you gonna hide it from your friends, your classmates? The world's gonna try to snuff it out -- they're gonna tell you not to pray in school, some Biology teacher's gonna say you evolved from an ape, and people you think are your friends are gonna try to get you to do things you know are wrong.

On the back row, skaters cut up. A HAND on Reese's shoulder. He looks up to find an infuriated Robbie. The leader puts a finger in Reese's face and motions for him to follow.

The other skaters are like "ooh, busted." As Pastor Chris continues, Reese tries to make his way out of the row to follow Robbie. One of the skaters trips Reese, who falls. They all laugh. Reese rises, gives the kid the finger, and follows Robbie to a corner, where Robbie verbally reams him.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)
 You're called to be a light in the
 darkness. They'll call you a freak,
 but you know what the Bible says in
 Revelation 3:16?

(reading)

"So, because you are lukewarm --
 neither hot nor cold -- I am about to
 spit you out of my mouth." God would
 rather you be ice cold about him than
 lukewarm. It disgusts him. So many
 people say they're Christians but
 then don't live it. If you say you're
 a Christian, everything you do
 reflects God in one way or another.

Wes sneaks back onstage. He begins playing his acoustic
 guitar lightly as Pastor Chris finishes speaking.

CLOSE ON: April and Molly sit with Levi. April is mesmerized
 by the sermon, nodding along. Levi isn't as captivated.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)
 When they look at you this year, what
 are they gonna see? Jesus? Or just
 another kid trying to be cool?

(beat)

Next week is our annual back-to-
 school rally. We're gonna give you
 tickets to hand out, and you've got a
 choice to make -- are you gonna stay
 silent? Or are you gonna be sold out,
 on fire, completely and radically
 unashamed for God?

April is crying and nodding her head, convinced.

INT. YOUTH ROOM - LATER

Service is over. Leaders stand by the doors, passing out
 tickets as the kids leave. Our crew goes up to Wes and Tori.

WES

Ok, what're we working with here? How
 many tickets we thinking?

LEVI

Um...five?

(off April's look)

No...twenty?

Wes starts counting the tickets. April smiles at Levi.

INT. APRIL'S CAR - NIGHT

Molly rides shotgun in April's VW Bug, Levi in the back.

APRIL

Pastor Chris is so right. We're gonna have to work hard to stay on fire for God this year. Y'all, I've been praying, and I think God has impressed upon my heart that he's gonna bring about a revival at our school. And it's gonna start with us.

MOLLY

Really? With us? But...how?

APRIL

I don't know yet. But I'm gonna keep praying about it. God will show us. Y'all will keep praying too, right?

MOLLY

Of course.

April looks at Levi in the rear-view mirror.

LEVI

Yeah, totally. I'll pray. Keep praying. Because I already have been.

EXT. APRIL'S AND LEVI'S STREET - NIGHT

April's Bug pulls into the driveway of a modest, single-story home on a suburban street that's firmly middle class.

The kids hop out and head their separate ways: April up the driveway to her house, Levi next door to his, and Molly across the street towards hers.

INT. LEVI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Levi enters his room in his pajamas. His walls are covered with posters of mid-'90s Christian rock bands: DC Talk, Newsboys, Audio Adrenaline, etc. Very few trophies. A cork board filled with 4x6 photos of him with youth group kids. His whole life revolves around church and Christian culture.

He passes his window and looks out.

LEVI'S POV

Through his open blinds, he sees into the bedroom of the house next door. April has entered, fresh from a shower, a towel wrapped around her body. She opens a drawer.

BACK TO LEVI

He freezes, unsure what to do.

CLOSE ON her pulling out some panties.

Levi gasps and quickly twists the rod to shut the blinds. He doesn't move away from them though. It's like he's glued to the spot, still unsure how he'll handle this temptation.

INT. APRIL'S ROOM - NIGHT

April's room is full of youth group tchotchkes, photographs, and Christian music posters. Trophies and medals: choir, drama, student council. A classic overachiever.

