

How To Do a Topic Study

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Towards the end of last year, my family and I experienced a number of painful things which all seemed to point to one thing – intimidation from Satan. As I began to pray into these things, I realised that there was a particular kind of prayer that God was calling me to, and that particular prayer muscle was a bit weak. I felt the need to delve into God’s word and strengthen my faith in the area of prayer. As I did this, I almost immediately felt my faith growing.

5 Steps of a Topic Bible Study

In this article I would like to focus on the particular skill of studying the Word of God to gain understanding on a particular topic. So where do we start?

1. Formulate a Question

Formulating a good question is crucial to learning godly wisdom. You will find that, as your research begins, it can quickly snowball and lose direction. It’s wonderful to learn more than you originally intended, but you want to make sure that you keep your study focused and find answers to your original question.

The question I formulated in my study was, ‘How can I win my battles in prayer?’

2. Find a Passage

To begin your study, think of a passage in Scripture that speaks about your topic. You may remember something you have heard or read and then you can find that passage and begin there. If you are really at a loss, you could maybe ask a friend or a leader for a few references.

For my study, I remembered a few passages about prayer but ended up choosing to start in the book of James (chapter 5).

As you re-read your passage in the light of your question, it can be quite surprising how the Scriptures take on a whole new meaning for your life!

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3. Cross-Reference

Scriptures

The best way to get at the multi-layers of meaning and interpretation of any particular passage is to allow 'Scripture to interpret Scripture'. If we take any passage in isolation on the topic we are studying, we will quickly get an imbalanced understanding of it. It is as we explore the theme throughout Scripture that we develop a healthy, godly understanding.

Study Bible

In order to cross-reference the passage you have chosen, you can refer to your study bible (if you have one). Many study bibles have references to other Scriptures relating to the topic in the verse that you are considering. These references are often listed in the footnotes.

Concordance

If you don't have a study bible, you might try a concordance that lists Scripture passages according to topics.

Online Bible Study Sites

A very cheap and accessible study resource is to use online Bible study sites that have many free study resources. My favourite is Biblehub.com. For my study on prayer, I used the cross-reference study function and found a bunch of Scriptures related to my passage in James.

Google

I confess that I also Googled 'famous Bible verses on prayer' and came across a few pages that had pretty comprehensive lists of Bible verses on my topic. Google can be helpful if we use it in this way. When it becomes unhelpful is when we use it to find authors teaching and expounding on our topic before we've studied what the Bible has to say.

Characters and Books in the Bible

Very often you can find characters in the Bible (particularly in the Old Testament) who can bring a depth of 'lived experience' to the topic we are studying and really help to make it personal and meaningful. Sometimes you can get really fortunate and discover that a whole book of the Bible is devoted to addressing the particular topic you are studying!

In my study, I found a reference to Elijah in James and was intrigued to learn about his prayer life. I went and found the story about his travails in the face of very intense intimidation from Ahab and Jezebel. His story of perseverance in prayer (very often he prayed multiple times for the things for which he was asking) and the heavy emotional toll that the intimidation he faced had on him was a wonderfully encouraging illustration for me, tying together multiple themes from the rest of Scripture of what it means to warfare in prayer.

4. Draw Out Major Themes and Summarise

For each passage of Scripture that you find particularly insightful about the question you are

considering, I encourage you to summarise in your own words what the text is saying about your topic.

I wrote up a brief one or two-line summary for each passage that I considered. I am now able to go back over my notes and remember what the Holy Spirit taught me through these passages.

5. Application

Relating to my previous point, when we have pulled out key lessons from the texts which we have studied, I encourage you to bring these words before the Lord and ask Him to illuminate where your heart is at. Some key questions to ask might be:

- What is God encouraging me to do?
- What is God convicting me of?
- What do I need to change in the way that I think/speak/act?
- What are some of the things that have prevented me from thinking and living this way? (Have I believed lies? Have I been influenced by the culture around me? Have I been trusting in myself rather than God?)

Some of the things I garnered from my study:

- Very often people and situations can be my primary focus in times of conflict, and it can be easy to miss what Satan is trying to achieve and how God wants me to respond!
- Instead of worrying about my problem, pray!
- It is by patient endurance that we inherit the promises, so don't give up!
- Prayer is inextricably linked to 'humbling ourselves' so don't come before God like a spoilt teenager, but instead approach Him with a humble, trusting, thankful heart.

I trust that as you walk out your faith in God and continue to grow in faith and maturity, that you will turn to the Scriptures again and again and find wisdom from God in this way.