

Chapter 3

MINISTRIES

Ministering to women in matters of Christian marriage, apologetics, and faith

How to Study the Bible by Topic

Studying the Bible is key to a healthy Christian life. Together with the work of the Holy Spirit, knowing and obeying God's word helps us to live lives that are more pleasing to Him as we submit to His will. His word can also protect us from or free us from false teachings, something that is surely needed today.

Though it is a common choice for studying the Bible, you don't have to only look for or sign up for a Bible Study at church. You can study the Bible on your own. It's possible that you'd even get more out of regular personal study than following a ready-made study with questions and answers or doing a class with a book written by a popular women's author.

To study the Bible on your own, all you need is a little know-how. There are options like studying through a certain book of the Bible, doing word studies, or doing topical studies. This article takes a close look at the latter. A topical Bible study focuses on one thing and traces it throughout the Scriptures. It is a great way to get informed about specific truths and details and to also see the big picture. Following are twelve suggestions for how to do a topical Bible study as well as a link to over four hundred topic suggestions divided into twelve categories. Yup, over four-hundred! May all your studies lead to a deeper love for God and to greater worship, for He is worthy!

1. Keep lists of topics that you would like to study.

A. Keep a list of topics: Compose a list of topics that you have wanted to learn more about. Keep the list handy, so you can add to it as more topics come up.

and/or

B. Keep a list of topics and applicable verses: Have a small notebook or electronic note handy during Bible time. Create headings for topics that come up as you read, adding the verses that apply right away. This will create a nice collection of verses to go back to for reference or further study.

2. Choose a topic to study. Prayerfully pick a topic. What you choose to study could be a result of many things. Perhaps something you heard in church, something you read about online, or something from your personal life could give inspiration. Whatever the case, it is good for us to ever expand our knowledge of God and His word; so dig in often!

3. Prepare to study with care. Set aside a certain chunk of time each week for study. It could be every day or part of the weekend. Pray for understanding and discernment and approach the work with humility and entire submissiveness to God's word. Be aware of any presuppositions and be prepared to

let the Bible inform or even change your beliefs. Think things through logically. Engage your mind as well as your heart. Keep notes to help you organize your findings and remember what you learned. They'll be a great resource down the road.

4. Use a good translation like the NASB, ESV, or KJV. This is an important part of the process. A good translation will help you stay as close as possible to the original meaning of the text. Translations that are incorrect or inconsistent in how they render the Hebrew and Greek words into English or paraphrase them to the point of changing the meaning can make it hard if not impossible to follow a topic throughout the Bible. You could miss verses that should speak to your topic and never even realize it. One version that I do not recommend for this exact reason is The Message. Please see [Analysis of The Message Bible: Justification and Sanctification](#) for details about how this version obscures these all important biblical topics.

5. Gather relevant verses. If applicable, collect the verses that you know relate to the topic and then add others that you find through searches. This will help give you a fuller view. The internet can provide many lists of verses for just about any topic. Just be careful to weed out the ones that really don't apply.

You could also use Bible software or a concordance to search by using words that relate to the topic. For example, let's say you wanted to study the topic of baptism or different facets relating to it. Searching for the word "baptism" will bring up a nice selection of verses to help you begin your study. Try searching for other forms of key words too. In this case, you could search for "baptized" and "baptizing". Be as exhaustive as possible in your searches. It never hurts to see more verses, and seeing them can prevent faulty, hasty conclusions based on too few verses. When you wish to study a topic that does not lend itself to a word search like the Trinity or abortion, you may need to think a bit creatively. You might need to search for similar or related ideas to gather relevant verses. Many Bibles have cross-references that help. Sometimes words mean different things in different contexts. Make sure to only gather the verses that have the meaning that fits your topic.

6. Read the verses in context considering several verses before and after. This is the heart of the study; and I think, the best part. Take your time and enjoy being in God's word praying for discernment and to be instructed. As you read all the verses that relate to a topic, you will learn important details; but oftentimes a bigger picture will emerge. I've often been amazed at the interconnectedness in the Bible. It truly testifies to its inspiration. As your knowledge of the topic grows, you may find it helpful to reread the verses all over again. Going back and forth between relevant verses can often expand your understanding even more. And if you find new verses that relate to the topic, make sure to read them in the light of the ones you have already looked at.

7. When you read passages, make sure to exercise proper [hermeneutics](#). Be careful to practice exegesis (digging out the original meaning of the text) and not eisegesis (reading meaning into it). It is not necessary to apply any unusual approaches when you do this work. Consider normal things like grammar and syntax. Take the simple, straight meaning without twisting or stretching what's there. This work can be done prayerfully and carefully, relying always on God's help. You could also check trusted commentaries to aid you. This can help confirm your interpretation of the verses and notify you if you

have come up with a brand new interpretation. After two millennia of church history in which the meaning of the Scriptures has been well hammered out, a brand new interpretation would be a red flag that something is amiss.

