

FOREWORD BY ERWIN RAPHAEL MCMANUS

# THE HEIST

HOW  
GRACE  
ROBS  
US OF  
OUR  
SHAME

CHRIS DURSO

Praise for  
*The Heist*

“Chris Durso is a young pastor with an authority beyond his years. His edgy demeanor gives him license to speak life and truth into people who are lost and broken. Even seasoned Christians will rediscover their first love through his passionate words. His revelation of grace and the truth of the gospel will compel and inspire you to step into your God-given purpose and destiny.”

—BRIAN HOUSTON, global senior pastor, Hillsong Church

“*The Heist* is a story of grace and restoration. Readers will find refuge in the promise that God’s grace can and will stop shame in its tracks.”

—CHRISTINE CAINE, cofounder of the A21 Campaign and Propel Women

“Gutsy. Unexpected. Refreshing. Chris Durso explains the story of saving Grace in a language that both the world and the Church, sinners and so-called saints, can understand. *The Heist* walks us down the road with the prodigal son, inviting us to come home to the One who has a grace-party waiting. Fresh and accessible, I believe this book will help many live fully and freely in Jesus.”

—LOUIE GIGLIO, pastor of Passion City Church, founder of Passion Conferences, author of *Goliath Must Fall*

“I have the privilege of being Chris Durso’s friend, and I have watched him teach that Jesus is the way to real life. I believe *The Heist* has the potential to remind people that whatever has been stolen or destroyed can be redeemed in an *instant*. I love this book and I highly recommend its author!”

—CARL LENTZ, lead pastor, Hillsong New York

“*The Heist* is packed with hard-hitting, attention-grabbing, and life-altering truth. Chris Durso masterfully portrays the death and resurrection of Jesus in a new and unprecedented way, that will not only catch readers off guard but draw them closer to Jesus.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, founder and senior pastor of Life.Church and *New York Times* best-selling author

“Chris Durso manages to beautifully remind us that just like the prodigal son, we are all able to return home into the loving arms of our God.”

—JUDAH SMITH, lead pastor of the City Church, Seattle

“Most of our lives are spent avoiding anything that resembles a robbery. However, Pastor Chris Durso has cleverly used a metaphorical illustration to exemplify the powerful, stealthy work of grace. This grace removes the plagues from our hall of shame, enabling the guilty to appear faultless before God’s throne. To the wounded, read this powerful book with the doors unlocked and the alarm off, anticipating the possibility of a new life! This is *The Heist* for which the human soul longs!”

—T. D. JAKES SR., senior pastor, The Potter’s House of Dallas

“I’m so glad Chris Durso took the time to pen *The Heist*. It will change how you view Jesus and his death on the Cross. It will reveal how the road to salvation is anything but a ‘boring, old Bible story’ and portray Jesus as the Mastermind working to rescue us from the clutches of Satan.”

—LISA BEVERE, minister and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Without Rival*

“*The Heist* isn’t just a book that creatively retells the story of Jesus dying on the cross. It’s a book with a timeless, vitally important message that we are all loved by God, and that it doesn’t matter what we do or where we are; we can always run into his arms.”

—JENTEZEN FRANKLIN, *New York Times* best-selling author and pastor of Free Chapel Worship Center

“Pastor Chris has a unique ability to help us see something familiar through a different lens. This book is an incredible picture of how God came in to our spiritual homes and robbed everything that was never meant to live there. When we receive the revelation of this kind of grace, we can’t help but step up and live from a free and secure place. This book is a necessary read for each of us because we all need the fullness of this grace revelation.”

—ALEX SEELEY, author and pastor, The Belonging Co., Nashville

“In a culture that is constantly drowning under the strong currents of condemnation and shame, Pastor Chris Durso has thrown us all a timely lifeline with his powerful new book *The Heist*.”

—PASTOR ROBERT MADU

“My son Chris Durso is not just a brilliant writer. Rather, his ability to take a doctrine of the faith and put it into everyday language is simply masterful! Jesus taught the people “as they could understand.” This is the Gospel: how heaven robbed hell. This is the heart of God! What a concept!”

