**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, as Ramesh Richard says, 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 can only partially answer the above question. I call these single words a “topic” rather than a subject (theme). Let's call it a longer topic if it has more than one word but still can’t be reworded as a question.

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 apply (i.e., was it only a topic or subject, or was it a complete idea?). Then, in the last column, explain why the statement was not a central 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?  | [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  |  |