

Putting it All Together

Finding the main theme of a book

Ephesians Workshop, Week 5, 3/8/2020

INTERPRETATION - Summary Skill – finding the main theme of a book of the Bible

What is the main theme and why does it help us study the Bible?

Looking for the main theme of the book you are studying helps you summarize and make important connections. Each author had a point to writing. The author uses each passage to develop the main theme across the book.

Taking time to find the main theme,

- Helps you summarize what the author is saying in the book.
- Helps you see how the passage you are studying relates to the point of the book.
- Helps you make applications that are consistent with the context of the book.
- Helps you connect the themes to the whole Bible.
- Helps you keep the main thing, the main thing, keeps you focused and biblically proportionate.
- Helps you form the habit of keeping Scripture in context.

The melodic line of a book,

“A melodic line is a short sequence of notes that form a distinctive portion of a song... Books of the Bible work the same way. Each book [of the Bible] has *a melodic line, an essence that informs what the book is about*. And each passage in the book, then, will serve that melodic line in some way.”¹

How do we find the main theme of a book?²

Two overarching questions,

We keep these questions in mind as we do the following study tasks to help us find the main theme. You can also write out an initial answer to question 1 and then revise it as you go.

1. What is the “essence” of my book (melodic line/main theme)?
2. How does my passage relate to it?

¹ David Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 47.

² This section is an adapted process built from Helm (47-57) and from our preaching cohort handout from Josh.

Study tasks: to uncover the main theme of a book

1. Read Cover to Cover

- Possibly do this multiple times in different translations.
- What is the general tone of the entire book?
- After reading through, what ideas or verses strike you as important?

2. Read the Beginning and End

- What words, phrases, or themes appear in both the first and last section of the book?

3. Identify Repeated Words, Concepts, and Phrases of the Entire Book

- What words are repeated throughout the book?
- What phrases are repeated throughout the book?
- What main concepts/themes are repeated throughout the book?
- What are the most important verses of the book?
- How do they strengthen, alter, or correct your initial melodic line?

4. Identify the Purpose Statement (reason for writing the book)

- If stated, what is the purpose statement of this book?
- If not clear, what might the purpose statement of this book be?

5. See the Structure and Emphasis

- What are the dynamics of the entire book? Find the structure. What are its main sections and a summary of each?
- What does the organization reveal about the author's intended emphasis?

6. Know what Type of Literature You Are Studying

- What kind of literature is this? (OT Narrative, Prophetic, Apocalyptic, Wisdom and Poetry, Epistle, Gospel, Acts)
- How does the type of literature express the message of the book?

Then see if you can answer the overarching questions

1. What is the "essence" of my book (melodic line/main theme)?
2. As you study individual texts, ask, how does my passage relate to it?
 - Does it directly form or reinforce the main theme?
 - How does the main theme help me make sense of what my passage says?

Resources

- A good Study Bible... such as the *ESV Study Bible* book Introductions, *Life Application Study Bible* “megathemes” section.
- *The Bible Project* book of the Bible videos: bibleproject.com
- *Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*
- Word studies – blueletterbible.org, Strongs, biblestudytools.com

Let’s Try it!

Ephesians

- Thankfulness
- Equipping in him
- Victory in Christ
- Life in him, Christian living
- Depending on Christ, putting on his armor
- Blessings in Christ, Armor of God
- Walking, unity, conduct, standing firm
- Authority of Christ
- 1-3; 4-6 natural structure break

Possible melodic line statements (from preaching cohort)

- Since you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3) then walk in a manner worthy of your calling (4:1).
- Because we are partakers of grace, how then shall we live?
- God’s plan is to unite all things in Christ – all of Christ for all of life
- Because your identity is strong, walk in love and avoid what is wrong (rhyme, lol)