



Riverview Church Membership Class: Part 2

Our Mission at Riverview is to make Sacrificial Followers of Jesus who Grow, Serve, and Go.

We didn't just make that up out of thin air - these are all very important concepts to us. It all starts with the person and work of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

Here at Riverview, we're all about making *Followers* of Jesus. What does that mean? It means that we believe in who Jesus is, and what he has done. Let's work our way through the first few chapters of Romans.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16)

"Believer" is one of, if not *the*, most common terms used to describe someone who follows Jesus. We are believers – we believe in who Jesus is and what he has done. Check out where Paul goes next:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." (Romans 1:18-20)

From the tiniest insect to the furthest star we can focus our telescopes on, creation has a message: "There is a powerful creator of all that exists." Unfortunately, our minds and hearts wander from this creator to his creation far too easily.

"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (Romans 1:21-25)

In other words, every one of us starts out with this general revelation about who God is by looking at the universe around us. We move from worshipping the *creator* to worshipping the *created things*. We worship ourselves, sex, money, the environment, fair trade coffee, etc. Things that are *created* become the object of our affections rather than the *creator*.

"For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things." (Romans 1:26-2:1)

Every single one of us is in the same boat! Born sinners, we worship the creation rather than the creator – and sin takes hold of our lives. All of these words, as harsh as they seem, describe who we are and who we become in our sinful nature. None of us has an excuse. This doesn't even leave us with an excuse to point our finger at someone else and judge them as worse sinners than us – because we do the *very same things* that they do!

We look at the Lansing area and we realize that *this* is why we exist. There are about half a million people in the greater Lansing area and, statistically, only a fraction of them know who Jesus is in a saving way.

In Romans 3:10-18, Paul continues:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

As Paul unfolds his argument, his description seems a little more intense than we feel that we are. We don't feel like we have the venom of asps in our lips, but this is a picture of exactly who we are. If we are that bad, why doesn't it seem that way? Because we tend to compare ourselves to other people, while God compares us to his perfect character. Between us and God is a chasm larger than the distance between Pluto and Earth. But there is good news!

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:21-26)

In other words: Jesus is God, he lived a sinless life, he died on the cross, was buried and rose again to pay for our sins. So by God pouring out his justice and his wrath for all of our sins onto Jesus, He became both the Just (the sins have to be paid for), and the Justifier (he makes us righteous through Jesus). This is what it means to follow Jesus – to believe *this*. Again and again this passage implores us to believe in Jesus and not our own works. Believing in our own works makes us become like the horrible descriptions Paul uses in 3:10-18. That is who we are – unless we believe in Jesus and Jesus alone. Only he is both the Just and the Justifier.

This is essential, because when we talk about becoming a Sacrificial Follower of Jesus who Grows, Serves, and Goes, we're not talking about doing anything that earns salvation at all, or keeps it.

What does it mean, then, to be a sacrificial follower of Jesus? We picked the word "sacrificial" because, in our culture, we're not very sacrificial or commitment-oriented people. But Jesus calls us to a radical commitment to follow him – not to save ourselves, but to give ourselves as a sacrifice the way he did. This helps us grow in our faith.

Maybe you can identify with Paul's words here in Romans 7:

"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me." (Romans 7:15-20)

Paul is just like me and you – he's been saved by Jesus, nothing can take him from his hands, but he just keeps failing and continuing to sin. We all find ourselves here. But the beauty of the Gospel is found in Romans 8:1-2:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

It's important to know that God is not only the Just and the Justifier, but he is *the means* of growing us up spiritually. God, the Holy Spirit, does the work in the life of a believer to conform us into the likeness of Jesus.

Let's talk about what it means, in our nomenclature, to "Grow, Serve, and Go."

	GROW		SERVE	GO
Gospel	Giving	Faithfulness	Serving	Mission
Know	Yes	Teachable	Somewhere	Aware
Share	Regular	Reliable	Consistently	Active
Teach	Generous	Trusted	Leading	Owner
Defend	Sacrificial	Above Reproach	Churchwide	Definer

Growing in the Gospel

Know: An apprentice should have a general working knowledge of the Gospel. They should, at minimum, be a Christian who understands they are a sinner, saved by grace through faith.

