

The Book Survey Method

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Week 10

Bible Study Methods

Randy Bowman

Introduction

Martin Luther is known for two major accomplishments in history. First, he is probably most well known for beginning the Reformation by nailing the 95 theses to the doors of Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517. What many people may not know is that at the root of his disagreement with the Catholic Church was Luther's fundamental belief that the Bible, not the Papacy, was the only infallible source of religious authority. He believed that all baptized Christians were a spiritual priesthood and that all people should have access to the scripture. This belief led him to his second great accomplishment, the translation of the Bible into German so that the average Christian could have access to God's Word.

He believed that every Christian should have a thorough understanding of God's Word and he gave some practical suggestions for how to study the Bible. He once said that he studied the Scriptures the way he gathered apples:

"First, I shake the whole apple tree [study the Bible as a whole], that the ripest might fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb [study of a whole book], and then each branch [study of a chapter of a book] and then each twig [study of the paragraphs and sentences], and then I look under each leaf [study of single words]."

When you combine today's study with the next two weeks (as well as some of the others we have studied), you get the most comprehensive approach to studying God's Word.

Survey – get a bird's eye view of the book

Analysis – Study everything in each chapter in detail

Synthesis – put it back together again.

Definition

A book survey involves gaining a sweeping overview of an entire book of the Bible. It is like standing on a bluff and looking over the terrain.

Why this method?

As you know, the Bible is really 66 different books compiled under one cover. Each book is unique and has an important message. This method is a practical way to master the general contents of a single book. Doing a survey as the first part of an analysis and synthesis helps reveal how each part of the book is related to the other

parts. Many verses that may be hard to understand may become clear when seen in the larger context of the book.

Doing a survey also reveals the proper emphasis of each point in the book. It keeps the study of God's word balanced, lessening the possibility of overemphasizing or minimizing any one point.

Tools Needed

May have to borrow these from the public library or church

- Study Bible
- Several contemporary translations
- Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia
- A Bible handbook

The form

Read the Book

1. Read the book through in one sitting.

Except for the Psalms, the longest book of the Bible is Isaiah, and it can be read in three or four hours. Most of the other books, especially those in the NT, can be read in much less time. If you have to break it up, try to finish in no more than two sittings.

2. Read through the book in a recent translation.
3. Read through the book rapidly, ignoring chapter divisions.

Remember these were added later and not part of the original writing. Right now your purpose is to get a sense of the flow and feel of the book. Don't be concerned with the details at this stage.

4. Read through the book repeatedly.

Try to read as many times as you can. You'll notice new things each time.

5. Read through the book without reference material, commentaries, or notes you've written.
6. Read through the book with a pen or pencil in hand. As you begin your second and third readings, you'll want to begin taking notes and making observations.

Make Notes on what you read

As you read through the book, write down your impressions and the important facts you discover. Look for the following nine items:

- a. *Category* – Is the book history? Poetry? Prophecy? Law? A biography? A letter?
- b. *First Impressions* – What is the first impression you get from the book? What do you think is the purpose of the writer? What “feel” do you get from reading it?
- c. *Key Words* – What are some of the significant words the writer uses? What words are repeated the most? What word or words is he emphasizing?
- d. *Key Verse* – What seems to be the key verse (if any)? What ideas or phrases are repeated that may show his main thought? What is the writer’s key statement?
- e. *Literary Style* – Is the book narrative? A drama? A personal letter? A discourse? Poetry? A combination? Does the writer use figurative language? Is he using a logical argument?
- f. *Emotional tone* – Is the writer angry? Sad? Happy? Worried? Excited? Depressed? Calm? How do you think his hearers must have felt? How does it make you feel?
- g. *Main Theme(s)* – What is the main theme? Is there more than one? What is the writer saying? What is his major emphasis?
- h. *Structure of the book* – Are there obvious divisions of thought in the book? How is the book organized? Around people? Events? Places? Ideas? Time spans?
- i. *Major People* – Who are the principal personalities in the book? Which people are mentioned the most? What parts do they play in the book?

Background Study

Try to answer these questions using just the book first. Then go back and use outside reference tools.

- What do I know about the writer(s)?
- When was the book written?
- Where was the book written?
- To whom was it written? Who were they?
- Why was the book written?

Horizontal Chart

This is an analysis method that allows you to diagram the book’s contents on one or two sheets of paper. This allows you to visually see the book’s contents and divisions.

Why?

- Help summarize the main ideas and contents
- See the entire contents of the book at a glance
- Helps discover relationships between chapters and paragraphs
- Raises awareness of ideas that are repeated
- Serves as a memory device to help you recall the chapter’s content quickly
- Enables you to think through a book and remember it

Prep

- Need a Bible with Paragraph divisions.
- A pencil and a ruler
- Multiple copies of page X of the Form (step 4)

How

1. Use your ruler to make as many vertical columns as there are chapters in the book. TRY to stay on one page. For longer books, make the columns narrower and abbreviate what you write.
2. Make sure you save room to lay the major divisions on the top of the chart. Read through the book and find its major divisions. Record these divisions in as few words as possible at the top of your chart.
3. Read through the book and think of a title for each chapter.
 - o Preferably use one word, no more than four
 - o Use “picture” words that help you visualize the contents
 - o Use words from the text if possible
4. Read through the book one more time and give each paragraph a title.
5. As you become proficient, you may add things to your chart that personalize the study.

USE PowerPoint to show this. Spend most class time here.

Make a tentative outline

Using your horizontal chart, you can turn that into a tentative, general outline. We will make a very detailed outline in the Book Synthesis method.

Personal application

Select one thing the Lord spoke to you about from your survey and write out the application.