

“Single Idea”
Pastor Terry Hlebo

“Biblical Preaching” (The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages) By Haddon W. Robinson

“Power In The Pulpit” (How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons) by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix

Agustin said, “When The Bible Speaks God Speaks”

“In Preaching, One Must Convey The Meaning Of The Text” To fail to convey the meaning of the text results in failure to preach what the Bible says!

The Biblical Model of Presenting God’s Truth is The Expository Sermon:

An expository sermon makes plain what the Bible passage says and gives good application to the lives of the hearers. Expository preaching is not merely preaching about the Bible but preaching what the Bible itself says.”

What's The Big Idea: Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law.

—an outline is the shape of the sermon idea, and the parts must all be related to the whole. (Outline explains the idea of the text) *Three or four ideas not related to a more inclusive idea do not make a message; they make three or four sermonettes all preached at one time.*

Sermons seldom fail because they have too many ideas; more often they fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas.

*(HR) Some expository sermons offer little more than scattered comments based on words and phrases from a passage, making no attempt to show how the various thoughts fit together as a whole. At the outset the preacher may catch the congregation's mind with some observation about life, or worse, jump into the text with no thought at all about the present. As the sermon goes on, the preacher comments on the words and phrases in the passage with sub-themes and major themes and individual words all given equal emphasis. The conclusion, if there is one, usually substitutes a vague exhortation for relevant application, because no single truth has emerged to apply. * When the*

congregation goes back into the world, it has received no message by which to live because it has not occurred to the preacher to preach one.

(Robinson) 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, 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.

The Importance of a Single Idea: Students of public speaking and preaching have argued for centuries that effective communication demands a single theme.

Virtually every textbook devotes some space to a treatment of the principle of a single idea!

Terminology may vary—"Central Idea," "Proposition," "Theme," "Thesis Statement," "Main Thought"—but the concept is the same: an effective speech "Centers on one specific Thing, A Central Idea."

(Robinson) - Donald G. Miller, in a chapter devoted to the heart of biblical preaching, insists: ... any single sermon should have just one major idea. The points or subdivisions should be parts of this one grand thought. Just as bites of any particular food are all parts of the whole, cut into sizes that are both palatable and digestible, so the points of a sermon should be smaller sections of the one theme, broken into tinier fragments so that the mind may grasp them and the life assimilate them....

"Every sermon should have a theme, and that theme should be the theme of the portion of Scripture on which it is based."

Example: Thought of The Passage (Subject), The Complements To The Subject:

Title - "Walking In Wisdom"
Ephesians 5:15-17

Thought Of The Passage: "In Christ The Believer Receives Wisdom To Walk Carefully Utilizing The Time And Understanding God's Will"

1. Verse - 15 Wisdom – Is Walking Carefully:
2. Verse - 16 Wisdom – Is Making Use Of Our Time:

3. Verse - 17 Wisdom – Is Understanding God's Will:

Alan M. Stibbs: "The preacher must develop his expository treatment of the text in relation to a single dominant theme." H. Grady Davis "a well-prepared sermon is the embodiment, the development, the full statement of a significant thought."

J. H. Jowett said "I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching, not ready for writing out, until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study. To compel oneself to fashion that sentence, to dismiss every word that is vague, ragged, ambiguous, to think oneself through to a form of words which defines the theme with scrupulous exactness—this is surely one of the most vital and essential factors in the making of a sermon: and I do not think any sermon ought to be preached or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon."

Warren Wiersbe said, "Teachers of homiletics call this sentence by different terms: the sermon proposition, the theme sentence, the "big idea." This sentence is to the sermon is what the spine is to the skeleton, and the foundation to the house: it holds things together and helps to determine what the final product will become."

Why Preachers/Teachers Don't Have A Central Idea Of The Text?

1. Stating the main subject of a Scripture passage may be the most difficult area of sermon preparation. Broadus said, "To state one's central idea as the heart of the sermon is not always easy, especially in textual and expository preaching."

2. Most pastors are extremely busy. They are preaching several times a week. That demand places severe strain upon the time available for preparation, and most men find it difficult to find time to think through each sermon passage in this manner.

3. Some preachers simply are lazy and refuse to do the hard work of identifying the subject of the text. The absolute necessity of doing this work is related directly to the nature of preaching itself. If the preacher's responsibility is to communicate what God already has said, then the central idea of any given sermon must reflect the central idea intended by the author himself.

(Robinson) In the Old Testament, the sermons of the prophets are called "the burden of the Lord."

Ezekiel 12:10; Zechariah 9:1; Malachi 1:1

The sermons of the apostles were without exception the proclamation of a single idea directed toward a particular audience.

Donald R. Sunukjian concluded that: "Each of Paul's messages is centered around one simple idea or thought. Each address crystallizes into a single sentence which expresses the sum and substance of the whole discourse. Everything in the sermons... leads up to, develops, or follows from a single unifying theme."

The Definition of an Idea: The word **idea** - moved into English from the Greek word means *"to see" and therefore "to know."* An idea sometimes enables us to see what was previously unclear.

In common life when an explanation provides new insight, we exclaim, *"Oh, I see what you mean!"*

Defining The CIT (Central Idea of the Text) (CIT)

(Jerry Vines) This definition contains several words that provide clues for developing a good theme statement. The 15-18-word parameter is intended merely to be a guide for being concise yet thorough. If you find yourself with less than fifteen words, you probably are not saying enough. If you have more than eighteen words, you likely are saying too much and should make an attempt to be more concise. Avoid being legalistic, however. Say what needs to be said.

