

When Mr. Goodman Went Away

At seven in the morning, Nellie usually awoke.
Lovely smells drifted down the street and aroused most folk.
For in Nellie's small town at six, the bakery was open.
Bread, cakes, and muffins filled the shelves and were ordered by the dozen.

Mr. Goodman loved to make great food for everyone to eat,
But when the baking was all done, he walked across the street.
Then, in the big, white church, with the tall, blue steeple,
Mr. Goodman would stand up to preach to all the people.

Nellie and her family bought fresh bread every day.
There were rarely any lineups when it was time to pay.
Some thought the prices high, but others thought them fair,
For Tuesday dinner was free for all who needed extra care.

When Mr. Goodman announced that he had to go away,
Everyone that heard the news begged for him to stay.
"Who will teach us about God and bake goodies every day?"
They said, "You make the BEST bread ever and teach us how to pray."

"I have found two fine, young helpers," Mr. Goodman replied.
He pulled them forward from the crowd and with a loud voice cried,
"Jake will be your baker and Todd will preach to you.
Please support them while I'm gone, even though they are so new."

Nellie was concerned, for her birthday was coming soon.
Would there still be lots of fancy cakes on the twelfth of June?
She'd miss the man who had showed her how to love, serve and obey.
Everyone cried when Mr. Goodman turned around and walked away.

It took a little time to get everything just right.
Sometimes the bread was burnt, or the bagels looked too light.
But finally the day came for Nellie to order a cake.
She looked in the glass display at the five, well-made by Jake.

"I'd like the cherry one, please," Nellie asked, with a laugh.
"Certainly," Jake answered, "and I'll only charge you half.
You're here so often, you deserve a special deal.
Free coffees for your folks," Jake said, "and a coupon for a meal."

"Thank you, but we aren't in need," Nellie's father replied.
"Then pass it on," Jake said, "I want more customers inside."
"We need to draw the crowds and spread the news about this shop.
I want to sell more bread and cakes with fancy icing on the top."

Not only was the bakery good, Nellie liked Pastor Todd.
That Sunday he gave his third talk on the deep love of God.
At the back of the church in a big, wide, glass jar,
Colourful hearts said, "God loves you just as you are."

Told to take the hearts home and pass them out to all,

Nellie took some for Sue, Kim, Sally, Frank, and Paul.
Others saw the hearts and asked, "Can we come to your church too?"
"Of course you can," Nellie encouraged, "because God loves you."

When her birthday cake arrived on that special Saturday,
Nellie's friends were there with gifts and fun games to play.
They painted, played, and feasted, especially on the cake,
Then Nellie handed out favours for her friends to take.

Her dad said, "Nellie used her allowance to buy those treats for you."
"Thank you, Nellie!" said her friends. "That's so kind to do."
As one dad led his happy child towards the big front door,
He turned and asked, "Did you get your cake at the bakery store?"

"Yes," Nellie's father replied, "for a half-price deal, in fact!"
"I'm surprised at the line-ups now," the dad said. "It's packed!
Everyone is getting special deals and far more than they asked.
I love it, but I wonder if the bakery will last."

The next day at church, Nellie saw hearts everywhere.
So many new people came and she tried not to stare.
They weren't listening well and they all kept whispering,
But when the choir stood up, they sure liked to sing!

Week after week, the church was filled and the lineups stretched far.
Jake gave more, and Todd preached, "God loves you just as you are."
The Bible wasn't opened and verses were pulled off the wall,
Opinions seemed more important than the inspired words of Paul.

One day, Pastor Todd announced, "Next week is the parade,
For a way to shine God's love and light to this town, I've prayed."
"I know," said the guy with the brand new Lamborghini car.
"We can all wear shirts that say, "God loves you just as you are."

Preparations began in earnest for those who would take part.
The fire truck was washed and shined, the shirts ordered with a heart.
Raffle tickets were printed, the florist packaged seeds.
The bakery began to make one thousand, free cookies.

On Parade Day, Mr. Goodman returned just in time.
He found out from the bank that he didn't have a dime.
As he took his place to watch the shiny, red truck coming through,
He was drenched by the spray from the happy fire crew.

Next, delicious sugar cookies were scattered all around.
Some were eagerly caught, but many fell onto the ground.
With no recognition the florist handed him a seed.
But when the church walked past in brand new shirts, he took careful heed.

The words on the back of their shirts, made him cry, "Good Grief!"
He read, "Proud to lie," "Proud to Rage," "Proud to be a thief."
Had the church stopped fighting the battle against sin?
Were they proud to proclaim their weaknesses and just give in?

Colour rose in Mr. Goodman's face and he cried out to all,
"Stop this at once!" he demanded, standing straight and tall.
"You've missed the point. You've got it wrong. I must talk to you."
The procession came to a halt, as he ran up to the crew.

Climbing on top of the firetruck, Mr. Goodman spoke,
"No doubt, Jake has been generous, but now the bakery is broke.
I can't pay my workers or provide dinners for the poor.
And yes, its true God loves you, but there is so much more!

God loves all who turn to Him and listen to His word.
But He wants us to change our lives based on what we've heard.
His love is real and forgiving, but not meant to boost our pride.
To show us how to fight sin, is one reason Jesus died."

To Jake and Todd he said, "You have not been honest or true.
You were generous, yes, but the gift wasn't coming from you.
God's gift isn't meant to keep us who we naturally are,
But to encourage change, to lift our minds and hearts up far.

God knows we will be happiest if we try to be like Him,
If we love His standards, not demand that He accept our sin.
So get rid of those colourful shirts, they don't say what's true,
The offer of salvation requires a change in me and you.

The two men left with heads hung low, and all the town was shaken,
To think that they had been misled, and cheated God and Mr. Goodman.
It wasn't what they intended; they had been deceived.
They turned to one another, ashamed that lies had been believed.

Nellie's family cheered when Mr. Goodman set things right.
Todd opened his Bible and began to see the light.
Jake learned that generosity is only truly real,
When it's from one's own pocket that gifts are given, or a meal.

Yes, Mr. Goodman had returned and would never leave again.
Nellie changed her heart to say, "God loves you. Do you love Him?"
She kept inviting friends to church but with the understanding,
That the gift is God's to give, not ours, and soon Jesus will be the King!