# Bible Study on *Oikos - From Dwelling to Abiding*

## Introduction

The word *oikos* is Ancient Greek for family, household, or home. It was used interchangeably to mean any of those things, and sometimes meant all of them at the same time. It was often used to refer to the line of descent from a father to a son, or it could mean everyone within a family unit who was subject to the head of that household including employees or slaves. In Ancient Greek philosophy, the *oikos* was the basic unit of the state.

The idea of the *oikos* carries with it a sense of dwelling – somewhere to put down roots, where you can belong and be part of something greater than yourself. There are lots of places where we might stay, but very few places where we live, where we dwell. Throughout the Bible God has called humanity to dwell in certain places. First, God called the Israelites to dwell together in the Promised Land. Then, God called the disciples of Jesus to come and dwell together as the Church. Finally, God calls everyone to come and dwell together in and with God.

In this Bible study we will be looking at what it means to dwell, whether that is the importance of a place for building community, the importance of difference in our church community, or the radical transformation of being ‘in Christ’. The Bible study finishes with a call for us to learn to ‘abide’, to slow down and take time to dwell in God and in our local community.

### The four sessions are as follows:

1. Israel Dwelling in the Holy Land
2. Dwelling in the Church
3. Dwelling in God
4. Abiding

## Session 1: Israel Dwelling in the Holy Land

### Scripture Focus: Deuteronomy 12:10; Psalm 37:3

### Study:

After the Israelites had been set free from slavery in Egypt, God brought them across the wilderness to the borders of the Promised Land. After 40 years of struggling in the wild places, having to rely on God for food and water, falling out with each other, and having to learn how to trust God, the people of God stood at the Jordan looking out over the land that God had promised.

The people of God had gone without a place to call their own. Once they crossed the Jordan, they found a place where God said they could stay, where they could put down roots, where they could dwell. Deuteronomy 12:10 (*NRSV)* says:

*‘When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and when he gives you rest from your enemies all around so that you live in safety…’*

The Promised Land was going to be a place of safety for the people of God, where they could rest after wandering around for such a long time. They had endured hardship and fear, confusion and loss – but all of that was going to change.

When we live somewhere, especially when it is somewhere we decide to settle and put down roots, making it somewhere where we can dwell, we do not do so on our own. We do so amongst other people with other cultures and beliefs.

For the Israelites, sharing the place that they were told to dwell in did not go well from the start. They preferred to go to war with the people already living in Canaan rather than live with them. But things change when we reach the age of the Church. Israel would be defined by its emphasis on religious and cultural purity. The Church would be defined by its radical acceptance of difference.

When God calls us to dwell somewhere, we have the assurance of God’s sustenance as we remain in a place we have been called to. Psalm 37:3 says, ‘*Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture*.’ God rarely brings us to a place to dwell with no purpose in mind; Psalm 37:3 comes with an instruction to ‘*do good*’ in that dwelling place. We are challenged to bring God into the community he has placed us in and around, by carrying out a lifestyle that reflects God’s goodness and kindness.

### Questions for discussion:

Consider the questions and spent some time in prayer to seek God’s guidance for your role in your community and place of dwelling.

* What do you think it was like for the Israelites to be given a place of safety to dwell and rest, after being in the wilderness and escaping from slavery?
* How can you dwell somewhere in a way which creates peace and respect between different cultures, customs and faiths rather than invading other people’s space?
* Where is God asking you to dwell, to intentionally remain and be present? What good deeds can you bring to your dwelling place?

### Prayer:

Lord,

Help us to remain open and obedient to your dwelling places for our lives. Keep us in your pleasing and perfect will, attuning our spirit to yours.

Help us to make room for carrying out good deeds in our communities and help us to model your radical acceptance, love and goodness.

Thank you that your Spirit goes with us and empowers us in all that you call us to do.

Amen.

## Session 2: Dwelling in the Church

### Scripture Focus: Acts 2:44-47; Ephesians 2:19-22

### Study:

The birth of the Church dramatically changed the system of belonging and patronage, which was once rooted in the primary identity of the household unit. Personal identity was being completely transformed through faith in Christ. When a person came to believe in Jesus, the primary loyalty shifted from their earthly ruler to King Jesus. Belonging to the Kingdom of God was not restricted by culture, by custom or by creed, nor was it bounded by geography. Anyone, anywhere, from any social status could belong to the Kingdom of God.

This dramatic change in how people belonged to systems of power was seen as incredibly threatening by Rome’s imperial powers and the Temple’s religious authority.

Perhaps even more radical was the transformation of a person’s identity in their family unit. The Church was a new family, a new household, shaped not by bonds of blood but through a shared faith in Jesus. Acts 2:44-47 (*NRSV*) says:

*‘All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.’*

Union in the Holy Spirit and shared faith in Jesus became the marker of belonging to the new household of God which is the Church. Anyone could belong to the Church, regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, gender, or whether they were slave or free. This was truly radical. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:19-22 (*NRSV*) says:

*‘So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.’*

We together form a dwelling-place for God. We belong to the Kingdom of God, and to God’s Church. Not only do we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, but we are also part of the household that other people will join. People far into the future will inherit the legacy we leave behind. How we live our lives and how we witness to our faith reverberates not only in our lives but for so many other people.

We are building the household of God. This project will remain unfinished until the coming of Christ, but we must continue working on it throughout our lives. We build the household of God when we act with love to each other, when we provide a welcome for people who are different from us, when we eat together and share together and encourage each other.

As we learn from the success of the early Church, may we look for the things we have in common rather than our differences, and work to build the Kingdom of God together as his Church, his dwelling-place.

