

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT OIKOS

(ACTUALLY, THERE ARE SIX)

TOM  MERCER

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

The Oikos Movement

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011.

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oikos

THE DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

“Go home to *your own people* and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

—MARK 5:19

ZACCHAEUS

“Today salvation has come to this *house*.”

—LUKE 19:9

THE ROYAL OFFICIAL'S SON

“...he and his whole *household* believed.”

—JOHN 4:53

LEVI

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's *house*, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.”

—MARK 2:15

CORNELIUS

“He will bring you a message through which you and all your *household* will be saved.”

—ACTS 11:14

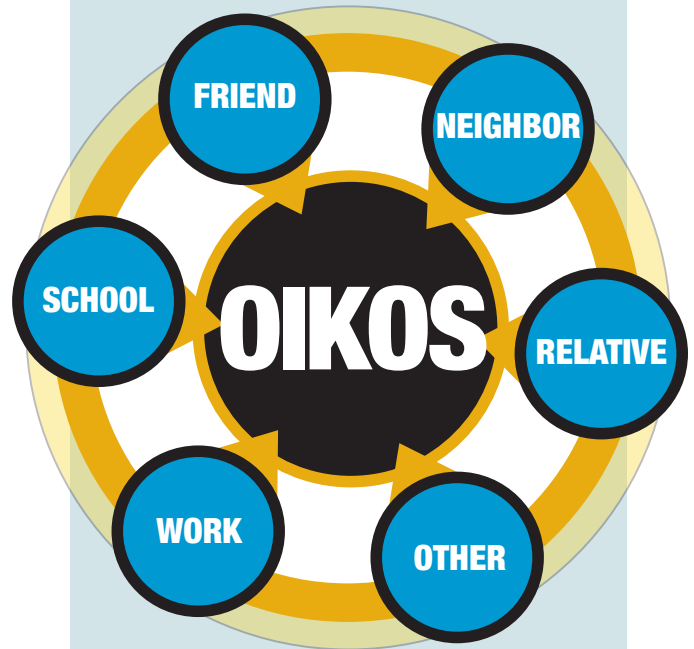
LYDIA

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message...she and the members of her *household* were baptized... —ACTS 16:15

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

He and all his *household* were baptized.

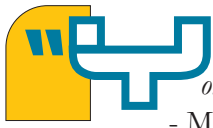
—ACTS 16:33



oikos n, extended household (Gr.)

1. the most natural and common environment for evangelism to occur
2. a group of eight to fifteen people with whom you share life most closely, your sphere of greatest influence
3. the people for whom God wants to prepare you to become an ideal instrument of His grace
4. a microcosm of the world at large, for whom God sent His Son—that all who place their faith in Christ would be delivered from the bondage of sin and enjoy life to the fullest

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT OIKOS



our focus need more focus.”

- Mr. Han to Dre, from The Karate Kid

I have become (Christ's) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

-The Apostle Paul, Colossians 1:25

We don't only find the word *oikos* in its complete stand-alone self in the New Testament. It is also a key ingredient to a variety of compound Greek terms. A good example is Colossians 1:25. There, the word *commission* (the older translations use the word *stewardship*), is the Greek *oikonomia*, a compound term combining *oikos*, “house,” with *nomos*, “law.” Paul's point is that God has given each of us official (evidently, even legal) influence among a specific and relatively small circle of people. The English word *commission* accurately frames the intent of the statement.

As Jesus-followers, His mission has now become our mission. Literally, we partner with Jesus to “co” His mission together! Any commission is unique to an individual believer but, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, you could say that Paul's was uniquely unique. Our “co” mission is more typically unique. (Although that sounds like an oxymoron!) Paul reminds us that a common characteristic of every believer is to steward our responsibilities as servants.

1. Being a *loyal* servant requires heart, loving the people Jesus cared enough to die for.
2. Being an *effective* servant requires discernment, the ability to understand the specific commission we've each been given.
3. Being an *efficient* servant requires focus, managing everything else in our lives while being intentional about the people around us.

My belligerence about emphasizing the *oikos* principle over the years has frustrated some. But I continue to insist that, if the Kingdom is to function on all cylinders, there must be synergy between Christ, the Christian, and the local church.

If Christ came to save lost people...

...and *if* Christians are given a “co” mission, a certain number of those people to point to Jesus...

...*then* logic would tell us that local churches exist to (1) facilitate strategic partnerships with a local group of Christians, to enhance their success in delivering the Gospe, and (2) establish strategic partnerships with other local churches to do the same.

Local churches can misfire by not understanding their unique role. It becomes the responsibility of their leaders to design ministry systems that facilitate the Great Commission in the lives of believers who quite frankly don't feel that great at it. So, why don't they?