—MICHAEL DURSO, senior pastor, Christ Tabernacle

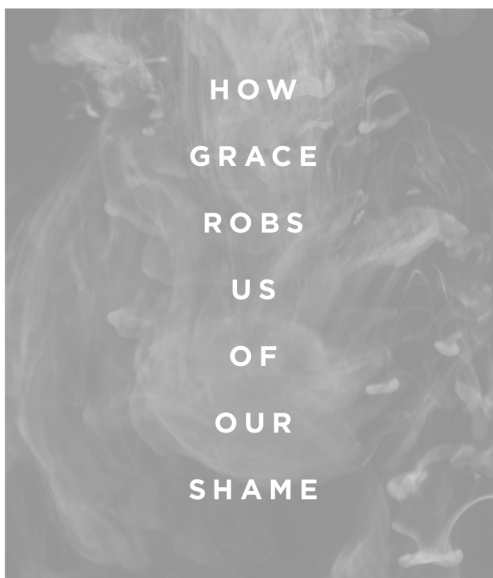
# THE HEIST

ALSO BY CHRIS DURSO

*Misfit*

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# THE HEIST



CHRIS DURSO



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## THE HEIST

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*I dedicate this book to my precious wife, Yahrís Durso. Thank you for giving me the best parts of you, accepting me just as I am, and doing all that you can to support the high calling on our lives as parents, pastors, and leaders. Your life and your love are the greatest evidence of God's grace in my life.*



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## FOREWORD

One of my earliest memories is from when I was living in Queens, New York, as a kid. My brother and I were walking down an alley, and we were mugged by kids just a bit older than us. Their weapon of choice was a clothes hanger that they thrust through my brother's nose. After they ran off, I remember my brother trying to use dirt from the street to stop the bleeding.

I share this memory with you to emphasize one main point: *you have to be tough to make it in Queens!*

This is one of the many reasons I love Chris Durso—he is 100 percent pure Queens. New Yorkers already have a reputation for resilience and drive that the rest of the world admires. When you add the character of Queens, you combine grit and street smarts to that formula.

That's who Chris Durso is at his core.

Street-smart, gritty, driven, and resilient, he is the perfect person to write a book called *The Heist*.

He has a unique way of communicating the message of Jesus

to a world that is put off by a faith that feels too sanitized and safe.

While I love the subtitle, *How Grace Robs Us of Our Shame*, I still prefer the subtitle Chris and I pitched to the publishers when I first heard of this project. In the early stages of this book, Chris shared with me his idea for a working title: *The Heist: The One Crime Jesus Did Commit!*

I don't think we are quite ready to see Jesus as the thief who died between two thieves.

I understand that we feel more comfortable saying "grace stole our shame," but it was Jesus who cracked the safe to the human heart and replaced despair with hope.

It was Jesus who, through His death and resurrection, robbed the grave of its power. And it was Jesus who descended into and endured the depths in order to set the captives free.

"Grace" is just a fancy way to describe the greatest heist in history.

Somewhere in between these two statements of grace and thievery is the power of *The Heist*.

Chris Durso is both a man of the Word and a man of the world. He has deep and powerful faith that is shaped by the Scriptures, yet he maintains the ability to speak to the hearts and minds of people who don't know Jesus.

Chris has taken on the challenge of becoming a translator of the gospel for a generation that speaks a unique language. His

life mission is to bring the message of Jesus to this world in an honest, gritty, street-smart way.

On a personal level, our stories came together long before I was aware of it, and they have been interwoven ever since. I had no idea I was a part of his story, but when I met Chris's beautiful wife, Yahris, the first thing she said to me was, "You are the reason Chris is a pastor and in ministry today."

Apparently Chris happened to be at an event where I was speaking years ago. He was far from God and running in the opposite direction. It was during that talk that God took hold of him, and Chris returned to the calling he knew was upon his life.

It was then he realized: *if Erwin can be a pastor, then so can I!*

Ironically, at that very same event I was asking myself if anyone was resonating with what I had to say or if I was just wasting my time. Out of ten thousand people I think there might have been one or two who genuinely connected with how I saw the world and life and faith. Chris Durso was one of them, and sometimes all it takes is one to change the world.

If the only thing that came out of that night was Chris Durso heeding God's call, it was worth my life.

Years later my son, Aaron, was on his own journey of faith and doubt when Chris entered the picture again. Aaron was in New York and running from God. He happened to run into Chris as he was fighting his way back to faith. He immediately

loved the Dursos and their gritty and honest approach toward faith.

It was through Aaron that I eventually came to know Chris and his family and became a part of their community.

