

## **SECTION 11**

### **The Main Idea of the Text (MIT) and The Main Idea of the Message (MIM)**

**THE MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT (MIT)/THE MAIN IDEA OF THE LESSON (MIM)**

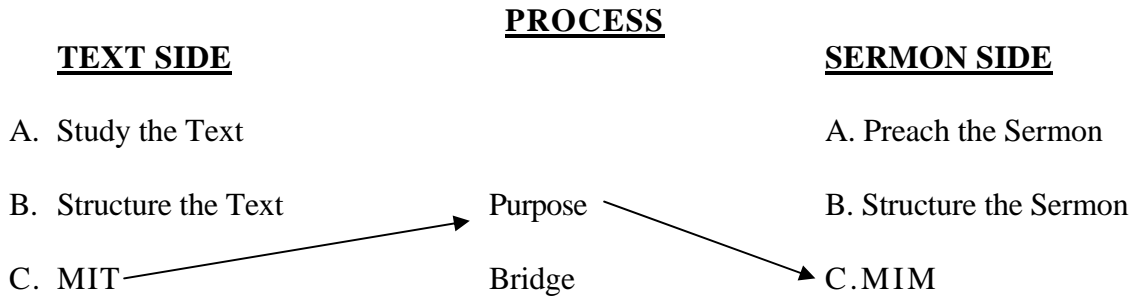
Every Bible teaching should focus on one main idea. If our people leave with one truth they have learned and intend to put into practice, we will have succeeded in our assignment.

Haddon Robinson challenges us to determine the “Big Idea” by asking:

1. What is the author talking about? - and –
2. What is he saying about what he is talking about?

Wayne McDill speaks of “Naming the Textual Idea.”

Ramesh Richard provides a method that balances the “text” and “sermon” aspects of homiletics. Central to his method is the parallel focus on the Central Proposition of the Text (CPT) and the Central Proposition of the Sermon (CPS). One (CPS) grows naturally out of the other (CPT) and insures that our work in the Scriptures and the Sermon will be true to the text. I have adjusted his terminology slightly.



## I. THE MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT (MIT)

### *The “Heart” of the Passage*

At the heart of a paragraph should be one cardinal thought: the “main idea of the text” (MIT). This proposition is made up of two components: the theme and the thrust. The main idea is sometimes called by other names: “textual thrust,” “central idea,” “exclusive emphasis,” or the “big idea.”

### **Components of the Main Idea**

Theme (subject or topic)

Thrust (complement or assertions)

The main idea is the singular theme/thrust around which the details of the text are woven. Since we want to communicate one major point for the people to hear, understand, and obey, we seek to communicate the major idea of each Scripture text in contemporary terms.

Reduce your text to a simple proposition ... illustrating the main idea by the various terms in which it is contained. (Charles Simeon in John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 226)

### ***A. Identifying the Main Idea of the Text (MIT)***

The main idea of the text is the single unit of thought that binds together and gives meaning to all the particulars of a text. [In some manner it should relate to your title]

### ***B. What Does the MIT Look Like?***

It should always be in the form of a full grammatical sentence.

### ***C. What Does the MIT Contain?***

- The *theme* of the text: What is the author talking about in the text?
- The *thrust* of the text: What is the author saying about what he is talking about in the text?

#### ***D. From Where Does One Get the MIT?***

The MIT is derived from your structuring of the text. In order to get the main idea of the text, put the content of the subjects, themes, main points, or summaries together. In arriving at the MIT you are looking for accuracy and adequacy. The MIT must precisely reflect your particular text and must cover the assertions of the text.

##### *1) The Theme*

The theme of a paragraph should be specific. Grammatical or content cues will tell you which is the controlling theme-what the author is talking about.

##### *2) The Thrust*

What is the author saying about the theme?

#### ***E. Organizing Your Textual Work***

- Give a tentative title to the text. This could well be the “theme” of the MIT.
- If possible write a personal translation or paraphrase of the text reflecting the flow or argument of the text.
- Write out the main idea of the text. (Put the theme and thrust in full sentence form. The full statement does not need to be long, but make it adequate. You will refine it and shorten it as you work with it.)
- Write out the outline. (All points and sub-points should be in full sentence form.)

Here you are culminating the study process as far as the text itself is concerned. If you really desire to be an expositor of the Word of God, you will seek to impress on your people what the author stresses-the truth of his text. A good lesson, message or sermon should have a one-sentence statement that summarizes the passage being taught.

The task is not often easy, but if undertaken, pays rich rewards.

- The preacher/teacher avoids the often-heard criticism that expository sermons/teaching lack structure.
- The discipline gives the preacher/teacher a better understanding of the truths he will share with his people.
- It assists those hearing the message to understand the message.

Wayne McDill says a concept needs a name. Define the textual idea precisely in your own mind. Unless it is clearly defined by a careful choice of words, the idea remains vague.

Reflect what the biblical writer is saying. You want to see if what you are calling the subject is actually what the writer is talking about.

