# *Oikos* Sermon Outline Week 3

## Title: Household Conversion

### Bible Verses: Acts 16:25-34

### Key Take-Away: There is a link between personal and social salvation.

### 30-Second Summary: Our salvation and the salvation of our household are joined together. We can see times in the Bible where the conversion of one person leads to a chain of conversions; so what if we were more intentional with the salvation of those around us? Through intercessory prayer and thinking beyond our own salvation, we may just make a difference to those around us.

### Introduction:

When we think about salvation, we tend to think about our *own* salvation. We have inherited a focus on personal salvation from our 18th and 19th-century evangelical ancestors.

In the Bible passage from Acts we see Paul tell the jailer that to be saved he needed to believe in the Lord Jesus, and then ‘you will be saved – you *and your household*’ (v31).

The first part of that we often take for granted. ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved’ – that’s pretty much the foundation of our evangelical faith. But then there is that second part – ‘you and your household’. What does the Bible mean by this?

### Context:

* In the ancient world the head of the extended household was either the eldest male, normally the father or eldest son; or sometimes, if there were no children, then the woman, often a widow, would be the head of the household. Their decisions affected everyone in that household and every member was expected to yield to the decisions made by the head of that household.
* In a pagan household, the ancestors of the head of the household would be the household gods for that household. If the head of the household converted to Christianity, then the whole household would change their allegiance with their master and get baptised.
* An extreme example of the faith of the head of a household affecting the whole household is with the Emperor Constantine, who may well have been influenced by his Christian mother Helena and then was supported in his conversion by his Christian slave. This is not an unusual occurrence as many of the first Christians were slaves. However, when the emperor became a Christian, then pretty soon afterwards the entire Roman Empire became officially Christian. There are other examples like this in history: Pepin ‘the Short’, King of the Franks and father of Charlesmagne, became a Christian and so his household and retainers were all baptised as well, and Christianity became the official religion of the Frankish kingdom. The Danish Viking King Harald ‘Bluetooth’ became a Christian and so all his household were baptised, and his kingdom officially became Christian.
* From our perspective today, with our emphasis on personal conversion, we may not think much of this. But at the time there was less of an emphasis on personal or individual conversion experiences. Which God you gave allegiance to was frequently less about personal faith and more about which kingdom you were part of and what household you belonged to.

### Main Thought:

* The Bible verses suggest that the faith of the jailor can lead to the salvation of his household. This can be understood to mean that the jailor would then go back and work on converting his household to belief in Jesus. Or perhaps something else is going on. Just as with Lydia, or with Cornelius in Acts 15, perhaps the salvation of the jailor is understood to be conveyed in some sense to the people inside his household as well.
* The theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that we have a responsibility for our neighbours. This is not unusual. However, he also believed that part of that responsibility meant interceding for our neighbours, for those around us.
* Intercession is a common practice. But for Bonhoeffer this did not just mean praying for our neighbours; it meant asking forgiveness on their behalf. He believed that because we live in an interconnected community, where my sins affect my neighbours just as their sins affect me, and we all share in a common humanity, we have a responsibility for the sins of other people.
* For those of us who are ‘in Christ’, part of our discipleship is to take up what it means to be part of the priesthood of all believers and stand between God and our neighbour to intercede on their behalf and ask for forgiveness for their sins.
* What if part of our role as Christians was to intercede for our households – for those people in our families and friendship groups and workplaces who don’t know God yet?
* What if, just as God looks at Christ instead of our sins to declare us righteous, God will look at us instead of our neighbours and listen to our intercession? What if our prayers on behalf of others will preserve them until they come to a place where they can know Christ for themselves?
* At the very least, it is a good thing to pray for our neighbours, to pray for their forgiveness and conversion, that they should come to know Christ and that they will be set free from their sin. We don’t know what will happen, but maybe we can dare to hope that, as with the jailor, God will see our faith and so save the household.

### Challenge:

* How often do you pray for the people in your household, for your friends and family and colleagues?   
  How often do you pray for your neighbours, for your community, for our country and for the world?   
  What if their eternal salvation was something we were more active in?
* Even if it’s something we are not convinced by, even if it’s something we are not sure about, we still need to commit to praying for the salvation of our neighbours, asking for forgiveness on their behalf and interceding for them with Christ. Then we might well see the transformation of our household, and of our community, come about in a way that we never expected.