**The CPS or Big Idea (Step 5)**

**I. Introduction**

A. Importance of a “Big Idea”: “A major affirmation of our definition of expository preaching, therefore, maintains that ‘expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept.’ That affirms the obvious. A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture” (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33).

B. Synonyms for “Big Idea”: central proposition of the sermon (CPS), biblical concept, central idea, central thought, dominant idea, homiletical idea, main idea, main thought, proposition, sermon idea, subject/complement statement, synthetic statement, and thesis statement.

C. Forming the “Big Idea”: The big idea is the sum of a subject and a complement (or, in the words of Ramesh Richard, the central proposition of the sermon is the theme plus the thrust).

1. Subject (Theme): an *incomplete,* short statement of at least two words that describes the thrust of a Bible passage but is a sentence fragment without its complement.

a. It answers the question, “What am I talking about?”

b. It can be worded as a question that doesn’t elicit a “yes” or “no” response.

c. It can never be a single word since one word cannot fully answer the above question. I call these single words that describe sermons a “topic” rather than a subject (theme). If it has more than one word but still can’t be reworded as a question, let’s just call it a longer topic.

d. Examples of Subjects (themes):

1) The reason people should praise God…

2) The test of a person’s character…

2. Complement (Thrust): an *incomplete or full* sentence that completes or answers the question posed by the subject.

a. It answers the question, “What exactly am I saying about what I am talking about (i.e., what am I saying about the subject)?”

b. It often is a brief series of two or three points mentioned in the passage that are sub points to the big idea.

c. It should be able to be worded as an answer to the question posed by the subject. However, this answer should be more than a simple “yes” or “no” response.

**II. Examples**

Subject/Theme (“to be” verb) Complement/Thrust

The reason people should praise God is because God is worthy to be praised.

The test of a person’s character is how he acts when he’s alone.

**Subject/Complement Samples**

Study these student attempts at writing main ideas and tick which of the three descriptions actually apply (i.e., was it actually only a topic or subject, or was it a full idea?). Then in the last column explain why the statement was not a main idea or how to improve it.

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|  | Student’s Example | Topic | Subject | MI | Evaluation |
| 1. | God has put us together as a family so that we can help one another. |  |  |  |  |
| 2. | What is a peacemaker?  Who is a peacemaker? |  |  |  |  |
| 3. | No substitute for leadership. |  |  |  |  |
| 4. | What is God’s prescription for anxiety? |  |  |  |  |
| 5. | One of the essential qualities of a servant of God is dependence on God. |  |  |  |  |
| 6. | Consecrated Christians,  courageous commitment, and continuing convictions are the  three foundational pillars of the  missions-minded church. |  |  |  |  |
| 7. | How and why your work matters to God. |  |  |  |  |
| 8. | To be a faithful servant of God till the end is the third quality of a faithful servant of God. |  |  |  |  |
| 9. | As a Christian, we must set our mind on Jesus. |  |  |  |  |
| 10. | Why will many who are first be last and many who are last will be first? |  |  |  |  |