Here are some of the misunderstandings that critics often bring to a conversation about the *oikos* principle, followed by a few (hopefully) clarifying comments. When we first released this document, it was called “Five Myths About *Oikos*.” Then we noticed we had numbered them incorrectly. So here are six! 😊



OIKOS IS AN EVANGELISM PROGRAM.

In all of our training efforts, one of the biggest obstacles continues to be the misunderstanding that the *oikos* principle is the centerpiece of an evangelism program. It takes us deeper than that. It actually frames a world view. I've even compared it to a new pair of glasses, through which we see life and ministry with greater clarity.

Yet communicating the Gospel to people who are lost continues to be at the heart of the Great Commission. And our oikos continues to be the most fertile soil for the Gospel to bear fruit.

Amazingly, some have pushed back. “Oikos is a copout. It’s too easy!” Evidently, they’d rather go to classes, memorize all kinds of stuff, and then go out and call on people they’ve never met to repent. Even argue with them, if necessary, until they surrender themselves to Christ. And, all the while, ignore the data. (Never do that, by the way.)

I apologize if that sounds condescending, but I am simply recounting how some of my conversations have gone. I am no one’s judge. I just feel badly that people are not only missing the opportunity to be an impactful world changer, but that no one has ever explained to them how to be one!

Cold evangelism has always had a place in Kingdom work, and that approach may actually be a specific call that God has placed on some individual’s lives. Cold evangelism is complicated, but it’s not that difficult. Just find someone with whom you can share the plan of salvation, have as meaningful a conversation as is possible, and then walk away. Regardless of how the conversation ends, more often than not, you would never see that person again. You’d certainly hope for the best, and you’d probably feel pretty good about the fact that you had just shared the Gospel with someone.

Conversely, oikos is a simple strategy, but not an easy one, because being a witness for Christ goes well beyond what we say to people. Jesus said that we wouldn’t go witnessing, but that we’d be witnesses! That’s who we are all day and every day. Good at it or not, we all carry the badge of being a witness for Jesus. That’s why some things just matter more now.

Because of your oikos, Christ-like behavior suddenly matters more.

Because of your oikos, the success of your marriage suddenly matters more.

Because of your oikos, being an intentional parent suddenly matters more.

Because of your oikos, learning the Bible suddenly matters more.

Because of your oikos, intercessory prayer suddenly matters more.

All of those things matter more because the Gospel matters so much.

And all day, every day, a specific group of people are not only watching you, they are already being influenced by you.

Having said that, it’s important to understand that oikos isn’t just about being an example to people and keeping your mouth shut. Oikos means that the people who are watching you will, at some point, also want to talk to you- so you better prepare to have something worthwhile to say. It is not just about inviting people to church, especially if the church an individual attends hasn’t yet committed to be a partner in the process. And even if you attend an oikocentric church, what if the people you invite don’t accept your invitation to attend a church service or event? What if they just want to meet you at Starbucks and talk about faith? Either way, you better prepare to have something to say because the eventuality of dialogue is certain.



OIKOS DISCOURAGES YOU FROM WITNESSING TO SOME ONE YOU DON'T KNOW.

That is false. Sharing Christ with anyone, anytime is every believer’s responsibility, regardless of who is or isn’t inside an oikos. But the fact is, without at least two people’s permission, no meaningful conversation ever takes place (if you’re married, you already know this). Cold evangelism experiences can be very exciting, but successful ones are rare because

people seldom grant that kind of permission on the spot. As one who designed the relational Universe, Jesus knew where permission was most likely to exist.

What you don't find in the New Testament is Jesus saying to recent converts, "Now that you're saved, go out on the street corner and argue people into My Kingdom."

Years ago, I heard an incredible story about a guy who, while walking through an intersection in a large city, noticed a police officer directing traffic in the middle of the street. As he walked by, the man sensed the Holy Spirit prompting him to go up to the officer and tell him that God loved him. The man dismissed the impulse and kept walking. Haunted by the continued sense that he had been disobedient to the Spirit, he finally walked back to that intersection, up to the cop and said, "Excuse me officer, but God just told me to tell you that He loves you." Tears started to trickle down from under the cop's mirrored sunglasses. Traffic stopped. With a broken voice, the officer said, "I prayed to God for the first time in a long time last night and told Him that, if He was real, the least He could do was to send someone to tell me that He was there for me." Within a matter of minutes, the officer called for backup and then prayed to receive Christ right there on that street corner. When I heard that story, I was mesmerized, to say the least. It was one of the most amazing and powerful conversion stories I had ever heard. As the speaker closed his message to our group that evening, he said, "Now go out and witness to people," so we were all looking for cops all week! (Some of you have had so many traffic tickets that the Highway Patrol probably is your oikos!)

