



How to Weave Christian Themes into your Story

You want to write great fiction that impacts the world for Christ, but you don't know how to do so without being preachy or cliched.

Sound familiar?

We know what it's like to struggle to weave Christian themes effectively into a story.

That's why we want to help.

Theme vs. Message

The first thing you want to do is to distinguish between your novel's theme and your novel's message.

Your novel's theme is a broad moral topic or idea that your story addresses.

It's a broad concept like "love," "suffering," or "the struggles of adolescence." The most important thing to remember is that it's a topic. It's not trying to make a moral point. That comes later in the message.

Another way to put it is that a proper theme can never be controversial; if someone could disagree with your theme, then your theme isn't a theme--it's a message. A theme is simply a topic.

Your novel's message then is the expression of the author's worldview with regards to the thematic matter.



To put it another way: **it's the moral point of your story**. If a novel's theme is like the topic of a research paper, your message is its thesis. It's the lesson you want your reader to learn from your story.

Distinguishing between your novel's theme and message is the first step you need to take to tell a compelling story.

Connecting your Novel's Theme and Message

The best way to connect your novel's theme to your novel's message is with a focusing question.

A focusing question is an open-ended, applicational question that stems from your novel's theme which your reader likely wrestles with. Your message is then going to answer that focusing question.

For example, in Toy Story, the film's theme is friendship, and the film's focusing question is "How can you be friends with someone who's your rival?" The message is that by humbling yourself and pursuing selflessness, you can transform a rivalry into a meaningful and transformative friendship.

Your focusing question should be open-ended because you should come up with many more possible answers to the question than just your message. While George Bailey ends up accepting the story's message, other characters believe that a fulfilling life stems from wealth, fame, or simply doing your duty.

Exploring these other (wrong) answers to the focusing question helps to keep the story from being simplistic.

The Worksheet

So now it's your turn.



Write down your thoughts to the following prompts to figure out what your novel's theme is going to look like.

The Theme

Begin by choosing the theme of your novel. REMEMBER: The theme is a moral topic. It isn't making a moral point. Come up with some general topic you want to write a story about that's related to the human condition and experience.

The Focusing Question

Now that you've chosen your theme, think up a compelling question that people often ask themselves that's related to your theme. Remember: it should be open-ended (not a yes/no question) and it shouldn't have an easy right answer.

Possible Answers to the Focusing Question

Now that you've figured out your focusing question, before you decide on your story's message, I want you to think of five different ways that real people in real life choose to answer your story's focusing question, whether those answers are right or wrong. The more realistic these answers are, the better. This is what's going to help you give your story's theme breadth.

The Message

Now, finally, think about how you would answer your story's focusing question. Go to Scriptures for help and come up with a biblical response to the story's central question. This is going to become the moral point of your story.

Using the Worksheet

Now you know your story's theme, focusing question, and message. But how are you supposed to use this?

The best way to use them is to assign different answers to your focusing question to different characters in your book.



Have them live out those answers in practice while your protagonist wrestled with whether or not to accept your story's message. Then use those characters to explore the story's theme and the importance of your story's message.