April, dressed in pajamas, climbs on her bed and pulls out a journal. As she writes, we hear her prayer.

APRIL (V.O.)

Lord God...Daddy...thank you for this new school year. For this opportunity to reach my school for you.

(intense)

Will you show us how to make a real impact? How can I reach the girls in my school who are tempted to, you know, drink, do drugs, and have sex? Should I tell them mom's story? Will you give me a chance to share it?

April stares at a poster on a wall: a gorgeous husband and wife music duo called Out of the Grey. She writes on...

APRIL (V.O.) (cont'd)

And I pray for my future husband, wherever he might be...whoever he might be...

INT. LEVI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Levi lies in his bed, praying. Feeling a bit guilty.

LEVI (V.O.)

Lord God...um, sorry about earlier.
Please forgive me. Uh, will you show
us how to make revival happen at
school?

(beat)

And if it be your will that April
like me...you know, as more than a
friend...that'd be cool. I also pray
for...my...my par--

And he falls asleep mid-prayer.

EXT. APRIL AND LEVI'S STREET - MORNING

April and Molly stand by April's Bug in her driveway. She
reaches in and HONKS her horn. Levi comes out, backpack on.

APRIL

Come on! Get in, we've gotta talk.

INT. APRIL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Instead of starting the car, April turns to face the others.

APRIL

I was praying for a couple of hours
last night--

MOLLY

A couple of hours?

APRIL

--and I think God told me how we can
start a revival at school.

LEVI

God told you? Like, you heard him?

APRIL

Yeah, we talk all the time. He's my
best friend. No offense, Molly.

MOLLY

It's fine.

APRIL

The Lord put on my heart that there's
a way to not just keep this fire
burning, but to make it spread.

LEVI
Which is...?

APRIL
How does any trend start in school?

No one's sure of the answer.

APRIL (cont'd)
The popular kids do it. So...

She looks at them to put it together.

MOLLY
We get the popular kids to become
Christians?

APRIL
YES! If everyone's partying and
drinking and stuff because of peer
pressure, what if they were being
peer pressured to do good things?

LEVI
You wanna make being a Christian
cool?

APRIL
It is cool! But no one knows it. If
someone popular gets saved, though,
everyone will know it. And then all
the other popular kids will want to
come to church and be Christians. And
when they make it cool to be a
Christian, everyone else will want to
be one too. Right?

Molly looks at Levi. Is April onto something or just crazy?

LEVI
I guess so. Sorta like a domino
effect.

APRIL
Exactly! Once one falls, they all
start to fall.

LEVI
(cheeky)
In love with Jesus.

APRIL

We just have to get that first popular kid saved.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The trio walks down the hallway together, led by April. Unlike at church, nobody pays any attention to them.

APRIL

I say we make a list of who to target. We should hit all of the cliques and cast our net wide.

April studies students as our group walks by them. Football players in letter jackets, Polo boots, and Structure vests rough-house by a locker.

APRIL (cont'd)

You never know where a revival could begin, who's most open to Jesus. Let's start with kids in our classes.

Cheerleaders in their game day outfits approach the players. As April talks, we see JEN FRANKLIN (17) cozy up to one of the football players.

APRIL (cont'd)

Jen Franklin is in Algebra Two with me. Cheerleader, class president, Tim King's girlfriend...she's perfect.

Our group keeps walking. More popular kids are posted up by some lockers. Not athletes, cheerleaders, student council or anything official. Party kids -- their fame comes from hosting ragers. White bucket hats, silver hoop earrings, pukka shell necklaces, pseudo-surf ware like Billabong.

One girl, KANDACE KLAY (18), carries herself with the sexual confidence of a woman a decade older. Molly looks at her.

MOLLY

(whispering)

Kandace Klay's in my chemistry class, but I don't know--

APRIL

Ooh, sweet! She hosts, like, every party. If we get her saved, they'll have nowhere to drink.