### Questions for discussion:

Consider the questions and spent some time in prayer to seek God’s guidance for your role in your community and place of dwelling.

* What does it mean for a congregation that the main thing that unites them together is faith in Jesus? Do you think that this is always the case, or do you think sometimes a congregation is united by something else?
* How can you personally work towards building a united community around you?
* What is one thing you can do to help build the household of God?

### Prayer:

Lord,

As we continue to build and be your Church, help us to reflect your promise that everyone can belong.

Teach us to love as you love and show us how we can reach the unreached.

Help us to dwell unified in your house as your children and work together to further your Kingdom and help us to be a pleasing dwelling-place for you.

Amen.

## Session 3: Dwelling in God

### Scripture Focus: Colossians 2:7; Psalm 91:1

### Study:

To be a Christian means to dwell in God. Not only is the Church our household, a new family to which we belong, constituted by faith, not by blood, but our sense of who we are and where we belong is also transformed away from our own individualism and into the person of Christ.

Many people feel a sense of dislocation in the world. Others spend their lives constantly trying to work out who they are, to find some sense of ‘authentic self’. Sometimes we might start to let our ideas of self, the things that we have accomplished or the failures in our lives, come to define who we are. But the Bible reminds us otherwise. Our first identity is to be ‘in Christ’. Jesus tells us that we are loved, redeemed, restored, forgiven and transformed. We are a sign of God’s good creation, the masterpiece of God’s work.

Coming to know ourselves through knowing Christ means coming to dwell in who Christ is. Colossians 2:7 says: ‘*Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him*’ (*NLT*). We put down our roots in the being of Christ which remains constant in the shifting sands of an uncertain world.

Once we know that who we are is one who dwells, who rests, in Christ, then we can feel safe and secure in the world. Just as the Israelites were told to feel safe and secure in Canaan, so we can feel safe and secure in the world because we belong to the new household of God (the Church) and in our identity in Christ.

Psalm 91:1 says: ‘*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty*’ (*ESV*). To dwell in God infers regular connection with him, through prayer, reading his word and worship. Then we may have confidence in the promise that in all that we do we may abide, rest in his shadow of protection, enjoying a closeness of relationship with him. This closeness of relationship with God and reliance on his strength and guidance will pour out in everything we are and do, allowing for a more successful mission field.

Just as the Church transformed the ancient world, and hopefully still provides a radical space where everyone can be welcome, so too does our faith fundamentally alter our sense of identity and purpose in this world. Our dwelling place is rooted in God, and from this place all else pours.

### Questions for discussion:

Consider the questions and spent some time in prayer to seek God’s guidance for your role in your community and place of dwelling.

* What does it mean for you to belong to Jesus?
* How can you put your roots of identity further into Christ?
* What could you do to dwell in God more consistently?

### Prayer:

Lord,

Teach us to dwell in you.

May you reveal to us other places where we may have found a sense of identity, and help us to place our sense of identity, belonging and worth in you alone.

Reveal to us what it looks like to have firm roots in Christ and give us the wisdom and strength to put your revelations into action in our lives.

Amen.

## Session 4: Abiding

### Scripture Focus: John 15:4-5

### Study:

We often become fixated on the need to do things, to accomplish more and more, to prove ourselves. But the reality is that everything comes down to faith and dependence upon Christ. The household of God is formed through the Holy Spirit, not our own effort. The transformation taking place in our life is because of the work of the Holy Spirit and our faithful response to grace, not because of the goodness of our works.

We need to learn to ‘abide’: to slow down, to rest, to take time and give space for the work of the Holy Spirit. It is when we give over control to Christ, when we let go of the illusion that we can make ourselves good, then we learn to abide in God’s presence. John 15:4-5 (*NKJV*) says:

*‘Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.’*

The fruits of our character and life can be a helpful indicator of our proximity to God. The more time we spend in God’s presence, in his word, the more likely we are to become like him and display his qualities. As we abide in God, we become *less* so that he can become *more*. What does your language reveal about your proximity to God? How do you treat a stranger, or those in your home? What about your thought life?

As you examine your heart and life, the Holy Spirit will lovingly nudge you of the things that do not reflect God’s glory, so that you may abide in him again and bear his good fruit. As we reach our communities, we are often their first encounter with God; with the help of the Holy Spirit, let your life and character be a good witness of God to those around you.

We belong to Jesus. We belong in the household of God. This is where we find peace and transformation, safety and security, rest and regeneration. When we dwell in the house of God for all of our days, we will abide in Christ, and he will abide in us.

### Questions for discussion:

Consider the questions and spent some time in prayer to seek God’s guidance for your role in your community and place of dwelling.

* What can you cut out of your life to help you slow down and give more space for building intimacy with God?
* What fruits of the Holy Spirit could you focus on developing with God?
* How are you going to intentionally abide, in this next season?

### Prayer:

Lord,

Thank you that we do not have to strive based on our own efforts, but you give us all that we need for each day. Help us to remember this and slow down, to abide in you and relinquish control.

Remind us of the safety, love and rest that you have to offer us in moments of stress and business.

Thank you that you are a relational, active God, for when we abide in you, you abide in us too.

Show us the areas of our heart and life that do not bear good fruit and fill us with the power of your Holy Spirit so that we may become more like you.

Amen.

### Conclusions and Next Steps:

* Recap the key lessons from each session.
* Encourage participants to reflect on their personal growth over the course of the study.
* Suggest ways to continue developing through ongoing spiritual disciplines, service and community involvement.
* Close in prayer, asking for God’s presence to draw near, and practise dwelling together.
* You may wish to continue this theme of dwelling, through small groups or corporate worship.