

## If Anyone

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

- Galatians 3:26-28

*And now let me address all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to accept of mercy and grace while it is offered to you: Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; and will you not accept it, now it is offered unto you?*

- George Whitefield, Preacher & Evangelist

When Jesus said, “IF ANYONE” regarding being a disciple, who do you think He had in mind? A religious ruler? A spiritual leader? A political figure? A business professional? A socialite? A social outcast? A scandalous sinner? The answer of course is all the above. In a word, “if anyone” means EVERYONE! When Jesus said “anyone” He meant “anyone” and not any special spiritual someone. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is open to anyone because everyone is qualified for the position: a sinner in need of a Savior. Jesus came to seek and save lost sinners! But why lost sinners? Because that is all that exists. But our story of “IF ANYONE” can’t start there. If we do, we fall into the trap of overemphasizing the Fall which is common in contemporary evangelicalism. Nancy Pearcey writes the following.

Consider the typical evangelistic message- “You’re a sinner; you need to be saved.” What could be wrong with that? Of course, it’s true that we are sinners, but notice that the message starts with the Fall instead of Creation. By beginning with the theme of sin, it implies that our essential identity consists in being guilty sinners, deserving of divine punishment. Some Christian literature goes so far as to say we are nothing, completely worthless, before a holy God. This excessively

negative view is not biblical, however, and it lays Christianity open to the charge that it has a low view of human dignity. The Bible does not begin with the Fall but with Creation: Our value and dignity are rooted in the fact that we are created in the image of God, with the high calling of being His representatives on earth. In fact, it is only because humans have such high value that sin is so tragic. If we were worthless to begin with, then the fall would be a trivial event. **1**

When I was first exposed to this book in seminary, it began to crystallize my understanding of what it meant to make disciples. It also highlighted what was currently missing from the contemporary evangelical church today in the process of making disciples... THE WHOLE STORY... woven through the three biblical strands (or parts) of Creation, Fall, and Redemption! God’s whole story *is* the only foundation upon which a biblical world view can be built in making disciples who

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make disciples. Let's now take a brief look at His *Whole Story* to better understand who Jesus is speaking to when He says "*if anyone*." **We need to understand who created humanity is in relation to our Creator.**

## THE WHOLE STORY

### Creation... everything is good!

In the beginning God created... EVERYTHING... not out of necessity or by accident—but out of His own good pleasure. Everything in the entire universe, including the entire universe which, by the way, was made *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and bears His stamp of approval. Over and over again in the creation account we read that “God saw everything was good!” Why? Because God made everything good and created it as a high and holy hymn to sing praises to His glory. Creation was God's canvas of unimaginable glory and majesty on uninterrupted display.

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*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1*

*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. 1 Timothy 4:4*

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Everything in creation brought glory to God merely by expressing its nature as God intended. In *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Daniel Migliore writes, “While the stars, the trees, and the animals do not speak or sing of the glory of God in the same way that humans do, in their own way they too lift up their praises to God, and for all we know, they do this with a spontaneity and consistency far greater than our own.” 2 Understanding “*non-human*” creation as more than a backdrop or stage for humanity, helps us to keep in view God's whole creation to consummation story. The importance of this will become clearer as we go along.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." **Genesis 1:26-28**

Of every created thing only humanity was made as the image bearer of the Creator. That means, starting with Adam and Eve, every human being has inherent value and a divine dignity. In all of creation, only man is made in the image of God. Not the animals on the land, the fish in the sea, or the birds in the air. Not the sun, moon, or the stars. Not the grass, plants, or the trees. Not the valleys, hills, or mountains. Humanity is above and beyond the rest of creation. Man is not, as some mistakenly suggest, the highest of all the animals. Man is wholly distinct from all other creations and only man has this special and supernatural dignity to reflect the character of our Creator God.