Share: A leader knows how to share the Gospel with another. This isn't just in an evangelistic sense (which is vitally important), but also in a daily reminder sense. When a team member is struggling, a leader knows how to point them back to the person and work of Jesus.

Teach: A Team Lead knows how to teach the Word to others in a various settings. This doesn't mean necessarily that they get up in front of the church and preach, but they are comfortable and able to open the Word and declare what it says to those who are listening in the

appropriate contexts. This could be teaching 5th Graders that Jesus loves them, leading a women's Bible study, or even teaching the Word to a gathered group of leaders at a training session.

Defend: A Director not only knows the Gospel, shares the Gospel, and teaches the Gospel, but they are equipped and prepared to defend the Gospel when it is challenged. They are "flock-focused" in their oversight of the Venue or Core Ministry they lead instead of focusing continually on individual "sheep."

Growing in Giving

Yes: An apprentice should be committed to giving financially to the work of the church. This is not only a mark of a follower of Jesus, but an important step of commitment to Riverview, as their local church.

Regular: A leader has made financial giving a habit. They are regular, cheerful, and faithful in their giving to the local church.

Generous: A hallmark of a Team Lead is their generosity. Giving, to them, isn't just a habit but is a strategic way they steward the resources God has given them.

Sacrificial: A Director's lifestyle is impacted by their financial giving to Riverview. Simply, there are things they cannot do because of their giving. They are not in the ministry for the money and one evidence is their level of financial generosity.

Growing in Faithfulness

Teachable: An apprentice should be teachable. When faced with applying the Word of God to an area in their lives where they need to grow, they should be willing and able to rank the Word above their own opinions, experience, and habits.

Reliable: A leader shows up, shows up on time, and can always be counted on to follow through on what they say they will do. To quote Jesus, they "let their 'yes' be 'yes,' and their 'no' be 'no.'" (Matt 5:37)

Trusted: A Team Lead has gained the respect of others and when push comes to shove, everyone knows they can count on this person.

Above Reproach: A Director isn't perfect, but he has no glaring weakness in his life that would disqualify him from ministry or tarnish the reputation of the church

Serve

Somewhere: An apprentice should be serving somewhere in the church. Often, at this level, service is "trial and error," with an apprentice serving in various areas until they find the spot where they can really thrive in the way God has wired them.

Consistently: A leader is a consistent servant. Their service to the church registers high on their list of priorities.

Leading: A Team Lead serves by leading. This can be a difficult transition for some who like to "do things." This person leads through others instead of always being the one making things happen on their own.

Churchwide: A Director's influence can be felt across multiple spheres of influence within the church. They serve the entire church through their role in their specific Venue or Core Ministry.

Go

Mission Aware: An apprentice should be aware of the mission of the church and the needs in our world.

Active: A leader actively on mission. Whether at work, in the home, in the community, they are looking for people they can introduce to Jesus through word and deed.

Owner: Just like an employee and a owner of a business walk into the same showroom with different eyes, a Team Lead owns the ministry. They feel a personal sense of responsibility and weight to make sure things get done in a way that is consistent with Riverview's overall mission.

Definer: A Director defines the mission for their Venue or Core Ministry, within the parameters set by the Elders. They are the chief missiologist for their flock, translating Riv's mission into action.

It's easy to look at this and be overwhelmed. But remember: this is not a ladder to climb or a checklist to check off! It is simply a way of defining each of these areas. This matrix can help us figure out where we might be now, and where we may need to go. For instance, you could ask yourself:

What is the Gospel? When was the last time I shared the Gospel?
Have I been baptized?
Have I been to Mexico on a short-term mission trip?
Am I in a Life Group?
Do I give? Do I give consistently? Sacrificially?

The important thing here is that we are growing. We won't always attain each of these things in our lives, but we want to always be growing and moving in that direction with the help of the Holy Spirit. When it comes to maturity, trajectory always trumps your current position.

This is our mission at Riverview: To make sacrificial followers of Jesus who Grow, Serve, and Go.