

The Chapter Summary Method. *By Rick Warren*

Read a chapter of a Bible book through at least five times; then write down a summary of the central thoughts you find in it.

The Bible as it was originally written had no chapter or verse divisions. In fact, it wasn't until A.D. 1228 that Bishop Stephen Langton added the chapter divisions. These were added to make the various sections of the Bible more accessible to the readers. Some of these divisions are arbitrary and interrupt the flow of a writer's message. Usually, however, they provide good breaking points that are helpful in Bible study.

According to these divisions, there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. If you studied one chapter each day, you could read through the Scriptures in just over three years. If you summarized two chapters a day, you could finish in about 20 months. This pace is certainly not recommended, because you could quickly get bored with the study method. Instead, select random chapters of Scripture that you want to study and use the summary method on those passages; or use a different method for variety.

Ten Easy Steps for Doing a Chapter Summary

Step One—Caption

Step Two—Contents

Step Three—Chief People

Step Four—Choice Verse

Step Five—Crucial Word(s)

Step Six—Challenges

Step Seven—Cross-References

Step Eight—Christ Seen

Step Nine—Central Lesson(s)

Step Ten—Conclusion

In preparing to fill in the study form for this method of Bible study, read through the chapter at least five times. You will find no better way to get acquainted with a chapter of the Bible than to read it over and over again. The more times you read a passage of Scripture, the more it will come alive to you. Many Christians miss the great insights of Scripture because they fail to read and reread its passages. The great Bible expositor G. Campbell Morgan was famous for his powerful, exciting sermons. When asked for the secret of his ability to communicate God's Word, he replied that he made it a habit to read a chapter or passage 30 or 40 times before he began working on it for a sermon. It is no wonder his sermons were exciting and meaningful.

Here are some tips on how to read a chapter of the Bible:

- Read it in a Bible without notes. If you try using this method by reading a Bible in which you have made notes, you will have the tendency to concentrate on the same ideas. Let God speak to you in a fresh way and give you new insights.
- Read it without stopping. During your first few readings, don't stop in the middle of a chapter, but read it from start to finish. Your goal is to feel the flow of the chapter, so don't be concerned with the details at the outset. Try to capture the central message and the writer's overall theme.
- Read it in several different contemporary translations. This will give you additional insights as you see how each translator rendered the original writing. Make notes on the interesting differences you find.
- Read it aloud quietly to yourself. If you have a problem with concentration, this will help tremendously because you will be hearing yourself read. Many people have found that reading aloud helps them better focus their attention on the text. As you are rereading the chapter, begin looking for the following 10 specific things and write your answers on your Chapter Summary Form or on a blank piece of paper. You may fill in the 10 Cs in any order, saving Step Ten for the last step.

The 10 parts of your study are

Step One Caption

Give the chapter a short, descriptive title. The shorter the title, the more likely you will remember it. In fact, if you use this method on every chapter in a selected book of the Bible, you can remember the contents of the whole book by memorizing your chapter titles. Use one word if possible (1 Corinthians 13 might be titled "Love") and five words at most (Hebrews 11 could be "Heroes of the Faith"). Try to find the key word of the chapter and fit it into your title. If your title is catchy or produces a mental picture, you will remember it longer. One creative person gave "Well-Well" as a title for John 4. The two key events of that chapter are the woman at the well and the nobleman's son whom Jesus made well.

Step Two Contents

Describe, summarize, paraphrase, outline, or make a list of the major points in a chapter. The method you choose will depend on the literary style of the chapter and on your own preference. Some people like to summarize; analytical people enjoy outlining. Choose the method with which you feel most comfortable and is easy for you to do. Don't try to interpret the chapter; just make observations on its contents. Record on your form what you feel the writer said.

Step Three Chief People

List the most important people in the chapter. Ask questions such as, Who are the main people in this chapter? Why are they included? What is significant about them? If the chapter contains pronouns (he, she, they, etc.) you may have to refer to the previous chapter to identify the people. Write down your reasons for choosing certain people as the chief ones of the chapter. When you come to long genealogies (lists of people), don't try to list each one, but summarize the list.

Step Four Choice Verse

Choose a verse that summarizes the whole chapter or one that speaks to you personally. In some chapters you may find a key verse that summarizes the writer's argument; in other chapters there may not be a key verse. On occasion you may want to pick a verse from which you will be writing your application, a verse that you believe God would have you apply to your life.

Step Five Crucial Word(s)

Write down the key word or words of the chapter. Many times the key word will be the one that is used most frequently ("love" in 1 Corinthians 13 and "faith" in Hebrews 11). Sometimes the crucial word may be the most important word but not the most used one. In Romans 6, for example, the word "count" (kjv, "reckon") is the important word even though it is used only once (Rom. 6:11). Also, a chapter may have more than one crucial word.

Step Six Challenges

List any difficulties you may have with the passage. Are there any statements you do not understand? Is there any problem or question you would like to study further? Often while doing a chapter summary you will get ideas for other types of studies you may want to do in the future. For instance, a certain word in the chapter may catch your attention.

Step Seven Cross-References

Using the cross-references in your study Bible, look up other verses that help clarify what the chapter is talking about and list them on your form. Ask the question, What else in the Bible helps me understand this chapter? Cross-references are important because they are helpful tools in interpreting the meaning of a chapter; they enable you to see what the Bible as a whole has to say on any given teaching. You can look for several types of cross-references, and these are described in the section on correlation in the Chapter Analysis Method (see chapter 10) and in chapter 10 of Walter A. Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson's book *Studying, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Zondervan).

Step Eight Christ Seen

The entire Bible is a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus used the Old Testament to teach his disciples about himself. On the day of resurrection on the Emmaus road, Jesus taught two of his disciples: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). As you study each chapter, be alert for statements that tell you something about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or God the Father. Ask yourself, What can I learn about the nature of Jesus from this chapter? What attributes of God in Christ are illustrated here? (Some examples: his love, justice, mercy, holiness, power, and faithfulness.) This step may be the most difficult to complete in some portions of the Bible, particularly in Old Testament narratives and in passages where symbolism is used.

Step Nine Central Lesson(s)

Write down the major principles, insights, and lessons you learn from this chapter. Ask yourself, Why does God want this passage in the Bible? What does he want to teach me from this chapter? What is the central thought the writer is trying to develop? A possible answer might be “We should be loving in all interpersonal relationships” (1 Cor. 13).

Step Ten Conclusion

This is the application portion of your study. As discussed in chapter 1, develop a project to help you implement in your life a lesson you have learned from the chapter or portion. It will benefit you to conclude your chapter summary by asking yourself two questions: (1) How do these truths apply to me personally? and (2) What specifically am I going to do about them?