There's nothing wrong with those events. In fact, they can be as compelling as they are dramatic. But never forget—they're rare! The problem is that, when they happen, we put those testimonies on Christian television, write books or use them as the centerpiece of some sermon on evangelism and then everybody starts to think that's the way people normally come to Christ. But they don't—at least not 95% of us didn't come to Christ that way.

2 Timothy 1:5, *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

That was not only Timothy's conversion story, it may be the most boring personal testimony ever written. What is interesting to me is that it sounds just like mine and probably much like yours. Some may have to exchange the grandmother and mother for a father or a friend or a coworker or a neighbor. But most testimonies are eerily similar to 2 Timothy 1:5! No drama. Just worldchange.

Let me suggest that, if you're a pastor, you conduct your own research. As the opportunity affords itself, in a congregational setting, ask those who received Christ because of a "cold" evangelism conversation to raise their hand. Then have everyone look around the room to see the few hands that go up. The last time I did that, in an auditorium of thousands, four hands went up. Before you move on, be sure to affirm the legitimacy of those experiences, even emphasize the divine power those few experiences reflect. Then ask those who received Christ primarily because of the influence of one or more oikos relationships raise their hand. Have everyone look around the room to see the hands that go up—it will be almost everyone in the room. To recognize the difference should not negate the importance of spiritual conversations that occur between strangers, but it will establish the value of the oikos. Rather dramatically, I might add.



**EVERYONE IN YOUR
OIKOS IS A NON-
BELIEVER.**

That is false.

- Some are non-believers. Since they need Christ, the focus for you is to evangelize.
- Some are believers who have allowed other important challenges of life to crowd out the most important, their walk with Christ. They are already

part of God's Kingdom. They just need to be re-energized for their purpose-driven mission. Our focus is to pray that they will find their spiritual groove again.

- Some are believers already focused on becoming better prepared to reach out to their own oikos for Christ. They will need you to continually pray for them and encourage them to stay the course.

Two points here. (1) Know who is part of your commission and (2) recognize that everyone in it will always need your appropriate input and support.

MYTH 4 EVERYONE IN YOUR OIKOS IS A BELIEVER.

That is false. That is what many people who have been a Christian for many years actually think, but that's because no one has ever trained them to think oikocentrically. We are all more connected to non-believers than we realize. Only a lack of intentionality keeps our focus inward, provoking the natural instinct to surround ourselves by other Christians who can minister to us rather than focusing outward, to the relationships that frame our God given commission.

MYTH 5 YOU GET TO PICK YOUR OIKOS.

That is false. Every member of your oikos has been supernaturally and strategically placed in your relational world. You may not even like some of those people, but that's irrelevant. Just because you wouldn't have selected them doesn't mean they're going anywhere! We all dream of inter-oikos transfers, from time to time, but to no avail. As people wander in and out of your oikos, you'll notice that their migratory patterns are not so much the result of your personal magnetism as they are the result of divinely orchestrated circumstances.

MYTH 6 OIKOS IS ALL ABOUT GROWING A LOCAL CHURCH.

That is false. Actually, oikos won't grow a church nearly as fast as flashy programs will. But programs tend to impress people who go to church more than people who don't. That's why there is a crippling number of Christians in our culture who simply move across town to the local church that has the best programs, the best bands, the best preachers. But the math doesn't lie. If one church grows at the same time another church shrinks, then there is no net benefit to the Kingdom.

Jesus was focused. He came to accomplish a very specific job, to seek and to save people like us, those who were lost. Jesus didn't come to feed people or heal people. He did both because He cared about them but, when He took off (and I mean literally), there were a lot of hungry and sick people left behind. Jesus came with a specific focus and He accomplished a specific purpose. He left the Father, was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, rose from the grave to conquer death, and then ascended back to the Father. He finished the job He came to accomplish, and then He left.

That's why we call Easter Weekend the Passion of Christ! That was His passion. That was His focus. That was something that He and He alone could accomplish. Nobody could save the human race but Jesus. If He hadn't bothered to passionately focus on His unique mission, then something really really important would have never been accomplished and we would all be left to wallow in our sin.

So it should not surprise us to discover that focus is the primary building block of His Church's mission, the strategy that Jesus brought to the formation of the church. God calls us all to be involved in very specific tasks (we call them spiritual gifts), to get together with other like-minded believers at a very specific place (we call it a local church), and to prepare to do life with a very specific group of people

(we call them our oikos). That's *our* world. That's the world God wants to change through us.

Mr. Han was right. "Our focus need more focus."



If you have questions, comments, or would just like more information about The Oikos Movement, please go to our website.

oikosmovement.com