When we decided to invite our first guest speaker in the twenty-year history of Mosaic here in Los Angeles, it was an easy decision. We called Chris Durso.

The Hollywood scene is a tough one, and our audience is full of skeptics and seekers as well as passionate followers of Christ. Very few people can speak into this space and thrive. There is a demand here for raw honesty and a meaningful message.

Chris has both . . . So does *The Heist*.

*The Heist* will give you fresh and street-smart language for grace. It will help you understand the work of Jesus in a way that you will know that God is for you! Read on and you will find a book that gives you edgy, accurate, and applicable language for what Jesus has done for us on the cross. It truly is the heist that changes EVERYTHING.

For more than twenty-five years, I have given myself to a beautiful community here in Los Angeles known as Mosaic.

For more than twenty-five years, we have fought the battle of making the church the most relevant and beautiful expression of being human the world has ever known.

For more than twenty-five years, we have believed that one

day a tribe would emerge across the world that would lead the church to become humanity's most creative force.

For more than twenty-five years, we have believed that God will raise up leaders who engage the Scriptures and the culture with fresh perspectives, with passionate hearts, and with a fearless love for humanity.

Chris Durso is part of this new tribe.

He is proof that a new future is emerging and that it's going to be powerful. *The Heist* is his manifesto.

When Jesus walked the road to Emmaus, though His companions could not recognize Him, He told the story of His death and resurrection in such a way that His words burned in their hearts.

My prayer is that everyone who reads these words written to us by Chris Durso would have a similar experience. May his words burn in our hearts as he shares with us the story of Jesus in a way we haven't heard before.

If you're not careful, this book will cause you to fall so deeply in love with Jesus that He will steal your heart away.

What a promise: that grace would rob us of our shame.

Steal away Lord Jesus . . .

Steal away.

Erwin Raphael McManus

Mosaic, Los Angeles

Author, *The Artisan Soul*

# INTRODUCTION

In 2010, God challenged me to preach every message through and in grace. Until that point it was a topic I would cover only from time to time. I wrestled with God because I was concerned that offering grace would give the reckless a free pass to tamper with any of the seven deadly sins and ultimately dishonor God. During this struggle to understand what God was asking me to do, I realized that a true understanding and revelation of grace causes us to live godly lives, turning down temptation and sin of all sorts. A true revelation of grace not only forgives our sin but also makes us want to turn from sin.

Teaching law provides people with boundaries, boundaries they will likely cross, but grace is where we should live. Grace can be found in every book, every story of the Bible, but we are so focused on law that we miss the freedom and restoration only grace provides. How could I not write a book that would bring the kind of freedom that causes you not to want to cross any boundaries? And when you do, grace tells you that you can always turn back. This message hasn't been delivered well, and the



truth of the gospel is being warped as Christians berate one another when laws are violated.

The church's reputation as exclusive, bigoted, insensitive, and hypocritical has kept the message of God's love and grace from being properly understood. Self-righteousness, convoluted ideas, and a disconnected understanding of God's grace don't come from people outside of the church; they have to be experienced (given and received) in the church. Christians have long been suffering under doctrines or ideas of judgment. So much so that many refuse or are unable to see grace as the amazing gift it is. Instead of finding refuge and restoration within the walls of the church, the injured are walking away from church communities and, worse, walking away from their relationship with God.

It is time to tune out our misguided views of God and what He thinks about us so we can dial into grace's frequency. It's time to make an adjustment, an adjustment that will put our lives back on course and lead us into our God-given purpose and destiny.

I've called this book *The Heist* because I believe the way God saved us from Satan's grip and frees us from ourselves, from our sin and shame, is nothing short of an incredible heist. By removing shame and blotting out our sin, He gives us the freedom we need to gain a new perspective on our lives, to see the value we have in God's eyes and His plans for us. This was

no easy task, and it wasn't a fair one. There is a very scandalous side to how Jesus accomplished our freedom on and through the Cross.

I almost titled this book *The One Crime Jesus Did Commit*, but the powers that be thought it best not to go that route. They felt this title would be offensive, which I liked. The gospel *is* offensive! The Passion story isn't some nice story. It's a brutally violent love story about a shame-filled humanity and the God who loves humanity beyond limit.

When we spend time focusing on the wrong things, we end up saying no to the plans God has for us. But a minor adjustment can turn our failures into our successes. We have to stop focusing on our inadequacies. We have to stop hiding from our purpose because of our fears and insecurities. We have to stop flogging ourselves for making mistakes. We have to learn how to start living in grace.