Each commentary will have a bias, so make sure to check out the author(s). Also, you don't have to agree with everything that's in there, even if the author is widely regarded as trustworthy. No one is perfect, so consider them as guides not gospel truth.

Few suggestions:

John Calvin's Commentaries

Commentary on the Whole Bible Matthew Henry

Exposition of the Entire Bible John Gill

A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown

The MacArthur Bible Commentary John MacArthur

If you want to go even further, look up your topic in a systematic theology. You will most likely find a fuller handling of it there than in a commentary. Here are a few suggestions. Read them with the same discernment.

Systematic Theology, 3 Volumes Charles Hodge

Systematic Theology Louis Berkhof

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Wayne Grudem

8. When you read the verses about your topic, ask some questions to help you glean the meaning correctly and to get the most from the passage. Here are a few questions you could ask.

- Who is speaking or writing and to whom?
- What is the cultural setting?
- Consider the book and type of writing. The Bible has a variety of literary forms and that should weigh in your interpretation. For example, does the verse(s) in question appear in a historical narrative? Or is it a piece of poetry, prose, or a song? Does it appear in a letter? Is it prophetic or apocalyptic writing? Is it part of a parable?
- Are the verses in the Old or New Testament? That could affect how they should be interpreted or applied.
- What is the context of the passage and how does it give meaning to the words that relate to your topic?
- Is the passage a primary passage, meaning does it fully speak to your topic or is it more of a secondary passage that only kind of touches on it? Secondary passages are helpful, but should not be used alone to establish doctrine.
- How do the different verses on your list relate to each other? Are there common words or expressions that keep coming up? Making these connections can really help you understand the topic better.
- If the topic is not entirely new to you, how does what you are reading line up with what you already believe or have heard about the topic? Is there any need to change your beliefs to

better line up with the Scriptures? If you cannot reconcile what you believe with the Bible, the Bible wins. It is God's word, and we are not the arbiters of truth.

- Since the greatest point of knowing what is in the Bible is to grow in our knowledge of God, examine the verses for mention of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If they are mentioned, what is said about them? Are they taking a certain role or performing a certain work? Whatever the topic is that you are studying, it is always a blessing to learn more about God.

9. Consider the rest of the Scriptures in your study. It is often said, "Let the Bible interpret the Bible." When you study the list of verses that you collected for your topic, keep in mind what you already know about the rest of the Bible. There may be other relevant verses or concepts beyond what you are looking at that could affect the proper understanding of it. Make sure that your conclusions don't contradict other portions of the Scriptures.

10. Look up the Hebrew or Greek meanings of words when helpful or necessary. You may wish to consult different sources like *Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries*, the *NASB Concordance*, and *Thayer's Greek Definitions*. You cannot properly exegete a verse if you do not have the correct meaning of the words that are in it. Again, sometimes words can have different meanings depending on the context, so only consider the verses that fit your topic.

11. Include topics relating to theology. Do not be afraid to choose topics relating to the doctrines of Christianity. Actually, I recommend that studying them becomes your norm. This will help you grow, increase your joy in the Lord, and help you be better prepared to defend your faith and share it with others. There are some doctrinal and theological topics and terms on the lists of over four hundred topic suggestions in the link below that may not come up every day in your walk. Some of the terms may be foreign, but that can change. And it's not imperative that you know the terms anyway; it's what they mean that really matters. Knowing God and His word better, the real meat of it, will ignite your heart and deepen your peace in Christ. (Small sample: incommunicable and communicable attributes of God, Christology, homoousios, hypostatic union, regeneration, forensic justification, imputed righteousness) Strong, correct theology leads to strong, God honoring walks.

12. Putting it all together A topical Bible study can take time. You might spend days or even weeks learning about one thing, but it will be time well spent. When you are near the end, I recommend doing a recap. Review your verses again and spend some time praying and dwelling on your topic. Let what you have learned sink in. Maybe even memorize the location (or the verses themselves) of some key verses relating to the topic, so you can go back to them again when you want to. Having your lists will also help with this. If possible, share what you have learned with someone. This will help you process things even more and bless them too!

Remember to thank God for His word and His instruction. His word is living, active, and profitable for much ([Hebrews 4:12](#), [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)); so rest assured that if, by the grace of God, you are truly seeking the truth, His word and the power of the Holy Spirit will affect illumination and sanctification. Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you. ([Colossians 3:16](#)) You are now better prepared to live it, share it, and defend it to God's glory.

For some ideas about specific topics to study, please see:
[400+ Topic Suggestions for Topical Bible Study](#)

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