(Robinson) If we will not—or cannot—think ourselves clear so that we say what we mean, we have no business in the pulpit. We are like a singer who can't sing, an actor who can't act, or an accountant who can't add.

The Formation of an Idea: To define an idea with "scrupulous exactness," we must know how ideas are formed. When reduced to its basic structure, **an idea - consists of only two essential elements: a subject and a complement. Both are necessary.**

When we talk about the subject of an idea, we mean the complete, definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?"

A subject cannot stand alone. By itself it is incomplete, and therefore it needs a complement. The complement "completes" the subject by answering the question, "What am I saying about what I am talking about?" A subject without a complement dangles as an open-ended question. Complements without subjects resemble automobile parts not attached to a car. An idea emerges only when the complement is joined to a definite subject.

Moreover, behind every subject there is a question either stated or implied. If I say that my subject is "the importance of faith," the implied question is, "What is the importance of faith?" "The people that God justifies..." forms a subject because it answers the question, "What am I talking about?" But the unstated question is, "Who are the people God justifies?" If the words subject and complement confuse you, then try thinking of the subject as a question and your complement as the answer to that question. The two together make up the idea.

1 Timothy 6:1-2

"Honor In The Work Place"

Idea - "Spiritual Freedom in Christ does not annul our human responsibilities of honor and dutiful service in the workplace."

Complement - 1. Verse – 1 Serving A Non-Christian Master: (Witness Of God)
 2. Verse – 2 Serving A Christian Master: (Benefits Of Believers)

Finding The Central Idea of the Text:

As Donald G. McDougall rightly said: Our task is NOT to create our own message; It is rather to communicate the author's message.

Our task is NOT to create a central theme; It is rather to find the author's central theme build a message around that theme, and make that theme the central part of all we have to say.

1. Read Purposefully: (Jerry Vines) As you read, remember that you are moving toward a particular purpose—that of finding out what the passage means and how it applies to you and your people. Many times a clear design begins to emerge after a few readings.

2. Read Obediently: (Jerry Vines) Once you begin to get a preliminary idea about the gist of the passage, one final approach should be employed in your general reading. Read the text obediently. As you read the Scripture, your own heart will be confronted with many truths. The preacher must never confront his people with Bible truths that he himself has refused to face in his own life.

(Robinson) Finding the subject and complement does not start when we begin construction of our sermons. We pursue the subject and complement when we study the biblical text. Because each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea, we do not understand a passage until we can state its subject and complement exactly. While other questions emerge in the struggle to understand the meaning of a biblical writer, these two ("What precisely is the

author talking about?" and "What is the author saying about what he is talking about?") are fundamental.

Warren Wiersbe's book "The Elements of Preaching" said, "This proposition should have the following characteristics:

1. It should be biblical, a timeless truth that is worth preaching about.
2. It should be important and relevant to the needs of the congregation.
3. It should be definite and clear, uncluttered by abstract language or literary embellishments.
4. It should be accurate and honest and not promise more than the preacher can produce. You don't lay a foundation for a skyscraper and then build a chicken coop on it.
5. It should be interesting so that the listener is encouraged to want to listen to the development of the theme in the sermon.
6. It should usually be stated in the present tense, what God does for us today and not what He did for Moses centuries ago. "Jesus helped Peter when he was sinking" is a valid statement; but for a sermon thesis, it would better be stated, "In the storms of your life, your Savior is present to help you."

Examples of Forming an Idea: (Robinson) In some biblical passages the subject and complement may be discovered with relative ease, but in others determining the idea stands as a major challenge. **Psalm 117** is an example of an uncomplicated thought. The psalmist urges:

**Psalm 117:1 Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples!
2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!**

We do not understand the psalm until we can state its subject. What is the psalmist talking about? We might be tempted to say that the subject is praise, but praise is broad and imprecise. The psalmist isn't telling us everything about praise. Nor is the subject praise of God, which is still too broad. The subject needs more limits.

Subject: "Why everyone should praise the Lord." What, then, is the psalmist saying about that?

Complements to his subject: "The Lord should be praised, first, because His love is strong and second, because His faithfulness is eternal." In this short psalm the psalmist states his naked idea, stripped of any development, but in its bare bones it has a definite subject and two complements.

It is important to go through the process of stating the subject and complement to get at the ideas. Ideas are slippery creatures that can easily escape your grasp.

Examples:

1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

Title: *“What Should The Focus Of Ministry Be?”*

Idea/subject: *The church’s ministry is to be centered in God’s Word, and practiced through reading, preaching and teaching.*

Complement: (1) give attention to the public reading of Scripture, (2) to exhortation (3) and teaching.

Examples of CIT, Thought of The Passage

“What Makes God Angry?”

Romans 1:18-23

Thought Of Our Passage: “God’s Righteous Anger Is Revealed Against Those Who Suppress The Truth And To Those Who Pervert The Truth”

1. Verses – 18-20 Unbelief - Suppression Of Truth:

2. Verses – 21-23 Unbelief - Perversion Of Truth:

“Faith Illustrated”

Romans 4:1-16

Thought Of Our Passage: “God Has Provided Salvation Through Faith In Jesus Christ, Apart From Works Rituals And Rules”

1. Verses – 1-8 Abraham’s Righteousness Apart From Works:

2. Verses – 9-12 Abraham’s Righteousness Apart From Ritual:

3. Verses – 13-16 Abraham’s Righteousness Apart From Law:

Summary:

Subject/Idea - the complete, definite answer to the question, "What am I talking about?"
The CIT (Central Idea of the Text)

Complement - the answer to the question, "What exactly am I saying about what I'm talking about?"