



Oikos—

The Household Principle

The New Testament Method for Evangelism and Discipleship*

This is an excerpt from *The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism (Part 2)* by J. Hampton Keathley III. The titles and links for each part of the 5-part series are listed at the conclusion.

The Lord gave us the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Great Commission for the Body of Christ is to make disciples by going into all the world, by leading people to Christ and then baptizing them, and then by teaching them to obey the Lord.

At its core, the Great Commission means that believers in Christ need to reach out to non-Christians with the message of the gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ). The very mention of that responsibility, however, causes some believers to experience a parade of fears . . . the fear of rejection, the fear of being thought odd, the fear of what to say, the fear of being unable to answer questions, the fear of how to present the gospel, the fear of alienating someone, and the list goes on and on.

Followers of Christ are to communicate the message of the Savior and desire to do so. The question often faced by believers is “how?” . . . not only how to share the gospel but also how to help new Christians become anchored to God’s Word and become reproducers themselves in a way that is continuous, contagious, and compelling?

Various challenges arise when we try to translate the goal of evangelism/discipleship into specific plans that work on a continuing basis. What can we do that is significant? Do we put together an evangelistic committee? Do we start a visitation night so we can go door to door to door and speak with people who have no advance notice? Do we call in specialists to conduct a witnessing clinic or conference to teach us how to present the Good News?

Is there a biblical method and pattern that we can follow that will help us? I think there is. It is an approach that is not new though it has been gravely neglected in favor of other approaches that are far less effective and harder to execute. It is a process not a method. It is natural to the way society functions and operates and has for centuries. It is a process that builds on the natural “webs” of relationships which exist in every church. It is a process that has been called, “The Master’s Plan.”

The Master’s Plan is an application of New Testament principles which, by the way, coincide with insights of modern research by both church growth specialists and contemporary anthropologists concerning the way we are able to most effectively influence others. People are influenced the most by three universal units of societies’ social systems. These are (a) common kinship, (b) common community, and (c) common interests. As we study the New Testament, we find that the apostolic church used the interlocking social systems of common kinship, community, and interest as the vehicle for reaching the world with the Gospel.

The basic thrust of evangelism in the New Testament was not individual evangelism, it was not mass evangelism, and it was definitely not child evangelism. Then what was it? It was what has been called *Oikos* Evangelism.

THE *OIKOS* PRINCIPLE EXPLAINED

What is *oikos* evangelism? *Oikos* is the Greek word most often translated house or household in the New Testament. But let’s be careful and not assume we know what that means.

In the culture of New Testament times, *oikos* described not only the immediate family, but it included servants, servants’ families, friends, and even business associates. One’s *oikos* was one’s sphere of influence, his/her social system composed of those related to each other through common kinship ties, common tasks, and common territory. The New Testament *oikos* included members of the nuclear family, but extended to dependents, slaves and employees. The *oikos* was the basic social unit by which the church grew.

An *oikos* was the fundamental and natural unit of society, and consisted of one's sphere of influence—his family, friends and associates. And equally important, the early church spread through *oikos*—circles of influence and association. With only a moment of reflection, we begin to realize a significant difference of thrust, tone, and tenor between much contemporary evangelism and early church outreach.

As we turn to the New Testament, Scripture focuses us on the household (family, friends, and associates) in the spread of the gospel to mankind. The Gospels, Acts, and Epistles illustrate that the link of communication from person to person was the *oikos*. Here was the bridge used regularly as a natural means for spreading the message of Jesus Christ.

- Mark 5:19. “Go home to your people (*oikos*) and report . . .”
- Luke 19:9. “Today salvation has come to this house (*oikos*).
- John 4:53. “. . . and he himself believed, and his whole household (*oikos*).
- Mark 2:14-15. We can't be certain, but “his house” probably refers to Levi's. If so, Levi invited his friends to come and meet and hear Jesus. Here is a typical household bridge—including associates within the confines of Levi's own home.
- John 1:40-45. The Apostle Peter came to Christ as a result of someone in his *oikos*. Also, Nathanael came to Christ because his friend Philip told him about the Savior.
- Acts 10:22 (and following verses). Cornelius invited his relatives and close friends (his *oikos*) to come to his own home to hear Peter tell about the Lord.
- Acts 10:15 and 31. Here two households came to know the Savior through the influence of Lydia, a business woman, and the jailer at Philippi. When most people read about these two incidences, they normally think of just the immediate family. It was probably much more.

It seems that *Oikos* Evangelism is the God-given and God-ordained means and key for naturally sharing our **supernatural** message. This is the way the early church spread, and it is the way the gospel is most **naturally** shared today. Research and statistics back up this claim.

Eight advantages of “oikos” evangelism/discipleship: (1) It is the natural way churches grow. (2) It is the most cost effective way to reach new people. (3) It is the most fruitful way to win new people. (4) It provides a constantly enlarging source of new contacts. (5) It brings the greatest satisfaction to participating members. (6) It results in the most effective assimilation of new members. (7) It tends to win entire families. (8) It focuses on existing relationships.

For further study, see:

[The Stewardship of God's Truth \(*Multiplying the Life Through Evangelism and Discipleship*\)](#)

[The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism – Part 1 \(*Understanding our Mission*\)](#)

[The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism – Part 2 \(*Understanding our Method*\)](#)

[The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism – Part 3 \(*Understanding our Message*\)](#)

[The Stewardship of God's Truth Through Evangelism – Part 4 \(*Common Assaults on the Gospel*\)](#)