As you read, you are going to learn to live in the grace God has scandalously made available to you by adjusting how you think about yourself and how you think about God. The fact that God would rob us of our shame just so we can have with Him the type of relationship He wants us to have is pretty sobering. It changes how we think that He thinks about us, and in turn it will change how we think about Him. We will do this by looking at the parable of the prodigal son, which can be found in Luke 15.

I'm unpacking this parable, touching on two points. First, and most obvious, this story is a message for those who have abandoned the faith. I believe they will see that even when they fail, the Father waits. Grace waits for you to be ready; then grace reconciles you back to the Father. Second, this story is a message for believers, the ones who should be shining examples of mercy but are often judgmental instead. Grace isn't merely available to the believer; it is necessary for the believer. This is where it gets a little messy. Grace can seem unfair; we don't deserve it and we can't earn it. We can't do anything but receive it. God gave us His best when we were at our worst, and we'll see that gift as we unpack this parable.

In the story as the prodigal son is returning home, before he gets cleaned up, before he can apologize, before he is back on his father's property, his father sees him and runs to greet him. Is that shocking? It shouldn't be. This *is* the gospel. This is a picture of the love described in John 3:16. God does the work, and all we have to do is receive it.

God has great plans for you, more than you can imagine. But in order for you to move from nothing to abundance, you have to adjust your thinking. It's time to recalibrate how you receive His Word, understand who He is, and believe what grace means to you.

## Chapter 1

# THE PLAYERS

### *Who's Who*

The greatest trick the devil  
ever pulled was convincing the  
world he didn't exist.

—Verbal Kint (Kevin Spacey),  
*The Usual Suspects*

Protected by round-the-clock private security and ten layers of security including motion, heat, and light sensors, buried two floors beneath ground level, and placed inside 160 uniquely locked combination lockboxes made of solid steel were incredible quantities of diamonds, gold, and jewelry—an estimated \$200 million worth. As impressive as the security systems were, they were no match for Leonardo Notarbartolo, the mastermind behind the diamond heist in Antwerp, Belgium. Notarbartolo and his crew were able to proceed completely undetected as they broke into 123 of those lockboxes over Valentine’s Day weekend in 2003. This was no small feat. It required inside information, careful planning, and precision timing.

It is believed that Notarbartolo lived near the diamond center for three years before that weekend in February, building trusted relationships with the people who would eventually be his victims. This trusted member of the community would soon prove that everything is not what it seems. His stakeout gave him a front-row seat to the comings and goings of the security team

and the merchants who stored their treasures at the diamond center that boasted about its top-of-the-line security. Planting himself among those he would be robbing was nearly genius. He not only learned all he needed to know about the area and the security system, but it earned him credibility within the community while he studied and plotted against them. This heist was so brilliantly planned and executed it has been dubbed “the heist of the century.”

I admit I am fascinated by the skill and gall one would need to successfully plan and execute a heist, especially one of this magnitude. It also makes me wonder, *What would be so valuable that a person would put his life and freedom on the line? A need? Greed? Ego? Thrills?*

## THE PLAYERS

I was preparing a message a few years back when I realized the gospel has all the elements of a great heist. There were some parallels to be noted. I began to see Jesus as a mastermind and His three years of ministry as His stakeout. He had been watching, waiting, and planning. Eventually the cross became one of the most powerful tools ever used by a burglar. Like Notarbartolo, Jesus was clear about His purpose, and He remained focused even as Satan himself attempted to derail Him. Fortunately for

us, Satan could not stop what Jesus had planned. Nothing would stop Him from pulling off this heist.

Without our permission and against death's will, Jesus plotted His own heist, and no one ever saw it coming. This grand heist wasn't pulled off for Jesus's financial gain. He wasn't looking to get rich quick. He wasn't looking for the thrill of the chase. He was planning on robbing us *for* God.

You are more valuable than you know, and God longs for your affection. He is a jealous God. He wants your heart, your affections, and your worship. God has had His eye on you since the beginning of time, and there is great competition for you. Let's take a step back to catch a glimpse of the players vying for your attention and your worship.

**GOD.** The Creator. He creates a wondrous place with everything that all living creatures would need to survive and thrive. He gives us life, and in no time at all, we ruin His original plan. We deceive ourselves and try to come up with a better plan, one that doesn't include Him. But God doesn't abandon us or His plan for us. Instead, He comes up with a plan to redeem us and win back our hearts.