Just past Kandace is another party kid: ALEX RICHARDS (16). Wiry, good-looking, effortlessly cool in a Bush *Sixteen Stone* t-shirt. Alex tries to talk to a pretty girl at a locker. She's not having any of it. In fact, she's angry. SLAMS her locker and stomps off.

Frustrated, Alex doesn't follow her. Things SLOW as he looks up and seemingly locks eyes with Levi. Levi's mouth opens, as if to say something, but nothing comes out. Instead, Levi nods an awkward "What's up?"

Alex doesn't react -- he looks away and moves on as if he didn't see Levi, which is exactly how Levi plays it off.

The kids reach an intersection of hallways and stop.

APRIL (cont'd)
Levi? Who you got?

Levi watches Alex walk off. April sees Alex.

APRIL (cont'd)
Isn't Alex Richards in your radio/TV class?

LEVI
Well...yeah...

APRIL
Excellent! It's settled. Ok, break!

Everyone splits off down different hallways.

INT. ALGEBRA CLASS - DAY

April enters her class and immediately scans the students and sees Jen. April pulls a ticket out of her bag.

She beelines for Jen, who chats with the boy behind her. April waits a moment, but Jen doesn't see her. The boy does, but he goes back to the convo like she doesn't exist.

April CLEARS HER THROAT. Jen keeps talking.

APRIL
Hey, Jen?

Jen finally turns and sees her. She's obviously not entirely sure why this girl is standing at her desk.

APRIL (cont'd)

Hi. So, my church youth group is hosting a back-to-school rally on Wednesday, and I'd love it if you'd be my special guest.

Jen shares a baffled look with the boy. April hands Jen a ticket. As Jen reads it...

APRIL (cont'd)

There'll be a band, food, drinks, prizes -- kinda like a big party. It's gonna be da bomb. And I can give you a ride if you need.

JEN

(dumbfounded)

No, I have a car. But, well, I think...oh you know, I can't. I'm cheering at a game on Wednesday.

April is disappointed but tries to hide it.

APRIL

Of course. Well we actually meet every Wednesday for--

JEN

(interrupting)

I have games on Wednesdays. Like, all of them.

April smiles and turns to leave, disheartened.

INT. CHEMISTRY CLASS - DAY

Molly sits behind Kandace. Just staring at the back of her head. She glances at Kandace's thong sticking out of the top of her jeans. Is entranced a moment, then snaps out of it.

Nervous, Molly closes her eyes and says a prayer, her mouth moving but no sound coming out. Her eyes open. She picks up a ticket and leans forward to tap Kandace's shoulder.

Kandace turns around, a big smile on her face.

KANDACE

(bubbly)

Yes, sweetie?

MOLLY

Hi. I like your blouse. It's cute.

KANDACE
Oh, thank you!

Kandace turns back around. Molly taps again.

MOLLY
And I wanted to ask... We're having
this thing at my...

Kandace snatches the ticket out of Molly's hands.

MOLLY (cont'd)
...church...

KANDACE
(realizing)
Oh, honey. I appreciate the invite,
but I don't wanna go to your teeny
bopper thing. Y'all have fun, though!

Kandace turns back around. The students around them can't even look at Molly, but they're grinning at the awkwardness of it all. Molly is devastated.

INT. RADIO/TV CLASS - DAY

Levi sits in class. Other students mill about, some sitting on desks. An old VHS editing bay sits against a wall.

Alex enters and sits near Levi, who studies him a bit. Alex seems bummed. He catches Levi watching. Levi is frozen like a deer in headlights. Not knowing what else to do, he simply nods his head and...

LEVI
(casual)
'Sup?

ALEX
Oh, hey. 'Sup, Levi?

LEVI
Not much. Nothing much. Is up.

ALEX
(distracted)
Cool.

Levi looks down at the ticket in his hands.

LEVI
Just--

JULIO RIOS (17) strolls in and sits by Alex.

JULIO
She's a bitch, dawg. So you like to
get wasted -- what's wrong with that?
She's overreacting.