God did not stop after making man in His own image. He gave them something to do as His image bearers. The Creator God who called them into existence gave them a calling in life to fulfill. God blessed Adam and Eve and gave to them a “cultural mandate” as the federal heads of all humanity to multiply the number of other image-bearers of God and through that multiplication, to subdue, rule, and have dominion over all of creation. In a word, *stewardship*—Adam and Eve were to steward (*manage*) all that God had entrusted to their care as caretakers of His creation which began in their holy covenant of marriage, their family, their community, and carried throughout all of

creation. They were to be curators of creation and create a culture that glorified the Creator on the throne of every area of life... *on earth as it is in heaven.*

Made by God, for God, in the image of God, they were to live for nothing smaller than God. In a word... transcendence! Their purpose was God's purpose and their meaning, significance, and identity was to be found in Him only. Adam and Eve were never to live for themselves. They were created to live for something much bigger and far beyond the borders of their lives. They were created to live for their Creator in every area of life as stewards of His good creation. Living for anything less would be a less than human existence. And that is exactly what happened when they removed God from the throne of their lives.

### **Fall... *everything went bad!***

The caretakers of creation were then tested for their faithfulness and devotion to the One who created them. This test they failed miserably. And as the federal heads of humanity, when Adam and Eve fell, we all fell. This is known as the Doctrine of Original Sin spelled out in these words from the pen of the apostle Paul, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). It was not enough for Adam and Eve to be the only part of creation made in the image of God, they wanted to be God. So they listened to a second voice (i.e., Satan) in the Garden of Eden and plunged all of humanity, including all of creation, into a downward spiral of utter ruin and brokenness. Their cosmic treason brought God's curse on all of His creation.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but

God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. **Genesis 3:1-6**

The tree was simply a test for Adam and Eve. The tree was not a bad tree. The tree was good because everything God created was good. The test tree was planted to press Adam and Eve to make a decision whether or not to trust and depend on God for everything, including the knowledge of good and evil. They were dependent upon God not just for their physical needs, but for their mental, emotional, moral, and spiritual needs as well. In disobeying God they denied their own humanity as His creation. In their quest for being God they missed the One True God. Instead of advancing the cause of God's big kingdom, they decided to advance their own little kingdom. They shrunk the size of their lives down to the size of their lives, and in so doing, settled for less than God's best for their lives... and they got it!

The next thing we see in the story is the truth of their spiritual death. Adam and Eve who were in the habit of walking with God in the Garden in the cool of the day were now on the run from God. Hiding in their sin and shame, they are on the run from the One they should have run toward.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day,

and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." **Genesis 3:7-13**

It's instructive to read God calling out to Adam, "*Where are you?*" Did God lose Adam? Did God not know where Adam was? Of course not! God knew exactly where Adam was. It was Adam who did not know where Adam was. His sin and shame had blinded him from the One who was to be his very life. The delight Adam and Eve once experienced in their intimate relationship with God was now replaced with dread. The blessings they once experienced in their holy covenant of marriage were now replaced with blame. Adam blamed God and Eve. Eve blamed the serpent and we have been blaming ever since. But that's not all. The cosmic scope of their disobedience to God broke the entire created order. Their sin was much more than rebellion against and a breaking of God's law. They rebelled against and broke their relationship with God, each other, and the created order perverting every part of the paradise God had created.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **Romans 8:20-22**

Adam and Eve corrupted everything they had been given responsibility to care for. The ripple effect of their rebellion reached all of the entire created order. Creation was now "groaning" instead of growing. Creation groaned through thorns and thistles, hurricanes and hail storms, diseases and death. Nothing was in the condition in which it was created. But all hope was not lost. God came after two rebels on the run and promised to take everything that was now bad, including creation, and make it good again in the process of redemption. Only as we see God's cosmic creation-to-consummation story do we see just how all the parts fit in God's plan of redemption.

**Redemption... *everything in Christ will be re-made good again!***

Imagine picking up a book and reading these words on the first line of the very first page, "It's not about you." The book, of course, is the Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren, which has sold an estimated 40 million copies around the world. He goes on to say,

"The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose." **3**

Well, when it comes to redemption, we can change Warren's opening statement to read, "It's not just about you", because God is in the process of making "all things" new.

Think about this for a moment. If redemption was just about humanity, then the redeeming work of Christ would be the restoration of a two-way vertical relationship between God and man. But it is not. Redemption is also a horizontal three-way relational restoration between God,

man, and the entire created order. The disciple of Jesus is never to limit the scope of redemption to the personal and individual realm. In *Theatre of the Gospel*, Alan Lewis identifies this increasingly common presumption, “*Human beings have sometimes presumed that the sequence of creation, fall, and redemption is only a human drama. In this way of thinking, nonhuman creation is merely a stage. Animals are only props. The show is about us.*” <sup>4</sup> The Bible makes it clear that this “*show*” is not about us, yet we are indeed a part of it, and a very important part as those who bear the image of God.

