

ROCC: "Who We Are" Audio

Our Vision

Thank you for your interest in River Oaks and for taking the time to listen to this audio message on who we are. I'm David Beaty, pastor here at River Oaks, and I'd like to start by reading a few verses that help to lay the foundation for who we are as a church.

Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

This passage, commonly known as the Great Commission, is foundational for all we do here at River Oaks. It's the basis for our vision statement that reads, "River Oaks Community Church exists to reach those who do not know our Lord Jesus Christ with the message of the gospel, to build devoted and equipped followers of Jesus, and to send God's people into the world to serve with compassion and conviction." We usually talk about our vision with 3 key words: "reach", "build" and "send".

How do we do each of these three things? One of the primary ways we reach people is by inviting friends who are not yet Christians to our church. We hope to always be a place where your friends will feel welcomed and comfortable, yet will be challenged to consider the message of the gospel. We have learned that one of the best ways to reach people in western Forsyth County is by having great ministries for youth and children. Most people who come to faith in Jesus Christ do so before they are 18 years old. The early years are also critical years for becoming grounded in the truths of the Bible. This is why we consider those under 18 to be, in some ways, our most important guests. So we put a lot of our resources into having the best ministries possible for youth and children.

But we also want their parents to enjoy being at River Oaks. That's why we built such a large coffee bar – a place for people to connect with others and make new friends. That's why we put such emphasis on hospitality. The dress is casual and the music is contemporary at River Oaks, because we think people who are not regular church-goers tend to feel more at home in that type of setting.

Our messages are based on Scripture, and we try to make the Bible understandable. It's my belief that you can teach even the most challenging or controversial topics in the Bible when you have pre-Christians in the audience, as long as you make the message understandable. We will never compromise the Bible because we believe that Scripture is inspired by God in order to teach us His ways. It's His Word that God uses to convert people, so the Bible must be foremost in our services if we want to reach people.

God uses His Word to reach people, and He also uses it to build people. So the word “build” in our vision statement is all about equipping people with knowledge of Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, the Bible says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” God uses Scripture to equip us to live in a way that pleases Him. God’s Word builds us up so we can serve Him and fulfill His plan for our lives.

We teach the Bible even to our youngest children. We want them to experience and understand the love of Jesus from the earliest possible age. From Noah’s Ark for pre-schoolers, to KidsROCC, our church for elementary aged kids, to our youth ministry, the Bible is foundational to all we do. We want our kids to have fun, but we want God’s Word to be foremost.

Outside of Sunday mornings, our primary vehicle for building people in their faith is our small group ministry. As one of our elders often says, “God does big things in small groups”. A group of 8 to 12 people provides an ideal environment for studying Scripture, praying together and caring for one another. Jesus modeled discipleship in community with His own followers, and we also believe that people experience significant spiritual growth while in community with other believers. While we do provide special classes at certain times during the year, our small groups are our chief means of fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission mandate to “make disciples”.

The “send” part of our vision statement has to do with going outside the walls of our church to share the love of Jesus in word and deed. We want all of our members to experience the joys of outreach – reaching out to people through local or international missions. We support over 20 local ministries with our giving, but more importantly, River Oaks members invest hundreds of hours each month serving in our community. Members lead worship services in our local jail and prison, mentor inmates, help to feed the homeless, serve the recovering and tutor those struggling in school. We want our community to be a much better place because our church is here.

Sending extends to our whole world. As a church in an affluent area like western Forsyth County, we believe we have an obligation to be generous with our financial support to help spread the gospel to those who have little or no access to it. When our church was started in 1999 and we opened our first bank account, as a symbolic gesture, we wrote our first check to support a mission effort in Cuba. Today we support missionaries all over the world. Some of those missionaries are River Oaks members who have felt the call to live in a distant country in order to share the gospel. We have begun special efforts to reach people living in unreached people groups- those language groups who do not yet have Scripture in their languages and have little or no access to any Christian missionary.

Sending includes not only local and world missions, but it involves every River Oaks member reaching out to share the love and message of Jesus whenever and

wherever possible. This means we hope that every member will seek to share the gospel in his or her own sphere of influence – at work, at school, in the neighborhood or among your own family. The full cycle of discipleship means that those who have been reached are reaching others. If you decide to become part of River Oaks, we ask that you first understand and embrace who we are as an outreach-focused church, one who is committed to reaching, building and sending for God’s glory.

Our Values

In understanding who we are as a church, it’s also important to understand something about the things we value. Our core values are qualities or attitudes that we hope will characterize all who are members at River Oaks. These values help us recognize the type of people we want to have in leadership. While none of us embodies these qualities as we should, we hope to be making steady progress toward them. So what are they?

The first is humility – humility before God and before others. One of the most important expressions of our humility before God is our devotion to prayer. Prayer flows out of our awareness that apart from the Lord, we can do nothing (John 15:5). It is based on our understanding that only God can build His church. One of our theme verses as a church is Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” We want to be part of something that God is building, not an organization based on human strategies or ingenuity. Humility before God includes the recognition that we must be both guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit if our work as a church is to be pleasing to God.

