

Sharing the Gospel: So Simple that Many Churches Miss it!

By Bob Young

Thirty-plus years of analyzing, evaluating, consulting. Be patient. I begin with basic definitions and observations.

→ First, the healthy church grows as it cultivates three levels of fellowship.

The **congregation** assembles and shares worship as the body of Christ. The shape and dynamics of faith are proclaimed, unifying the gathered church as it prepares to go forth into the world. Sermons are a declaration of shared faith. Congregations can have an almost limitless number of persons present.

The **class** gives people opportunity to explore corporate faith and to understand how that faith is lived out in the context of the body with members working together. Classes seek to integrate biblical understanding and shared activities. Classes that effectively fulfill their role have 20-25 members, no more than 30-40.

The **cell (small group)** is the basic unit of the church. The cell gives members opportunity explore individual faith and to receive support in the task of living out faith individually in families and daily interactions. The cell provides intimate fellowship and support. Scripture can be applied to specific individual problems. Cells function best with about 10 members, forming new cells as the cell grows.

→ Second, the members of a church live within a circle of influence—an OIKOS. Your circle includes the people with whom you interact frequently, often daily. These are natural, normal relationships. Examples are coworkers, family, friends, and various social groups or gatherings. OIKOS is the New Testament word that is often used to describe this “household” or circle of influence.

→ Third, effective evangelism starts with the OIKOS of the members of the church. Effective evangelism begins with already existing relationships and interactions. The advantage of natural relationships is that continuing interactions are normal.

More and more churches seek to develop new, artificial relationships. Such relationships must constantly be reinforced because they are not natural. Unnatural activities are programmed again and again. Members go out of their way to cultivate relationships with people they do not naturally interact with.

How to touch your OIKOS with the gospel

First, you can easily invite your OIKOS to congregational worship. They will be able to interact with many people of faith and to hear the shape of biblical faith proclaimed.

Second, you can easily invite your OIKOS to share time with your cell. In the cell, genuine relationships are made visible. Scripture is made relevant as real-life problems are addressed and individual Christians receive strength and support.

When you invite people from your OIKOS to the congregational celebration or to the cell, focus on the needs you already know about in their lives and how they may benefit. The most effective invitations focus on solving the problems a person is dealing with. Never leave the impression that you are inviting someone because of a church outreach, program, or goal. No one like to feel used.

The cell is ideal for welcoming guests, offering friendship, sharing interests, being comfortable. Shared time encourages transparency. Sharing life and problems provides connections. All are encouraged to see that Jesus continually meets every need.

Authenticity is essential for effective outreach. Authenticity is most natural in reaching out to your OIKOS. Do not hesitate to share weaknesses and struggles. Transparency builds trust and loyalty. Christ was compassionate toward all. He will help us as we pour his love out of our lives into our OIKOS—naturally, regularly, tirelessly.

Pitfalls to Effective Evangelism

Churches fail to recognize and honor the unique dynamics of different levels of fellowship.

Sermons may fail to declare the great principles of Christian faith, choosing rather to focus on application (the role of the class).

Churches without small groups often substitute the class for the cell, but the class is too large to fulfill the needs that are met in a smaller group. Remember that classes larger than 30-40 will discourage member involvement, degenerating into “lessons” or “sermonettes.”

Churches use the cell for fellowship and discourage inviting non-members. In many churches, small groups are too large. Cells that are larger than 10-12 lose their effectiveness for evangelism and for incorporating and assimilating new people.