Now, what I find absolutely amazing in God’s story of redemption is the fact that God did not simply start over with some new dirt and a new rib which was His absolute sovereign right to do.

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God could have destroyed the sinful man and woman and redeemed the once-good creation they had corrupted. Instead, God in His goodness, grace, and mercy as a covenant-keeping God, shares the promise to reverse the curse that had been made in the eternal counsel of the Triune God “*before the creation of the world*”(Ephesians 1:4).

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."  
**Genesis 3:14-15**

I remember when one of my seminary professors, Dr. Robert Reymond, said these words to me, “Tommy, one day when you are preaching in

your church please tell the Christmas story in light of the fact that God is a covenant-keeping God—who kept His promise to His people!” Dr. Reymond’s statement was based on the clear teaching of all of Scripture, built upon the foundation of these words...

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep. **Hebrews 13:20**

A covenant is simply an agreement between two or more parties and it is the way God has chosen to communicate and relate to us. In the eternal counsel (before the creation of the world) of the Triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) an agreement was made (covenant) before man existed, that Jesus would come into this world in human form, live a sinless life (fulfilling the covenant Adam broke – “*you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die*” - Genesis 2:17), die a sacrificial death, and be raised from the dead as God’s stamp of approval that Jesus succeeded (perfect obedience) where Adam failed. In *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, Geerhardus Vos echoes these words of Dr. Raymond, “If man already stood in a covenant relation to God before the fall, then it is to be expected that the covenant idea will also dominate in the work of redemption. God cannot simply let go of the ordinance which He once instituted, but much rather displays His glory in that He carries it through despite man’s sin and apostasy.” <sup>5</sup>

Dr. Sproul put it this way, “*Covenant theology seeks to present a clear picture of the unity of redemption, which unity is seen in the continuity of the covenants that God has given throughout history and how they are fulfilled in the person and work of Christ.*” In other words, covenant theology is a framework for reading, understanding, and applying the Scriptures as one story, from one God, to one people. An in-

depth study of covenant theology goes beyond the scope of this book, but I encourage every disciple of Jesus to become a serious student of this biblical truth to grow to maturity in the faith (*see resource section*). One final point: there is much discussion and debate as to the various different covenants God made with man. But as we just read from the writer of Hebrews, from all eternity, everything God thought and did, is doing, or every will do is rooted in His gracious disposition to us. Omnipotence has no obligation to make any promises to His creatures, rather He does so to bring glory to Himself.

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace, wherein he freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained to eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. **6**

Man, through willful disobedience, broke God's first covenant of works and the penalty was death. Yet, through the protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 (the first gospel promise made to man), God gives to the creature a new covenant of grace which finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

With this thumb-nail sketch of covenant theology, I trust you can see just how important it is for the disciple of Jesus to understand. God, who is above His creation, chose to relate to His creation personally. The better we understand the implications of covenant theology, the better we will be able to read and understand the Word, relate to God, each other, and the world around us.

You see, covenant theology tells us why God did not start over. The promise made through the eternal covenant was to find it's 'yes' and 'amen' in Jesus Christ. No matter how bad we messed things up, our Master was on His way to turn our mess into His masterpiece. Now our first two parents did indeed mess things up. Their disobedience corrupted every aspect of God's perfect creation. Yet, as we have learned through the truth of the covenant, God would not allow them to crush it altogether into oblivion. All of creation was now marred (but not totally mutilated) including those who were his image bearers. Corrupt man still bears the image of our Creator God in ways that nothing else in all of creation does and we are still called to be curators of both creation and the culture. The cultural mandate is still in effect.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." **Genesis 9:1-3**

God is in the redemptive process of making all things new. He is making a new heaven, a new earth, and a renewed humanity. God's redemptive plan is nothing less than the restoration of God's cosmic purposes for all of creation. This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ through His birth, life, death, and resurrection – which we will unpack in a later chapter. For now, in order to fully participate in this process we need to constantly keep in view these three strands that make up the whole story of God (Creation, Fall, and Redemption which includes Restoration of all things).

