

NPL Army  
How to do Book Survey<sup>1</sup>  
by Jim McKnight

We create book surveys to see the whole of a book all at once. Metaphorically, we want to overlook the forest, not the individual trees. Book surveys are usually done at two different times. The first time is before studying a book in small portions. The second time is after studying a book in small portions. This guided survey will help you do an initial survey of any book. There are three tiers of how to do the overview: scaled (1-3 hours of study), prescription (RX) (3-5 hours of study), and prescription+(RX+) (5-10 hours of study). Each version uses the Head, Heart, Hands paradigm. All tiers are legitimate. Choose the one that is right for you given your available time and experience in bible study.

**Scaled:**

*Head:*

- Read the book three times. Make sure you are ready to record observations you note on each reading as you read. Be at your keyboard or have your pen or pencil in your hand.
- Write an outline of the book.

*Heart:*

- How do the people who received the book for the first time feel when they read it?
- How do you feel?

*Hands:*

- SOS. What did God (S)ay to you, how will you (O)bey specifically, and what will you (S)hare.

**RX:**

*Head:*

- Read the book as fast as you can, even skimming, in as few sittings as possible.
  - Record your initial impressions.
- Now, read the book a second time, paragraph by paragraph<sup>2</sup>.
  - Record additional impressions as you read.
  - Write a one-word, and one word only, title for each chapter. We will refer to the chapters as segments for bible study. You may modify the segment breaks if you think it's necessary.
  - Group your segments into larger portions of scripture; we'll call them sections.
  - Where appropriate, group your sections into even larger chunks. We'll call those divisions.
  - Finally, add a title to the book. After you do this, write an outline or build a horizontal book chart. Make it short and concise without losing the forest view. An example of an outline and a book chart from Ephesians follows. This survey is what you might expect to get from an initial book survey:

Title:	<b>Ephesians: Christ and His Church</b>											
Division	Being In Christ						Living Like Christ					
Section	Ruled by Christ		Redeemed through Christ		Reveals God from Christ		Regenerates to be like Christ			Receives the Mission of Christ		
Segment	In Christ	Power	Grace	Peace	Revelation	Love	Body	Live	Relations	Armor	Pray	Encourage
Verse	1.1	15	2.1	11	3.1	14	4.1	17	5.21	6.10	18	21 6.24

*Heart:*

- Read the book a third time and answer the following questions:
  - What is the overall atmosphere of the book. Add to your previous impressions.
  - How does the author feel?
  - How do the recipients feel?
  - How does it make you feel?
  - Are there any climactic moments, pivots, or other literary features?
  - Compare the beginning and end of the book, what do you notice?
- Make any final changes to your outline you need to.

*Hands:*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Jensen, Irving L, *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*, Chichago: Moody, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 89.

- Say. Write a short paragraph on God's message to you. Make it in first person from God to you. Resist the temptation to summarize the passage. Write the words the Holy Spirit is communicating to you.
- Obey. Now it's time to get specific. Write a measureable way in which you will respond and obey the Holy Spirit. This is the time when you translate how you are feeling into what you will practically do to serve Jesus Christ, in response to what His Spirit has said. Be a doer of the word, and not a hearer (or studier) only (Jas 1.22).
- Share. Write Head, Heart, and Hands questions as if you were going to teach this passage to a new disciple. The questions should help him see some of the deep truths you found as you were studying the passage. Ask questions that drive him to see and experience what you experienced. Write 1-3 questions for Head; write 1-3 for Heart; and write 1-3 for Hands. This gives you a total of 3-9 questions. If done well, the questions should be simple enough that he can ask someone the same questions and lead them through the passage; however, the questions will also be challenging and insightful causing growth in Christ.

#### **RX+**

- Before you begin, if this is your first bible survey, read chapters 1-3 of *Jensen's Survey of the New Testament*. Chapter 3 is the most important, as it describes how to do bible survey in more detail than above.
- Next, read the chapter in *Jensen's Survey* that corresponds to the book you are studying. Do not look at Jensen's chart until you complete your own. Each of his chapters on NT books are divided into what you should read and exercises you should do before you look at his survey, and after.
- Once your survey is complete as above, then finish Jensen's chapter.