ALEX
Stop saying she's a bitch. I fucked
up. For real, I overdid it this time.

JULIO
Naw, dawg.
(singing)
She's a bitch, she's a bitch, she's a
bitch! Even this guy thinks she's a
bitch. Right, my man?

They look at Levi, who's frozen again.

LEVI
Well, I...I don't...

JULIO
You don't think she's a bitch?

LEVI
...know?

JULIO
No, she's not a bitch?

LEVI
I don't know her, so I couldn't say.

A beat as Julio stares at him. Then...

JULIO
(shaking his head)
Well, she is.
(to Alex)
Dawg, we gotta bounce back hard from
this. Let's get fucked up this
weekend. Can we smoke at your place?
Will your parents be there?

ALEX
They don't give a shit. I don't know
if I wanna get fucked up like that
again. I think I need to chill out.
Especially if I'm gonna get her back.

JULIO
 No! No chill! If she's not cool with
 you having fun, fuck her.
 (seeing Levi
 listening)
 You wanna smoke out, little homie?

LEVI
 Actually, I don't smoke.

JULIO
 Damn, son, I'd love to see you get
 wild. You should come to Jen's party
 Friday. A keg, some weed, some
 hoes...

Levi is thrown -- did he just invited to a cool party?

ALEX
 (to Julio)
 Leave him alone -- Levi's a good kid.

Levi is sort of annoyed at being called good again, but he's
 also happy that Alex knows this about him. Levi looks at the
 ticket in his hands. He slips it back in his pocket.

LEVI
 I mean...yeah, maybe I'll come.

JULIO
 Yesssss!

COACH BROWN (40s), the cheerleading coach and a former
 beauty queen, enters.

COACH BROWN
 Why's everyone just sitting around?
 We shooting the video announcements
 yet? Let's go! I'm not staying late
 to edit today. I've got a roast in
 the crock pot.

Students get out an old VHS camera and set it on a tripod.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Levi sits with April, who prays over their food, eyes closed
 tight. Levi looks around to see if anyone is watching them.

APRIL
 And, Jesus, we ask that you'd bless
 this food to the needs of our bodies.
 (MORE)

APRIL (cont'd)
 And give us favor as we try to spark
 a revival in our school. Amen.

Levi quickly closes his eyes again and opens them at the
 same time April opens hers.

APRIL (cont'd)
 So, how'd it go with Alex?

LEVI
 I didn't get a chance to ask him. I
 was going to, but then Julio came in
 and started talking about how Alex's
 girlfriend is a b-word, and--

APRIL
 A butt?

LEVI
 What? No. Why would I not say "butt"?

APRIL
 I don't know. Lots of people don't
 say it. Your mom doesn't say it. At
 least, she gets mad when I say it.

LEVI
 The real b-word. And then he started
 to ask if I got effed up on drugs and
 stuff, so I just...didn't ask.

APRIL
Levi. You can't be scared that people
 will find out you're a Christian.

LEVI
 I'm not!

APRIL
 Yes, you are. And you heard what
 Pastor Chris said last night. If we
 deny we know God here on earth, he'll
 deny knowing us in heaven. Do you
 want that?

LEVI
 Well, no. Of course not.

APRIL
 Then you have to be bold. Jesus said
 we'd be persecuted for our faith. It
 comes with the territory.

(MORE)

APRIL (cont'd)
 But if you put yourself out on a limb
 for God, he'll honor that. Don't
 worry -- you'll get another chance.

INT. RADIO/TV CLASS - DAY

Levi watches as Alex and another student edit the announcements on the old editing bay. Levi looks up at the clock and frowns. A bell RINGS and students pack their bags.

JULIO
 (to Alex)
 C'mon, dawg -- let's go.

Levi gives up hope and leaves the class.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Levi walks out the door and stops when he sees April coming towards him, a hopeful look on her face.

Behind Levi, Alex and Julio exit and head past Levi and April. Before April can ask, Levi works up the courage...

LEVI
 Alex!