Give the textual idea an accurate name so that the same words can be used in the lesson or teaching. Unless we find the right words to identify the textual idea, how will we ever teach that idea?

Carefully identify all the theological themes in the text for insight into its main idea. You can usually recognize the theological themes in the text by looking at the significant words you see there.

Consider the plain and obvious meaning of the text for indications of the textual idea.

Look for a pivotal verse in the text which may contain the main theme. Though every text does not have a pivotal verse, many will. It will be the one verse which seems to summarize the meaning of the entire section.

## **II. The Purpose Bridge**

### ***The “Brain” of the Message***

When you cross this bridge, you will have gone from studying the Scriptures—a hermeneutical exercise—towards teaching the Scriptures—the homiletical exercise.

#### ***A. The Purpose of Purpose***

The purpose controls many aspects of lesson preparation and teaching. A valid and clear purpose of the lesson:

1. focuses the introduction of the lesson on the need that will be raised in the lesson;
2. determines what must be included and/or excluded in the body of the teaching;
3. influences the teaching’s conclusion and any application;
4. helps in choosing the illustrations that will help accomplish the purpose of the lesson;
5. provides a more objective way to measure the proficiency or success of the lesson;
6. but most important, the purpose of the teaching directly contributes to the form of the theme of the main idea of the message (MIM).

#### ***B. Determining the Purpose of the Message***

We find the purpose of the message (construct the purpose bridge) by asking and answering the following question: *On the basis of the main idea of this text, what does God want my people to understand and obey?*

#### ***C. Connecting the Purpose of Your Text and the Purpose of Your Lesson***

Answer two *compatibility questions*.

1. Can I make an exegetical or theological case that my lesson's purpose is compatible with the *purpose* of the text?
2. Can I make a sociological or psychological case that my lesson’s purpose is compatible with the *needs* of my audience? This question is clearly secondary, but it enables one to be relevant to the audience.

***D. The Purpose Bridge***

Number one issue: What are the needs and conditions of my audience?

You are both liberated and limited by the main idea of the text. You must identify the lesson's purpose and fine tune it to the audience to whom you minister.

Two purposes are legitimately drawn from most text. The first is content oriented; the second behavior oriented. Your purpose statement will almost always, in raw form, provide the *theme* of the central proposition of the lesson.

### III. The Main Idea of the Message (MIM) *The “Heart” of the Message*

Here the MIT is channeled through the purpose. It is then contemporized by the main idea of the message. The MIM takes you into the homiletical aspects of the lesson/sermon preparation process.

For the sermon, as a living word from God to his people, should make its impact on them then and there. They will not remember the details. We should not expect them to do so. But they should remember the dominant thought, because all the sermon’s details have been marshaled to help them grasp its message and feel its power.

John R. W. Stott,  
*I Believe in Preaching*, 225

The subject answers the question, What is the sermon about? ... Whether a sermon has two points or ten points, it must have one point, it must be about something.

John A. Broadus,  
*On the Preparation and Delivery of a Sermon*, 38

The first thing in making a sermon, the *sine qua non*, is the idea. There can be no sermon that was not first preceded by an idea or a theme.

John Killinger,  
*Fundamentals of Preaching*, 44

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 crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting, and the most fruitful labour in my study.

J. H. Jowett,  
*The Preacher: His Life and World*, 133



Too many so-called expositors simply make the one central idea the substance of their message. The narrative may be read or retold, but the sermon is essentially their central expository idea-it is explained, illustrated, and applied without further recourse to the text. This approach is not valid exegetical exposition. In exegetical exposition, the substance of the exposition must be clearly derived from the text so that the central idea unfolds in the analysis of the passage and so that all parts of the passage may be interpreted to show their contribution to the theological idea.

Allen P. Ross,  
*Creation and Blessing*, 47

### ***A. Coming Up with the MIM***

The teaching process is thoroughly integrated. Our study (step one) and structure (step two) influence the main idea of the text (step three). The MIT influences the purpose of the lesson (step four). From the purpose of the lesson, we have to articulate the main idea of the message (step five).

Just as the text has a singular theme/thrust, your teaching must have a singular theme/thrust as well. For the MIM, you ask the key questions, of yourself rather than of the biblical author.

### **The Main Idea of the Message**

Theme: What am I talking about?

Thrust: What am I saying about what I am talking about?

Guidelines for the

## **Message Idea**

**(MIM)**

- Develop the MIM with your audience in mind.
- State the MIM in the most memorable sentence possible.
- State it positively, not negatively if possible.
- State it in the active voice, not the passive voice if possible.
- State it in words or phrases which are precise, concrete, and familiar to your listeners.
- State it so that the truth is readily seen as relevant to your audience and their needs.

## **Characteristics of the Main Idea of the Message**

**(MIM)**

- It is derived from the main idea of the text.
- It is what the teacher is saying.
- It is a carefully worded statement.
- It is geared to the audience.
- It has a subject and a complement.
- It is a complete sentence.