Humility is also expressed in our relationships with others in our church. In the Book of Philippians chapter 2 and verse 3, the Bible tells us, “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” We hope that this attitude, which characterized the life of Jesus on earth, will be increasingly seen in each of us here at River Oaks.

The second core value is servant-hood. Again, Jesus is our example. He washed the dirty feet of His disciples and said to them, “I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:15) It’s our hope that servant-hood will especially be modeled by every leader at River Oaks. We consider any promotion to leadership to simply be a promotion to serve people in a new role.

While we hope every member of River Oaks would be willing to do anything needed to serve our church, we recognize that service is most fulfilling and fruitful when we serve according to our individual giftedness. So we hope that, over time, our members will find those service roles where they can contribute most to God’s kingdom by using their God-given gifts.

Because our church operates with a large number of volunteers, we ask all of our members to serve in some way. We encourage members to think in terms of 4 hours per week – 1 hour to worship (though our services are actually more like 70 minutes!), 2 hours for their small group and 1 hour to serve. We especially rely on volunteers on Sunday mornings, so we ask our members to be available for both services – one to worship and one to serve. It's because of people dedicated to serving that we can help our visitors find places to park, greet them at the doors, and provide hospitality in the coffee bar. Ushers serve them in the worship area and teachers care for their children in Noah's Ark and Kids ROCC. People devoted to serving help operate audio-video equipment, support our worship services and empty trash from the coffee bar. The beautiful thing is that people find joy in serving. We believe God has created us to serve Him by serving one another, and that's why servant - hood is a core value of our church.

The third core value of our church is love. Because we love God, we should also love one another. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) We hope that the guests who visit our church will be able to sense the love that we have for each other. We hope they will see that love in the way we welcome them and care for their children. We hope that love will motivate our hospitality.

Love compels us to love all people, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. We don't just tolerate diversity – we celebrate it. We hope to be a church that increasingly looks more like heaven will look! That means we want to be a place that is especially welcoming to people of other nations. Our community is becoming more ethnically diverse, and we hope we can embody that diversity as a church.

Love for God and others must guide everything we do at River Oaks, both inside and outside of the walls of our building. One of the ways we show the love of Christ to our community is by loving and serving those in need. That's why we encourage our small groups who pray and study God's Word together to also serve in local missions together.

The Gospel

The most important thing we can do to share God's love with others is to share the great message of His love – the gospel. The word "gospel", as used in the Bible, simply means good news; specifically, the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. While no one verse explains all there is to know about the gospel, one of the most familiar verses in the Bible - John 3:16 – is a good place to start. That verse reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

The gospel begins with God and His love for the world He created. God is love, and He created human beings to share in His love and to enjoy fellowship with Him. But God's love is perfect and pure because He, himself, is perfectly pure. There is no evil in God. He is infinitely holy and perfectly just. This presents a problem for us humans. We were created to love God above all else. But since the time of Adam and Eve, all people have gone their own way. We have refused to love God and put Him first, choosing instead to seek the things we think will make us happy. Whether by pursuit of money, security, success, popularity or power, we humans are very good at trading God's supremacy in our lives for cheap counterfeits. The Bible calls this rebellion against God "sin", and it is found in every human heart. Sin separates us from God.

But God, who is both perfect in His justice and rich in His mercy, does not leave us in our state of separation from Him. Though His holiness necessitates our separation, His love wins our reconciliation. How? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only son..." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this earth as a dependent human baby. God the Creator became as His created ones. Both fully God and fully man, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. At the age of 33, He was taken by sinful men and was crucified. He died and was buried. On the third day, He arose from the grave and appeared to many people.

What was accomplished by Jesus death, burial and resurrection? The apostle Peter wrote, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18) The Bible describes this being brought to God as having received "eternal life." Jesus bore our judgment so that we could share in His eternity. He took our place – He was our substitute. God Himself paid our sin-debt in Jesus Christ. As the Book of Romans says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

How do we receive this gift? As John 3:16 says, it is for "whoever believes in him." Faith, in the Bible, is more than just agreement with the facts about Jesus. It also includes the recognition of our own sin and our personal need for God's forgiveness. It includes the belief that Jesus died in our place to bear our judgment, in order to credit us with His righteousness. It includes trust – reliance upon Him for our acceptance with our perfectly holy God, both now and for all eternity.

If you have never taken the step of placing your trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, and would like to do that now, I invite you to pray with me. You can follow me, using these words: Dear God.....I do believe that Jesus died in my place....that on the cross, He bore the judgment for my sins.....I acknowledge my sin and the need for your forgiveness.....I turn from my sin and I turn to you.....I ask you to be my Lord and my Savior.....Please help me to live as your follower.....to know and love and enjoy you.....from this day forward...Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and meant it, please let one of our elders or pastors or me know about that. We would love to celebrate that with you and be sure you have what you need to continue growing in your faith.

Thank you again for taking your time to listen to this audio message about who we are at River Oaks. I hope you will decide to do our new member class and learn more about how you can serve Jesus Christ as part of His church here at River Oaks. Thanks again.