Alex stops and turns. Julio does too. Levi catches up and pulls out the ticket.

LEVI (cont'd)
 Hey, do you want to come to this
 back-to-school rally at my youth
 group on Wednesday?

He hands him the ticket. Alex looks it over, confused.

ALEX
 You're inviting me to church?

LEVI
 Yeah, but it's a cool church.

Alex highly doubts that but is too polite to say so.

ALEX
 Maybe? I've got...things...

LEVI
(too quickly)
Oh, yeah yeah yeah -- that's cool. I understand. I might not even go.

April gives him a look.

LEVI (cont'd)
(off her look)
I don't know why I said that. I'm going.

Alex notices April for the first time.

ALEX
That your girl?

LEVI
April? No, she's just a friend.

ALEX
She going?

LEVI
Yeah, she'll be there.

Alex considers this. Then...

ALEX
Tight. Thanks for the invite.

Alex leaves with Julio. Levi turns to April, who wears a HUGE smile. Levi can't help but smile too.

APRIL
You did it! Jesus would be so proud.

She gives him a big hug. His smile grows. April looks up just in time to catch Alex looking back at her. They lock eyes, sharing a moment as she and Levi are hugging.

EXT. DENNY'S - MORNING

The sun has yet to come up.

INT. DENNY'S - MORNING

Wes and Levi sit in a booth.

LEVI

Then he kicks the guy off him, and he falls back on the busted pipe, and it sticks out of his chest like...

(mimes pipe stabbing through chest)

And Nicholas Cage is all, "Why couldn't you just put the bunny back in the box?"

Wes and Levi laugh.

WES

My favorite was, "Define irony -- a bunch of idiots dancing around on a plane to a song made famous by a band that died in a plane crash."

They laugh again.

WES (cont'd)

I'm surprised your parents let you see it since it's rated R.

LEVI

Well, it's just R because of violence and language. No sex or anything.

WES

Ah, that makes sense. Speaking of, how are you doing? With...you know.

Levi realizes he's asking if he masturbated this week.

LEVI

(a bit embarrassed)

Oh, that. It's been ok, I guess.

WES

Yeah? Did you...uh...when you did it, were you online?

Levi looks across the restaurant to see April, Molly, and Tori chatting at a table. Levi focuses on April. Then...

LEVI

Yeah. I stumbled a bit.

WES

Don't beat yourself up about it. As long as we confess, the Bible says God's faithful and just to forgive our sins.

(MORE)

WES (cont'd)

We just gotta truly repent and try to change, you know? I still struggle too. I'm there with ya.

Wes offers a reassuring smile. Levi nods. LAUGHS from the ladies. Levi glances over.

WITH THE LADIES

They're recovering from something really funny.

APRIL

I mean...if I'm being honest!

TORI

It's ok to pray that your future husband is hot. What else?

APRIL

That he waits for me and stays pure, obviously; that he loves the Bible; loves to worship God; that he plays the guitar and sings well so we can travel around the country in a V-W van and play coffee shops together.

Molly and Tori laugh.

APRIL (cont'd)

No, really -- that's what I feel called to do! Like, our ministry.

TORI

I know, I know -- you've told me. It's just...so you.

APRIL

There's more, but I forget. I wrote it all down in my journal. You think God would really give me all that?

TORI

The Bible says He gives us the desires of our heart. So yeah.

APRIL

Did Wes fit all that you wrote down?

TORI

No. But that's ok. Even though he didn't tick every box...I just knew. You will too. What about you, Molly?

Molly seems more uncomfortable than she probably should be.

MOLLY

I don't know. That he's not allergic
to cats?

This sends the ladies into another fit of laughter.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The place is hopping. Like the opening scenes but on steroids. Skating, basketball, and more.

INT. CHURCH CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Levi sits on the floor. A HAND appears and dabs white mime makeup on his face with a sponge. It belongs to April. They both wear their drama team T-shirt and black pants. Around them, the rest of the group applies makeup.