He sends His Son (Jesus) to walk this earth and ultimately take back what was stolen from Him: **MAN'S WORSHIP** and **PRAISE**. God's mission and Jesus's purpose are that simple: to take back what is rightfully God's. God desires His glory and

receives it through the praise, worship, and obedience of mankind, both male and female, young and old.

He knew we could never give Him our praise on our own; we would need His help. He planned to take away sin, shame, and guilt, but He wouldn't go a step beyond that. In other words, He sets us up to find our way to Him, but He does not force us to come to Him. Why? There would be no satisfaction in forcing humanity to turn to Him, so He doesn't make us do anything or give Him anything. He gives us free will to realize our need for Him on our own, and with that understanding comes a desire to freely worship Him.

Can you see why there would be fierce competition for our affections? If the ultimate satisfaction for God comes from our praise, if it's the one thing He wants most from us, then we should not be surprised to hear there is another thief on the prowl looking for the opportunity to steal our praise from us *and* Him.

SATAN. He plots against us. He comes to steal and destroy. He works to sever us from our Creator and plots to make us believe we have no reason to praise, leaving us feeling hopeless and too frustrated or weighed down to pursue our purpose. The worst thing for him is for you and me to be in communion with God, and he knows it. He wants to take what is rightfully ours, what is rightfully God's. He is aware that he cannot get our praise, so he settles for stealing God's praise from us. The master of destruction does this by luring us into sin, then using guilt and



shame against us, because guilt and shame will always keep us from praising God. He lures us into sin, then uses deception to convince us we are unworthy of God's purpose, peace, and forgiveness (all of which bring God joy).

Driven by their individual motives, God and Satan have something in common. They are both relentlessly pursuing you, and they will not stop until God returns and Satan is ultimately and permanently condemned to hell.

Please understand that your soul isn't being fought over by two kingdoms. Heaven and hell are not battling it out for you. God and Satan are. Satan does not have a kingdom. He is not coming back for you. He is the prince of this world, and he is using his influence and ancient strategies to keep you from what is rightfully yours, but he cannot stop the kingdom of heaven from coming for you. Can we just get this out of the way right here, at the very beginning? When the kingdom of heaven appears, Satan *will not* rule over hell; he will be a prisoner himself. He will, once and for all, receive his eternal punishment. He is hoping he can get you and me to join him; maybe misery actually does love company.

## **CAN YOU STEAL WHAT IS ALREADY YOURS?**

Is it considered stealing if you are only taking back what is already yours? Yes, it is. The act of stealing is taking something

from somebody against his or her will or without his or her knowledge, even if what you steal rightfully belongs to you. When Christ robbed us of our shame, rescuing us from Satan's grasp, He pulled off what really ought to be called "the heist of the centuries." Jesus stole Satan's power without his approval, keys included! (See Revelation 1:18.)

Because Satan is motivated by pride and jealousy, his plan is to ultimately rob God of the praise that is due Him. We give God praise through our verbal praise and worship. We give God praise when our hearts are leaning in, in awe of the One who created us, listening for Him, speaking to Him, when our hearts are acutely aware of their Creator. More important, we also give God praise by fulfilling His predestined purpose for us; His designed purpose for each one of us is to praise Him. Our very lives are praise in motion.

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen.  
We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—*everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. (Colossians 1:15–17, MSG)

Satan directly attacks God's desire for our lives by convincing us that we are not worthy of our purpose. Let's take a mo-

ment here to understand his tactics. Satan uses our mistakes, our sins, and our shortcomings against us. He convinces us that we are not good enough or that we have gone too far from God to do the things God is calling us to do. Added to this internal struggle is Satan's ability to use us against one another. He recruits other Christians, sometimes those closest to us, to point their accusing fingers at us to remind us of how unqualified and unworthy we are of fulfilling our purpose.

The accuser himself gets us to accuse one another within the four walls of the church. He is not powerful enough to make us do anything, but he certainly persuades us to fix our eyes on ourselves or on what the people around us are doing. These distractions or, more clearly stated, this tactic of comparison keeps us from pursuing our purpose. His tactics are timeless, but in this case the saying is true: there is nothing new under the sun. Satan is not a creator; he cannot create, so he cannot devise new tactics against us. His tactics are nothing more than recycled garbage. They may be packaged differently, but at the core they're always the same. His plots are direct and precise, and he uses an arsenal of old tools to separate us from what is rightfully ours. These tricks explain why we can easily relate to some of the biblical heroes of our faith when we read about the mistakes they made and the traps they fell into thousands of years ago.