## Types Of Anyone

Now with God's three-part story in view, let's turn our attention back to the "anyone's" Jesus is calling. There are actually two groups that Jesus is calling and they are best illustrated in one location known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Let me recommend additional reading regarding these two groups of "anyone's" that goes beyond the scope of the purpose in this book. Take a look at the sermon *Sharing the Father's Welcome* by Dr. Edmund P. Clowney and the fantastic book based on that sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*. I echo the observations of Dr. Keller himself, who said, "*I have seen more people encouraged, enlightened, and helped by this passage, when I explained the true meaning of it, than by any other text.*" **Z**

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **Luke 15:11-13**

### Group #1: Anyone On The Run From God

The first group of "anyone's" is on the run from God and is easily recognized in the younger brother (a.k.a. the prodigal son). Those on the run from God are the rule-breaking immoral outsiders who have gone off into the far country thumbing their proverbial noses at traditional family values and morality. Their riotous and rebellious living shouts to the world that they have no interest in the things of God.

Jesus is constantly condemned by the moral insiders (the other son whom we will look at next), for hanging out with this group of

"anyone's" who were known to be "*bad-to-the-bone*" by anyone's standards.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners". **Matthew 11:19**

For those who are unfamiliar with the tax collectors of Jesus' day, they were Israelites who were working for Rome collecting taxes from their own people. If that wasn't bad enough, they were allowed to collect more than what was owed to Rome to put in their own pockets. To say this group was part of the immoral outsiders is an understatement of gargantuan proportions. Tax collectors were not only sinners. They made their living sinning! They were both abhorred and avoided by respectable society. So, you will understand why the following events were shocking to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." **Luke 5:27-32**

Notice the name of this tax collector sitting at his booth. The Hebrew name Levi seems to suggest he is likely a descendent of the tribe of Levi, the tribe set apart by God for the order of priests and Levites. To be sure, the expected life path for Levi as far as his family and friends were concerned, did not include working for the pagan Roman government as a tax collector, let alone

heaping hot coals on his own head by robbing from his own people by collecting more than what Rome required and lining his own pockets with the surplus. With a name like Levi he was likely groomed from birth to be set apart for holy service in the temple of the Lord. So Levi, later known as Matthew (his Greek name) was not only a sinner and made his living sinning, he was considered by his own people to be the scum of the earth. But, Jesus singled him out and even said that this was the type of person that he came to save.

The point is not what Jesus didn't know about this tax collector, but in spite of Jesus knowing the reputation of a tax collector, He calls Levi to follow Him anyway. Perhaps a bit of first century Jewish discipleship training would prove profitable at this point.

The Mishnah (containing rabbinic interpretations of Scripture and oral traditions) describes the educational process for a young Jewish boy in Jesus' time. At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah (oral Torah, interpretations) at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud (making Rabbinic interpretations), at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (able to teach others). This clearly describes the exceptional student, for very few would become teachers.

The term rabbi was a word meaning "*great one*" or "*my master*" and was used as a term of respect for one's teacher. Many people referred to Jesus as Rabbi. The decision to follow a rabbi as a talmid (student/disciple) meant total commitment in the first century as it does today. Since a talmid was totally devoted to becoming like the rabbi he would have spent his entire time listening and observing the teacher to know how to understand the Scripture and how to put it

into practice. Jesus describes his relationship to his disciples in exactly this way (Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 6:40).

Most students sought out the rabbis they wished to follow and would ask if he might "*follow*" the rabbi. The rabbi would consider the students potential to become like him and whether he would make the commitment necessary. It is likely most students were turned away. Some of course were invited to "*follow me*". This indicated the rabbi believed the potential talmid had the ability and commitment to become like him. It would be a remarkable affirmation of the confidence the teacher had in the student. 8

Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who was as unconventional as He was counter-cultural. The most sought after and distinguished rabbi's in that day hand-picked the best students who had already completed the first two levels of formal education (ages 6-12 & 13-15). Many potential students desired to be talmid's and requested to "follow" the rabbi, but few were chosen. The goal of the final level of formal training up to age 30, was for each disciple to literally follow in the dusty sandaled footsteps of their rabbi every waking moment. With the ultimate goal of each student becoming like his teacher, you can see why the rabbi would only allow the best possible candidate to start with to be his disciple. Those who were accepted were as elite as the Talmidim (group of disciples) was exclusive. Only those "most likely to succeed" in being like the rabbi were picked because it was his reputation that was on the line.