APRIL

Close your eyes.

He does so. April paints black lines on his eyes.

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

Levi checks his makeup in a mirror. Two middle school boys burst in, basketball in hand. They dry sweat off with paper towels. One pulls out a bottle of Cool Water cologne and sprays it all over himself. He hands it to the other, who does the same. Levi coughs at the smell.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Levi exits the restroom. Glancing past a gaggle of kids chatting in the foyer, he sees a mid-'90s Mitsubishi Eclipse pull into the parking lot.

He freezes, jaw agape. Alex steps out of the car.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Alex eases towards the chaos in the parking lot. He's hesitant, out of his element for once.

He passes some black and Latinx kids who sit on the tailgate of a truck trying to rap as one bumps a beat. They're rapping about Jesus, though. Alex is baffled.

Robbie is lowering the basketball hoop. As he's doing this, a kid runs up and SLAMS home a dunk.

ROBBIE

(pissed)

HEY! That's it! I'm raising it up again. Y'all gotta respect me...

Alex moves towards the skate ramps. In the background, Reese -- Robbie's arch-nemesis -- stands with other skaters.

REESE

(to his friends)

Whoa -- Alex Richards is here.

(calling out)

Alex?

Reese skates over and slaps hands with Alex.

ALEX

Reese? What's up, man? You go here?

REESE

Well, my mom makes me. But the ramps are dope, so... Why are you here?

LEVI (O.S.)

Alex!

Levi jogs up. Alex jumps back a step at the sight of him.

ALEX

(surprised)

Holy shit!

In the background, Robbie hears this.

ROBBIE

(yelling)

Language!

ALEX

Sorry!

(to Levi)

Why are you wearing clown makeup?

LEVI

Oh, it's not clown makeup. It's mime makeup. For a skit we're doing later. I know, it's kinda weird.

ALEX

A skit? You act? You're always so quiet in class, I figured...

LEVI

Well, I'm a mime, so I'm still quiet. But yeah, I act.

REESE

He's hot shit here, man. Fuckin' the Christian Nicholas Cage.

Alex is impressed.

LEVI

I mean, I'm not Nicholas Cage, but... yeah. Well, I gotta finish getting ready, but save me a seat.

ALEX

(unsure)
I'll do that.

Levi leaves.

REESE

We're gonna smoke behind the building. Wanna come?
(seeing something)
Shit. Never mind. Parking lot Nazi.

Robbie approaches. Sticks his hand out for Alex.

ROBBIE

Yo, what's up, my brother? I'm Robbie. Lots of people call me Robbmeister General. You new here?

REESE

(under a cough)
Fascist!

INT. CHURCH CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Levi hurries into the classroom and beelines for April.

LEVI

Alex is here.

April is GIDDY. She grabs Levi's hands, which thrills him.

APRIL

We gotta pray.

(closing her eyes)

Lord God, we lift Alex up to you...

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - LATER

The doors are open and kids pour in as the countdown on the screen approaches zero. Alex walks in with the skaters, unsure about it all. They all sit on the back row.

The countdown hits zero and BOOM! Small pyrotechnics go off. Kids SCREAM! Alex is kind of impressed.

ALEX

(to Reese)

That's some WWE shit, man!

REESE

Here's our Stone Cold Steve Austin.

Robbie steps on stage, a potato gun strapped across his back. He wears sunglasses and tries to act cool. Wes gets on stage with him and tries to hype the crowd up.

Wes dumps a bunch of candy in the potato gun. Robbie aims it at one side of the crowd. They SCREAM! He aims it at the other side of the audience. The SCREAM LOUDER!

Robbie aims it at the ceiling and...

BOOM! The candy BLASTS into the roof, leaving marks all over it and shattering into tiny pieces that rain down over the youth. The kids go CRAZY!

Wes and Robbie share an "oh shit" look. Robbie turns down the pressure on the gun. Wes puts more candy in the barrel and points at the ceiling. Robbie nods.