Knowing full well the tactics Satan would employ against

us, knowing he would come after us with shame, Jesus comes down, becomes sin, and steals the consequences of our shame right out from under us without our permission or knowledge; the violent take it by force.

Until Jesus “was about thirty years old” (Luke 3:23), He walked the earth, fulfilling prophecy. For the next and last three years of His life, He lived among us; Jesus had a front-row seat, a close-up view of the darkness of humanity. He saw sin in action and knew that teenagers needed help; He knew single mothers needed help; He knew married men needed help. He understood all our struggles well. Jesus knew we were in desperate need of His help to overcome every strategic attack from Satan. Just as Leonardo Notarbartolo watched and learned, waiting for the right time to pull off one of the greatest diamond heists of all time, Jesus watched and learned during His time on earth. Jesus was able to pull off “the heist of the centuries” because He took the time to be a part of the world. HE KNEW SIN. HE SAW SIN. HE BECAME SIN.

Jesus went to such extreme measures because He knew there was no way we could have done this for ourselves. In the parable of the prodigal son, we see proof of this. The younger son, the prodigal, could not redeem himself, and we cannot do it for one another either. In the end the father of the prodigal son had to do what his children could not do on their own.

## THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

The story of the prodigal son is one you may have heard and read countless times. If you haven't read it, don't worry. Allow me to share some of the highlights with you from Luke 15. The story of the prodigal son is about a father and his two sons. The father is wealthy, and both his sons live with him, enjoying the benefits of their father's wealth. The father has staff to take care of the animals, the property, and all the needs of the house. The younger of the two boys one day asks his father for his inheritance. His father obliges his request, and the son takes his inheritance, leaves the benefits of his home, and over time squanders all his money and has to go back home. Before he makes it to the front door, the father sees him and runs toward him to welcome him back. The father throws a big party to celebrate. While the father and younger son are celebrating, the older son refuses to join the party because he is bitter. He thinks it is unfair for his brother to get this homecoming celebration when he had been so reckless. He compares his own faithfulness to his brother's recklessness and questions his father: Why should his brother get the best celebration when he himself didn't even get a "well done" party? The story ends with the father explaining and justifying his decision to celebrate his sinful son, saying, "Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and

everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he’s alive! He was lost, and he’s found!” (Luke 15:31–32, MSG).

The story of the prodigal son is a cautionary tale for Christians. It shows us what a father’s love should look like, and it reminds us to be careful about the ideas we entertain and what we are looking at. Otherwise, like the prodigal son, we may forget the benefits of being in our Father’s house and end up wandering off, only to find ourselves stripped of anything of value and left all alone.

Could there be more to this story? Are there any players we might have overlooked? If we read too quickly, we will likely miss it. Let’s start at the top, in that very first verse of Luke 15, where the scene is set for us. Jesus was not off to the side in a private place and out of sight telling this story to people we would easily consider sinners like the prodigal son. Jesus was out in the open. The Pharisees and the scribes (the religious leaders) were there. The tax collectors were there. They all wanted to hear Jesus tell His stories, but the religious leaders seemed to be increasingly distracted by that day’s crowd. They couldn’t understand why Jesus, a religious man, would allow tax collectors to sit with Him. How could He be so welcoming to the wicked and out in the open, no less? This was no accident, nor was it a surprise. Jesus had some tactical moves too.

The Pharisees often listened to Jesus's teachings. Sitting with the notorious was nothing new to Jesus; He seemed to attract all kinds of people. He never seemed to shy away from anyone—not the good, the bad, or the ugly—and this day was no different. I am pretty confident Jesus intended for both groups of people to hear this story.

As we read the story, it is clear this parable is about a son who went searching for more than what he could find at home. He was looking around, wondering what he could be missing. I think it is safe to say he spent too much time entertaining those thoughts. He let his imagination run wild, and his day-dreams made him forget the benefits of the house he was in: his father's protection, the meals that were available to him, and the support he received. Eventually he left his father's house, and when he returned, he was empty handed and covered in sin.