But Jesus was no ordinary rabbi. Jesus seemed to go out of His way to hand-pick those candidates "least likely to succeed" highlighted in this tax collector. And except for a few rare exceptions, those who became disciples of Jesus were not seeking discipleship. Levi would never have considered it possible to find a place in the Talmidim of any rabbi, especially Jesus. He



knew what he was and he knew what others thought of him. Yet even this despised tax collector was “qualified” to be an “anyone” in the eyes of Jesus who said, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”* (Luke 19:10). To be sure, one of the most visibly lost groups in all of Israel were the Jewish tax collectors. Also, consider the precarious position Jesus often put himself in when He extended His invitation of “follow me” to those who were not seeking Him. Jesus risked being rejected which would inflict serious damage on His rabbinic reputation. Jesus was simply a radical rabbi in hot pursuit of rebels on the run. There truly was, is, and always will be only one qualification for the “anyone’s” Jesus calls... and that is that they are absolutely unqualified.

Scripture is full of Jesus showing a compassionate love for the outcasts, the rebels, and the prodigals. For example, another time when Jesus was attending a dinner party at the home of a Pharisee, a prostitute entered and sat at his feet. She wet his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. To everyone in that home this woman was an immoral outsider of the greatest magnitude. Just entering the Pharisee’s home made it ceremonially unclean. The condemning crowd initially assumed that Jesus did not understand who, or what, she was.

If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner. **Luke 7:39**

Yet, the rest of the story tells us that, once again, in spite of knowing her fully, He invites her into relationship, something no self-respecting rabbi would ever dream of doing in that culture at that time. Have you been on the run from God lately? Have you been looking for love in all the wrong places? Have you been seeking your significance in anything smaller than the Savior? Have you been pursuing pleasure in the promises of this world? And now are you convinced that there is

no way you could be in this group of “anyone’s” (something I hear often from prodigals on the run from God)? Here is the good news of the gospel for ANYONE in the category of the younger brother. Jesus welcomes ANYONE on the run from God.

- He welcomes prodigals & prostitutes
- He welcomes tax collectors & transgressors
- He welcomes the sexual immoral & those struggling with addictions
- He welcomes the downcast & the divorced
- He welcomes the marginalized & the murderers
- He welcomes the excommunicated & the ex-con

He welcomes ANYONE on the run from God as His disciples because when He said “ANYONE” He meant exactly what He said.

## Group #2: Anyone On The Run Toward God

When I first heard this story I could not see past the son on the run away from God who squandered his wealth in wild living. What I missed was the opening line “There was a man who had two sons” which was designed to get the reader to look carefully at both of them. Over the years and with the help of some great teachers, it was plain to see Jesus was identifying two groups of “anyone’s” that were both lost and separated from God.

This brings us to the second group of “anyone’s”, which is easy to miss disguised as the obedient elder brother. Those on the run toward God are the rule-keeping moral insiders who are doing everything right, at least on the surface of their lives, based on the letter of the law. They walk in step with the commands of God and in the eyes of the watching world do what is considered

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good, right, noble, pure, and moral. They serve God with their head and hands, but as Jesus said, their hearts are far from Him.

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'" **Luke 15:28-30**

Sadly, the church is full of these "anyone's" who are blind to their own blindness. They are serving themselves, not their Savior. The self is on the throne of their lives and they organize everything around pleasing the self. Their self-effort leads to self-exaltation. Their self-rule leads to self-righteousness. Their self-centeredness leads to self-service. Because they are saving themselves through their spiritual self-achievement, they think they are in no need of a Savior.

In the Parable of the Prodigal it is clear that Jesus puts both categories of "anyone," the irreligious and the religious, under the heading of "lost and far from God." So have you been running toward God lately through the merit of your own work? Are you trying to broker God's favor through your good behavior of doing more and trying harder? Have you been pursuing the things of God rather than God Himself? Has your pursuit of "religion" replaced your relationship with Jesus? My friend Dr. Steve Brown says, "One must be careful about religion

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*"One must be careful about religion because it can make you feel that you're close to God...when in fact, you aren't."*

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because it can make you feel that you're close to God...when in fact, you aren't." **9**

