

TheWordWorks

General Bible Handling Training

Module 1

The big idea of a bible book and why it matters

Aim of this module:

To understand what the big idea of a bible book is and to be convinced that knowing it helps us understand and apply individual passages within the book better

What is the big idea of a bible book?

The big idea of the bible book consists of the same three things as the big idea of a passage:

1. The **main point** of the book: The main truth of the entire book captured in one summary sentence
2. The **purpose** of the book: The effect the biblical author wants the main point to have on the original hearers
3. The **situation** of the original hearers: The situation is the particular circumstance of the original hearers which the biblical author is writing to address

Why does knowing the big idea of the book matter?

1. **It helps us to avoid mis-applying individual passages by understanding the biblical author's overall purpose for the book**

Not understanding the overall purpose can lead us to *emphasise the wrong details* in a passage and therefore apply what might be a secondary point.

Example 1: Colossians

a) Teaching Colossians 1:1-14 and 1:24-2:7 without knowing the book's big idea

Passage	(Mis) Application
1:1-14 = Paul thanks God for gospel growth + Paul prays for continued gospel growth	Thank God for his work in your life + Pray that God will continue to grow you
1:24-2:7 = Paul suffers as he proclaims the gospel: a making-Christians-mature ministry committed to him by God	Be willing to suffer in gospel ministry as you urge others to walk in Jesus

b) Teaching Colossians 1:1-14 and 1:24-2:7 with the book's big idea in mind

Big Idea of the Book¹

Main point: The gospel is all-sufficient for spiritual maturity despite rival claims

Purpose: Stick to the gospel for spiritual maturity resisting rival claims

Situation: Colossians Christians were tempted to non-gospel means for spiritual growth

Passage	Application with the overall book purpose in mind
1:1-14 = Paul thanks God for gospel growth + Paul prays for continued gospel growth	Know that gospel you've received is sufficient for continued growth
1:24-2:7 = Paul suffers as he proclaims the gospel: a making-Christians-mature ministry committed to him by God	Stick to the gospel Paul suffers to proclaims if you want to grow in maturity

Example 2: Ruth

a) Teaching Ruth 1 & 2 without knowing the book's big idea

Passage	(Mis) Application
Ruth 1 = In the midst of tragedy, Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth following her	Stick together as family!
Ruth 2 = Boaz is kind to Ruth in the fields	Trust God to send someone to take care of your needs

b) Teaching Ruth with the book's big idea in mind

Big Idea of the Book

Main point: God, in his kindness, works out his purposes in one family and through them, works out his saving purposes for his people by raising up a Messiah

Purpose: Trust God to work out his big saving purposes

Situation of original hearers: Cannot be determined accurately. The in-book situation is of God's people in a period of sin/rebellion/judgment (1:1 – *in the days when the judges ruled*) but before the emergence of a Messiah-Saviour (4:22 – *Jesse fathered David*)

¹ It doesn't matter if you have a different big idea from us. The point we want to make is that knowing the book's big idea affects the way you apply individual passages within the book

Passage	Application with the overall book purpose in mind
Ruth 1 = In the midst of tragedy, Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth following	Trust God's good purposes in salvation (Vs 6 – he provides food, Vs 8 – he provides security...even to the outsider)
Ruth 2 = Boaz is kind to Ruth in the fields	Take refuge in the kind God who is working out his good purposes for his people (Vs 12, 20)

2. In a sermon series, having the big idea repeated at certain points in the series helps give coherence to the series. It helps our hearers understand how the different passages are connected to each other

Example 1: 1 Timothy

a) Teaching 1 Timothy without a book big idea leads to **unconnected passages** that seem **stand-alone**

Passage	Unconnected teaching on....
1:1-11	Not letting false teaching spread in church
1:12-17	Paul's testimony and God's grace
1:18-20	Timothy's charge
2:1-15	How God wants Sunday corporate worship done
3:1-13	How to choose church leaders
3:14-4:5	The mystery of godliness and the spirit of ungodliness
4:6-16	A young church leaders' priorities
5:1-6:2	How to treat different people in church
6:3-10	Greedy ungodliness VS Contented godliness
6:11-21	Paul's final charge to Timothy

a) Teaching 1 Tim with a big idea showing the interconnectedness of the passages

Big Idea of the Book

Main point (s): The church holds up and holds out the truth of the gospel by godly living and gospel proclamation (3:15). Churches like this have leaders who teach the gospel (which promotes godliness) and model godly living.