BOOM! More candy hits the ceiling and rains down. Wes puts on his guitar. The band starts playing.

WES

(into mic)

What's up, Ignite Youth Ministry?
Everybody on your feet!

As the band plays, Alex can't help but bob his head. He seems into the music. He scopes out April up on stage.

Reese and the other skaters intentionally clap off-beat. Alex gives them an annoyed look. Reese stops.

Many kids raise their hands and close their eyes, all of which confuses Alex.

INT. CHURCH CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Levi quickly applies April's makeup. The drama team's ready.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The human video is underway. Levi looks out and sees Alex.

WITH ALEX as he watches from his seat. He seems sort of baffled by the skit. When Brian, the main boy, smokes a cigarette, Reese leans over to Alex.

REESE

Never touched a cig in his life.

Alex smiles, but he's quickly focused on April. He watches as she pretends getting pregnant. He's taken with her.

INT. MEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

Levi washes the makeup off his face as quickly as possible.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Levi slips into the room as Pastor Chris preaches. Levi spots Alex and hurries over. Alex is really focused on the sermon until Levi slides into the seat next to him. Alex gives him a thumbs-up. Levi smiles.

ALEX

(whispering)

You missed a spot.

Alex points at his own chin. Embarrassed, Levi licks his own fingers and vigorously rubs his chin. Alex smiles and returns to focusing on the sermon.

Levi watches Alex out of the corner of his eye, trying to gauge how he's reacting to everything.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - LATER

As Pastor Chris brings things to a close, the band sneaks back on stage. Levi looks over to see that Alex is captivated by the sermon.

PASTOR CHRIS

Maybe you're here tonight, and you're saying, "Pastor Chris, there's this hole in my life." Know what? We've all got it. You got it, you got it...

(pointing at Alex)

You got it.

Alex feels this SO MUCH. It shakes him.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)

I've got it. And we keep trying to fill it with things the world tells us are cool -- drinking, drugs, boyfriends, girlfriends, sex...but nothing works. Let me tell you this: I know what's missing. Jesus Christ will fill your God-shaped hole.

REESE

(to Alex)

Did he say Jesus will fill your hole?

Levi shoots Reese a dirty look. Alex doesn't even register the comment. He's totally focused on Pastor Chris.

PASTOR CHRIS

If you're here with questions, I've got answers. The answer. It's time to surrender your life to Jesus. To give Him everything.

The band is playing gentle, moody music, setting the tone.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)

I want everyone in here to bow their heads and close their eyes.

Everyone complies, including Alex.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)

If you're ready for a clean slate tonight, I want you to raise your hand right now. Nobody's looking. Just you and God. Tell him. Slip that hand up. I see that hand. And that one.

Levi cracks his eyes open a bit just in time to see... Alex lowering his arm! Levi's heart is RACING.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)
Everyone open your eyes. It's easy to be a Christian in secret. But Christianity isn't meant to be lived in the dark. It's not for sissies. How much do you really want change?
(beat)
If you just raised your hand, I want you to stand up and come down to this altar. Make a public pronouncement of faith. Tell the whole world that from this moment on, you're following Jesus. Come on, let's go.

He stops talking and waits. No one moves. Levi is worried now. Alex isn't moving. Did Pastor Chris just screw everything up? Why'd he have to make it so hard? Why--

Alex gets to his feet.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)
Yes, brother, I see you.

Alex scoots past Levi and walks with intent to the front. Other kids stand and come forward, the dam now broken.

Levi makes eye contact with April, who's crying. Pastor Chris puts his hand on Alex's shoulder as he passes.

PASTOR CHRIS (cont'd)
Come on, y'all. Lay it all down. All the anger, all the pain, all the betrayal you've experienced. Give it to Jesus. Can we get some leaders to come pray with these bold teens?

Before he knows why, Levi is on his feet and heading for Alex. He slowly approaches.

Alex is trembling. Tears trickle down his face. He's having a genuine spiritual experience. Unsure what else to do, Levi puts his hand on Alex's back. Something breaks, and Alex's whole body heaves in sobs.