When we read about his return, our minds' eyes are on him, the sinful son, and rightfully so. But what about Jesus's audience? What did they have to do with this story? There is a clear correlation between the younger brother and the sinners sitting around the table with Jesus, but what about the Pharisees? Is there a correlation between the older brother and the Pharisees? Is it possible that this story isn't just about the young son, the "sinner" who left home?

## A FATHER'S LOVE

I have the privilege of being a father. I have two beautiful children. I have a nine-year-old son named Dylan. Dylan wants to travel the world and preach the gospel. I also have a six-year-old daughter named Chloe. Chloe is a character with a smile that will charm the last quarter right out of your pocket. She wants to preach to the nations.

They are very young, and while I have had them in my life for only a few years, I am pretty sure there is nothing they can do that will ever cause me to stop loving them. I want the very best of everything for them. That's just the way it is for most fathers. God is no exception.

God is ultimately motivated by His ferocious love for humanity and His desire for our individual and collective worship, because all glory and honor belong to Him alone. His original plan was for man to live unashamedly so that we would worship and praise Him freely, but the Fall of man changed that. The Fall of man robbed God of what was and is rightfully His. Jesus's sacrifice by way of the cross became the antidote and plan to get all that back. He was only stealing (or taking back) what originally belonged to Him.

You cannot do anything to earn His love, nor can you do anything to lose His love. He was so determined to get you back that He came up with a whole plan that would cost Him His Son.



## THE BATTLE IS ON

When we read the story of the prodigal son, we need to understand there is a battle between the prodigal son's purpose and the allure of the forbidden. We know his father has provided everything a son would need to thrive and live a good life. It is safe to assume the father wants the best for his son, but his heart must also be aching over his son's request for his inheritance.

In the distance I can easily imagine Satan wringing his hands, plotting, scheming, taunting the prodigal son's imagination, working to lure him out of his house and away from the future his father has imagined.

The battleground is not in the house or in a distant land. This battle is taking place in the prodigal son's heart and mind. He knows what is expected, what is required, and what is right, yet he can't help but feel the allure; he's drawn toward the unknown.

This has always been the inner struggle of man. The Bible is full of verses that warn us to guard our hearts and that tell us our hearts are deceitful. If we are going to guard our hearts, we also have to guard our thoughts and our eyes. Otherwise, we run the risk of fixing them on the wrong things, and before we know it, our hearts and souls are dark because we have allowed the wrong things in. Then, like the younger son, we're off wandering, looking for something more appealing than what we have at home.

How could someone who knows so much Scripture miss this? We know Satan knows the Bible back and forth. He knows the truth about his opponent: God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (everywhere at all times and seeing it all). God doesn't have to ask Satan's permission to go anywhere or do anything. The same is not true for Satan.

Satan has some good tricks up his sleeve, but they are old tricks. He cannot create, so there is nothing new coming from his corner. He also lacks the power of the Holy Spirit. This is key. While Satan can read the text, he cannot decipher the text as we can. He cannot gain revelation from the Holy Spirit as we can, so he cannot truly understand the context the way we can, which renders him less powerful than he would like us to think.

This is why it is so important for us to know the Word of God. Satan doesn't really know or understand it, yet he tries to use it against us. So why then do we, who have the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, look at Satan as if he were, in any way, shape, or form, God's competition? How do we get stuck when we know Satan is only a master of deception? He is so good he could be deceiving himself.

This tells us more about heaven than we've likely ever considered. Satan's tactics never change. They're always the same. He sits in his corner looking for ways to divide and separate us from God. He lures us into sin by getting us to focus on the big

payout, that thing we have to have: the money, the relationship, the good time. Then, like a person abusing an animal, he grabs us by our necks and sticks our noses in the mess we've made. He keeps us looking at our mistakes so we are so busy looking down that we miss the opportunity to see the face of grace looking right at us, waiting for us to realize that grace and freedom from the weight of our guilt and shame are available to us.

It might be important for us to take a few moments to search our hearts and figure out what that deception looks like for us. Satan uses the same strategies against all of us; he only changes his tactics. He will keep the sinner looking at his mistakes (the addiction, the hurt he has caused, the shame she has carried, and so on) because as long as we are looking at our mistakes, we will find it difficult to believe we are worthy of the grace, forgiveness, and the fresh start that await us. Fortunately, it isn't up to us, and there is a master plan in the works to save us from death, shame, and ourselves.

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