Robert Murray McCheyne, an 1800's minister in the Church of Scotland, who died at the young age of only 29, shines a bright light on the religious insider, "Self-righteousness is the largest idol of the human heart - the idol which man loves most and God hates most. Dearly beloved, you will always be going back to this idol. You are always trying to be something in yourself, to gain God's favour by thinking little of your sin, or by looking to your repentance, tears, prayers; or by looking to your religious exercises, your frames, etc; or by looking to your graces, the Spirit's work in your heart. Beware of false Christ's. Study sanctification to the utmost, but make not a Christ of it." **10**

Here is the good news of the gospel for ANYONE in the category of the elder brother; Jesus welcomes ANYONE on the run toward God. He welcomes the self-righteous. He welcomes the self-centered. He welcomes the self-confident. He welcomes the self-absorbed. He even welcomes the self-striving religious. He welcomes ANYONE on the run toward God because when He said ANYONE He meant what He said.

## CONCLUSION

God's whole three-part story tells us that everything was good (Creation), everything went bad (Fall), and everything in Christ will be re-made good again (Redemption). As it relates to humanity, everyone is broken and beyond any type personal repair project. So, God's eternal plan to repair our brokenness will come only through our Redeemer who invites "anyone" into a redemptive relationship. Remember, at a time when anyone with any kind of physical "defect" was considered ceremonially unclean, Jesus said and lived this message:

"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed." - **Luke 14:13-14**

Listen, the disabled never made the guest list in the social circle of the elite. But they were special guests at the table of our Savior. Former President of Moody Bible Institute, George Sweeting, once said, *"The inclusive gospel cannot be shared by an exclusive people."*

What we need to remember is that anyone can be His invited "anyone," not because they are a special "someone," but simply because they are ANYONE. There are only two categories to which everyone belongs: "Anyone on the run from God" and "Anyone on the run away from God" and Jesus invites from both.

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." - **Acts 10:34-35**

For 12 months we worked with our eldest son, Brock, through the college application process. We learned that the application process is open to anyone but only those who qualify (GPA, SAT & ACT scores) will actually have the opportunity of getting an invitation. Therefore, it is appropriate for the "anyone" in the college application process to mean "anyone" who actually qualifies. But in God's economy, "anyone" means EVERYONE, and that includes you and me.

## **ROMANS ROAD TO REDEMPTION**

Now, if the matter of your salvation is not yet settled, let's get it settled before going on. Now that you have the basic understanding of what "Anyone" means, let's take a walk down the Romans Road gospel presentation and invitation. Over the years, I have found it is the shortest distance between unbelief and belief for those with a basic frame of reference for

Revelation, which has just been presented to you.

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**Romans 3:23** - *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**Romans 6:23** - *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Romans 5:8** - *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Romans 10:9-10** - *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."*

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Let's start at the top. You know you are broken (a sinner) and you know you can't fix yourself (you need a Savior). Sure you have tried, just like all of us who have gone before you. We try everything to fill the hole in our soul but God designed it that nothing other than Jesus can do it. So here in Romans Road we see that God has provided that Savior for you. Jesus loved you so much that He died for you while you did not love Him. You need only confess that Jesus is Lord (which means you are *not*), repent of your sins, and believe God raised Him from the dead, by grace through faith, and you have entered into an eternal relationship with Jesus. You are now a disciple of Jesus and are ready to begin the life-long process of growing as a disciple (dying to self) and going to make other disciples (living for your Savior).

I want to make something perfectly clear in the era of easy believeism. If someone were to ask you if you were to die tonight would you go to heaven, you can now answer with a resounding "YES!" However, if you do not die tonight, and it is my prayer that you do not, never forget that YOUR DEATH STARTS NOW! As a pastor, it is not uncommon to find people who have been

walking with the Lord for decades knowing that when they die they will be with Him in paradise. Yet, never were they instructed that their death was to have begun when they were saved. Being a disciple of Jesus is dying daily to the self and living daily for your Savior and this is what we will sharpen our focus on in the upcoming weeks.

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## *Driving the Roots Deeper – Questions for Discussion*

1. What is the 3-part story line of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why is it important to keep the whole story (Creation, Fall, Redemption) in view when making disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What is the one qualification to be the “anyone” Jesus is calling to be His disciple?

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4. Who do the religious leaders say Jesus is the friend of?

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5. How would you describe the group of “anyone’s” on the run from God?

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6. How would you describe the group of “anyone’s” on the run toward God?

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7. Which group is harder to identify and why?

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8. What is your most important take-away from this lesson?

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