Bible Study Training

Part 1 – Getting the central idea
Agenda

♦ Studying the bible as the Word of God
♦ What is an idea?
♦ Getting the idea out of:
  – Narrative
    • History
    • Parables
  – Discourse
  – Poetry
♦ Exercise
Studying the Bible

- Biblical Principles
- Biblical Ideas
- Our Message
- Our World

9/18/2004 MIT HKSBS
Studying the Bible - pitfalls

- Literalism
- Being too personal
- Being irrelevant
- Getting side-tracked
What is an idea?

Idea = subject + complement
What is an idea?

- The Subject is always a question.
- The complement is the answer to the question.
Getting the idea - exercise

♦ Macy is having a one-day sale this Saturday.
  – Subject=__________________________
  – Complement=____________________
  – Idea=____________________________
    ________________________________
Getting the idea-other media

♦ Things that help identify the subject:
  – Genre
    • Forms
  – Symbols
  – “Surprises”
  – Context

♦ Exercise
More Exercises

♦ Rom 1: 16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.
More Exercise

♦ John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
BREAK

♦ Any Questions?
♦ Practice, practice, practice
Getting the idea out of a passage

♦ One of the most important determinant of the idea is the GENRE of the passage.

♦ In the Bible, there are primarily 3 genres
  – Narratives (include history, parables)
  – Discourse
  – Poetry

♦ Other minor genres (forms)
  – Laws, Covenants…
Narratives

♦ Basic form of a narrative

Setup → Climax → Resolution
Basic formula of an epic

The setup

♦ There was a former equilibrium that was disturbed by a crisis.
♦ There is a central character.
♦ There is a goal that our hero desires.
♦ There is a quest.
♦ There are obstacles that prevent our hero from achieving his goal.
♦ There are other characters who helps or hinder our hero’s quest.
Basic formula of an epic (cont.)

The climax

♦ The climax is:
  – The point at which the success or failure of our hero is decided.
  – The point at which our hero faces the biggest obstacle.
  – The point at which the most essential character of our hero is revealed.

♦ Look for the central idea at the climax.
Basic formula of an epic (cont.)

The resolution

♦ The resolution is a new equilibrium.

♦ The qualities of the characters in the epics are reflected by the differences between the resolution and the setup.
Exercise

♦ Analyze the entire Bible, i.e. the ‘Christian Story’ according to the formula.
Complex narratives

♦ Most stories have a more complicated story line.
♦ Nevertheless narratives are by nature linear.
♦ Therefore a piece of complex narrative can be studied as a sequence of mini-stories making up a big-story.
♦ The resolution of one mini-story become the setup of the next mini-story.
♦ Each mini-story has a mini-climax which reveals a little more about the characters in the story.
Key questions to ask when studying a narrative

♦ Divide up the story into its units.
♦ For each unit, ask:
  – Who is the main character?
    • Who are his/her friends?
    • Who are his/her enemies?
  – What is the goal (quest)?
  – What are the obstacles?
  – Where is the climax?
  – What is the status of each character before the story and after the story?
  – What can we learn about the (moral) quality of each of the character?
Key questions to ask when studying a narrative (cont.)

♦ After you have studied the units, ask the following question:
  – How do these units relate to each other?
  – How do these units contribute to the big overall story?
Exercise

♦ “The Lord of the Rings”
Some notes on studying parables

- Parables are narratives that often function as a discourse.
- It is often necessary to map the characters/symbols in the parable to real life people.
- All the formulae applicable to studying a narrative is applicable to studying a parable.
- The teaching of a parable comes from the central idea of the narrative.
- Do NOT over-interpret a parable.
Discourse

- The purpose of a discourse is to:
  - Explain
  - Argue
  - Prove

- Discourse = Communication
Discourse = communication

♦ Who is talking?
♦ Who is listening?
  – What are the relationship between the speaker and the audience?
♦ What is being said?
What is being said?

♦ Discourse analysis.
  – Delimit the passage.
  – Divide the passage into communication units.
    (sentences/phrases)
  – Ask: “How does one communication unit
    relates to the others?” (see handout)
  – Draw a chart.
  – The root of the chart is the central idea of the
discourse.
Exercise

 Romans 1:16-17
Poetry

♦ Disclaimer:
  – Many features of poetry are “lost in translation”.
  – Poetry features linguistics beauty

♦ Features of Poetry
  – Meter (mostly lost in translation)
  – Balance
  – Parallelism/Chiasm
Studying Poetry

♦ The purpose of poetry is to affect the emotion of the reader.

♦ Note the use of:
  – Symbols
  – Metaphors
  – Parallelism
  – Chiasm

♦ The central idea of a poem is found at its linguistic (aesthetic) climax.
Studying poetry

♦ Some poetry (especially Psalms) have “forms” and function. E.g. lament, praise, psalms of ascend, royal psalms, messianic psalms etc.

♦ Some poetry are historical.

♦ Know the difference!
  – Do not over historicize a psalm.
Summary

♦ The central idea of a narrative is found at its climax.
♦ The central idea of a discourse is found at its head communication units.
♦ The central idea of a piece of poetry is found at its linguistic climax.
Conclusion

♦ Once you get the central idea, the structure and flow of the ideas in the passage will become clear.

♦ The central idea is so important that you have make it a discipline to write it down clearly and refer to it often.

♦ IDEA = SUBJECT + COMPLEMENT

♦ Derive you *life application* of the passage on the central idea.
A passage that exercise everything you’ve learned today

♦ Acts 2

– You delimit the passage.
– Notice that all three genres (narrative, discourse, poetry) are present.
– Remember to write the the central idea of the passage.
– It might help to divide the passage up and write down the central ideas of the divisions first.