Purpose (for Timothy the church leader): Teach and Model for Christians how to hold up and hold out the gospel aka Guard the gospel entrusted to you (6:20)

Purpose (for Ephesian Christians): Hold up (i.e. Be godly) and Hold out (i.e. proclaim the gospel) the gospel

Situation: There were false teachers in the church teaching speculative, ascetic-legalistic stuff (1:3-4, 4:1-3, 6:20-21) that led people to deviate from the faith into ungodliness (6:4-5, 21)

Passage	Interconnected teaching
1:1-11	Stop false teaching promotes empty speculation! Gospel teaching promotes godliness.
1:12-17	This gracious gospel saves and produces godliness : Paul as a case study
1:18-20	Timothy's charge to engage in gospel battle by...
	a. 2:1-8a - Having the church pray that everyone comes to a saving knowledge of gospel truth
	b. 2:8b-15 - Ensuring godly behaviour in dressing, good works and learning/teaching
	c. 3:1-13 - Making sure church leaders are godly people who can teach the gospel
3:14-4:5	The heart of Timothy's charge: Make sure the church <i>holds up</i> and <i>holds out</i> the truth of the gospel by <i>living godly lives</i> and <i>proclaiming the gospel</i>
4:6-5:2	How Timothy achieves his charge: Teaching the gospel & Modelling godly living
5:3-6:2	Timothy's charge to ensure a godly church that holds up the gospel by...
	a. 5:3-16 - Supporting widows
	b. 5:17-25 - Honouring elders
	c. 6:1-2 - Having respectful slaves
6:3-10	Gospel teaching promotes contented godliness. False teaching promotes greedy ungodliness
6:11-21	Timothy's charge to guard the gospel

Example 2: Hebrews 7-10²

Big Idea of Hebrews 7-10

Main point: Jesus is better than Old Testament religion

Purpose: Draw near, Hold fast, Stir up one another to love and good works

Situation: Hebrew Christians were tempted to return to Old Testament religion for spiritual security

Knowing the big idea of Hebrews 7-10 allows the teacher/preacher to teach/preach 4 consecutive passages which are coherently held together by the logic of the big idea above. So in this series for example, the applications of the 1st three sermons are always the same but the applications have a different motivational force each week corresponding to the sub main points of Sermon 1, 2 and 3.

Main point of Hebrews 7-10	Purpose of Hebrews 7-10
Jesus is better than OT religion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sermon 1 - Better priest (Heb 7)• Sermon 2 - Better ministry (Heb 8)• Sermon 3 - Better blood (Heb 9:1-10:18)	Therefore brothers...let us (Heb 10:19-39) Sermon 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draw near• Hold fast• Stir up one another to love & good works

How to work out the big idea of a bible book

1. The process for working out the big idea of a book is the same process you go through when working out the big idea of any passage:
 - a. Work out the structure of the book and divide the book into sections
 - b. For each section, work out the Main point and Purpose
 - c. Work out the situation of the original hearers from the text as far as is possible
 - d. Integrate the various big ideas of the sections into the big idea of the whole book (see the table in the Sermon Overview Documents in the “Expository Preaching” resource section for worked out examples for Colossians, Ecclesiastes, Amos)
2. Here are some useful tips for getting the big idea of a book more quickly:
 - a. Observe if there are repeated themes throughout the book e.g. in 1 Tim, the gospel and its relationship to godliness is a repeated theme, in Philippians, the theme of partnership and working together for the gospel is a repeated theme
 - b. Look out for explicit statements from the biblical author about the overall main point and/or purpose of the whole book e.g. 1 Tim 3:15, 1 John 5:13, Jude 3, Colossians 2:6-7, Mark 1:14-15, Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 and 12:13

² Not a whole bible book I know but it shows how the big idea of the wider section shapes the way you preach individual passages

Exercise

Have a go working out the Big idea of Titus and compare it with TheWordWorks answer on the next page:

	Titus
Main Point	
Purpose	
Situation	

TheWordWorks answer (by no means the final word!)

	Titus
Main Point	God has saved us, purifying us for good works to the hope of eternal life (this is sound doctrine). 2:11-14/3:4-7
Purpose	(for Titus): Insist on sound doctrine (i.e. teach it, refute error, appoint godly men who can teach sound doctrine) (for the Cretan Christians): Listen to godly men insisting on sound doctrine and consequently, be devoted to good works
Situation	Cretan Christians were living under the twin threats of an immoral culture (1:12) and the false teaching of growing in godliness through legalism (1:10-14; 3:9-11)

Now, think through how this Big Idea will shape the way you teach/preach the individual passages within Titus.