

Ministry in the *Oikos* **Dr. Rob Rienow**

In the early church, Gospel ministry was driven in and through homes. The early church gathered in homes for corporate worship on Sundays.¹ For men to be qualified to serve as elders in the church, they first needed to demonstrate they were shepherding their family and discipling their children at home.² New believers were called to begin their Great Commission ministry at home with their children.³

One of the key words God has given us in the Scriptures which elevates this call to ministry at home is *oikos*. The word is used 106x times in the New Testament. *Oikos* most commonly refers to a literal, physical “house.”⁴ It’s second most common usage is “household” which refers to the men, women, boys, and girls who live in the home.⁵ When used as “household” the term *oikos* focuses on family members. In the first century it would have included servants who lived with the family and who were under the protection and jurisdiction of the family.

There is no example in the New Testament where *oikos* is used to refer to one’s friends, co-workers, or as a general term for one’s sphere of influence. Instead, *oikos* focuses our attention on Gospel ministry in the home and with our family members. Here are four key ways God has created the *oikos* to build His Kingdom.

***Oikos* – Where the Gospel is shared**

The early church viewed each believer’s house as a place of ministry. “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5:42 ESV). A believer’s house was to be filled with evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual life.

***Oikos* – Where whole families are discipled**

We have multiple examples in Acts of people coming to Christ and immediately seeking the salvation of their household (*oikos*).⁶ This was the case with the Philippian jailor who said to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family” (Acts 16:30-33).

***Oikos* – Where compassion begins**

In 1 Timothy 5 God provides His church with essential methodology for ministries of compassion and caring for the poor. He calls His people to exercise compassion and generosity first and foremost to their *oikos*. “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God...Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:3-8).

***Oikos* – Where elders stand guard**

In Titus 1, God gives us His qualifications for those who would serve as elders⁷ in the local church. One of the essential responsibilities of a pastor/elder is to “be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9b). Paul then goes on to explain why elders must silence false teachers. “They are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.” False teaching not only corrupts a local church but it corrupts the households within that church. Elders must guard the biblical doctrine so that both the local church and each *oikos* represented in the church can fulfill God’s call to advance the Gospel.

Dr. Rob Rienow’s most important ministry is loving his wife Amy and partnering with her to raise their six children for the glory of God. He is a pastor, author, and founder of Visionary Family Ministries (www.VisionaryFam.com).

¹ Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 15:2, Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15

² Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:5

³ Acts 2:39

⁴ Acts 2:2, 2:42

⁵ In a few instances, *oikos* refers to the “household of God” or the “house of Israel” describing God’s people as a spiritual family. (Examples 1 Peter 4:17, Acts 2:36).

⁶ Cornelius in Acts 10, Lydia in Acts 16, and Crispus in Acts 18

⁷ The word for pastor and elder in the New Testament refer to the same role and can be used interchangeably.