Levi closes his eyes and begins praying silently, his lips moving. All around them, kids are crying and praying.

Wes puts down his guitar and descends the steps. He approaches Alex and puts a hand on each shoulder. Alex opens his eyes. Wes smiles and pulls Alex into a hug.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - LATER

The place has almost emptied out. Most of the kids already picked up by parents or outside talking and playing games.

But Levi is back in his seat, April next to him. Both watching something. Waiting. Neither speaks.

In a corner, a few youth leaders are still praying with kids who came forward for salvation. Including Wes and Alex.

They stand. Levi and April sit up straight. Wes hugs Alex again. They separate, and Alex heads for Levi and April. He walks over and sits down. No one knows what to say.

ALEX
Thanks for inviting me.

LEVI
Sure. So...did you get saved?

ALEX
I don't know. Did I?

LEVI
If you decided to become a Christian,
then yeah.

ALEX
Huh. I guess I got saved.

APRIL
How does it feel?

ALEX
Like I had a big weight on my
shoulders, but now it's gone. Relief.

A tear sneaks out of April's eye. She wipes it away.

APRIL
I remember that feeling. A new start.

Alex and April hold each other's gaze, sharing a sensation. Levi looks on, unfamiliar with these feelings.

ALEX
So...what happens now? Like, how do I
be a Christian? What are the rules
and stuff? What do I do?

April hops up and retrieves a book from a stack at the back of the room. She hands it to Alex: a Teen Study Bible.

APRIL
First of all, you read this.

ALEX
The whole thing?

APRIL
Well, I'd start with the Gospels.

ALEX
What are those?

APRIL
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The
story of Jesus. Anything in red
letters are His words.

ALEX
Then what?

LEVI
Then you just...be a Christian.

ALEX
But I don't know how to do that. I
don't know how to be good like y'all.
I feel like I'm gonna fu-- I mean
mess up. Will you teach me?

Levi and April share a look.

APRIL
What are you doing after school
tomorrow?

A big grin grows on Alex's face.

END OF PILOT

Thanks for reading, everyone!

Feel free to email any thoughts you have to nathan@nathannix.com

Here's a little more info about how I currently envision the story playing out for those who might be interested...

'90s Christian things the series will cover:

- *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* • See You at the Pole
- True Love Waits • Hell houses
- Human videos/skits • Christian rock bands
- Youth lock-ins • Summer camp
- Mission trips • Disciple Now weekend
- Prayer journals • Fasting • Tithing
- Witnessing • Homeschooling

Arcs for the first season:

In general, April and Levi will teach Alex "how to be a Christian" -- i.e. the rules. He'll try and live by them, hoping they'll help him revisit the spiritual experience he had at the altar. But they won't. Not knowing any better, he'll question them, which will cause April and Levi to have their own doubts and wrestle with what they believe. Alex will be unsure if Christianity is really for him.

Levi will struggle with his desire to experience all the things he feels he's missing out on -- drinking, smoking, sex, etc. Common teen things he was raised to believe are bad. But his feelings for April and his desire to please her will prevent him from acting on any of these temptations... until something pushes him over the edge.

April will continue to mold her project (Alex) and try and use him to spread the Gospel at school. Meanwhile, she'll develop feelings for him that she suppresses -- both because she's officially "dating Jesus" right now and because she believes God's promised her a pure, lifelong Christian for a husband, not the bad boy turned good. Unsure if her feelings for him are from God or "of the flesh," she'll keep him at arms-length until she can't help it anymore.

Why 1997?

'97 was big for Evangelicals. *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* came out. True Love Waits, See You at the Pole and more were in full swing. It was pre-cell phones and almost even pre-Internet. The more I thought about it, anything in the late '90s is inherently funny. Pulling out a 200-disc CaseLogic to find your next CD? Funny. Frosted tips? Funny. Plus, it's the years I was in a youth group, so it's what I know best.