

How to Do a Book Study

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one . . . who
correctly handles the word of truth.*

— 2 Timothy 2:15

This appendix outlines two types of book studies: a simple and detailed version. If possible, do your book study in community with at least one other person, and if you have access to a trained Bible teacher, process your findings and conclusions with them.

OPTION 1: SIMPLE BOOK STUDY

You can conduct a simple book study in three steps: 1) read the book once to get the big picture, 2) read the book again and write down themes from the book, then 3) read the book a third time to decide the main theme.

OPTION 2: DETAILED BOOK STUDY

The following five steps outline a detailed way to conduct a book study:

1. Prepare for Reading
2. Identify the Theme
3. Make Structural Divisions
4. Conduct a Word Study
5. Exegete and Apply

Step 1. Prepare for Reading

Your preparation will help you make good use of your time as you proceed.

- ❑ Prayerfully choose a book of the Bible you want to study.
- ❑ Get a copy of the book you can write on. If possible, print out a copy of the book. Consider obtaining a “raw” version of it, with no footnotes, headings, verse numbers, chapter numbers, or section titles, by using biblegateway.com or a comparable source.
- ❑ Select a notebook or a journal where you can keep a running tab of your observations and questions as you do this book study.

Step 2. Identify the Theme

It's important to identify the primary theme of the book you're studying because this helps you understand from a high level what's happening in the details.

- ❑ Read through the entire raw version of your chosen book in one sitting.
 - ❑ As you read, keep a running tab of your questions and observations.
 - ❑ List potential book themes as you read. While you are reading, ask yourself and the Holy Spirit, *What are some of the main emphases in this piece of literature?*
- ❑ You may want to read the book multiple times until you can identify potential themes.
- ❑ Identify what you think is the main theme of the book. You may need to read it again to identify from the themes you listed what is the primary theme—the one that stretches the entire document.

Step 3. Make Structural Divisions

Dividing your book into parts helps you see the flow and progression of the book. Once you make the divisions, focus on just one subsection of your book. You will use this subsection for conducting a word study in Step 4.

a. Make Section and Subsection Divisions

Section divisions are three to five parts of your book, and subsection divisions are three to five parts of your sections. Results vary from person to person how to divide a certain book into parts, so don't worry about finding the "one way" to do this. Your divisions serve as a tool to help you better understand the macro-view in its major parts.

- ☐ Read the whole book again, still in raw format, dividing it into three to five major sections. Do this with your printed-out version that has no chapters, verses, or headers, using a pencil to divide the book into sections.
- ☐ Then, scanning the book as a whole, divide each of the three to five major sections you created into three to five subsections:
 - ☐ Make a chart that shows your sections and subsections (see the example below). While you will mark the divisions on your raw copy, use a Bible with chapters and verses so you can write the exact citations for the sections and subsections of your chart.
 - ☐ Label each section and subsection with a name you choose that represents those verses by topic.

Example Structure of Matthew						
P R O L O G U E 1:1–25	The Reign of God: <i>Jesus' Ministry to the Sheep of Israel</i> 2:1–18:35			The Reign of God: <i>Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem</i> 19:1–28:15		C O M M I S S I O N 28:16–28:20
	His Ministry Begins 2:1–4:16	His Fame Spreads: <i>He Preaches, Heals, and Exorcizes</i> 4:17–9:38	His People Learn Their King 10:1–18:35	The Vineyard of the King 19:1–20:34	Victory in the City of the King 21:1–28:15	

b. Focus on One Subsection

Subsection divisions help you focus on a particular passage of the Bible. You are now ready to understand the parts in light of the whole! The parts then give you more insight into the book as a whole as well.

- ☐ Read slowly through your subsection, writing your questions and observations.
- ☐ Read through the subsection again to identify a few topics that interest you.
- ☐ From this subsection, select one to three verses that are the most interesting, confusing, or convicting to you personally.
- ☐ Write down as many observations and questions about your verse(s) as possible.
- ☐ Make a few conclusions about what you think your passage says about God, people, and obedience based on the immediate context of your subsection and the book as a whole.

Step 4. Conduct a Word Study

A word study helps you understand the meaning of a word in the Bible as used by your author in your particular book. The meaning of words is contextual, so a word study gives you a practical way to understand how that word is used in a particular context by looking at its meaning in various contexts.

- ☐ Chose a prominent, interesting, or rare word from the one to three verses you focused on from your chosen subsection.
- ☐ Study that word using an online tool like *Bible Gateway* (biblegateway.com) or *Blue Letter Bible* (blueletterbible.org). Using one of those online tools, search for all occurrences of your word in the Bible. Once you identify all the verses in the Bible, read them through in one sitting to get the general sense of how the word is used and take notes as you go. The goal here is to form categories of how various biblical writers use this word in context.
- ☐ As you read, take notes on 1) what you're observing about that word, 2) what categories of meaning exist in the Bible outside your particular book, and 3) anything else important to you.
- ☐ Summarize your conclusions in one paragraph.

- Write another paragraph to apply your general conclusions about this word to your particular passage, using the immediate context to discern how it's being used in that instance.

Step 5. Exegete and Apply

Exegesis means to “draw out” meaning from Scripture. This is deciding what message the author intended the original audience to understand. Exegesis provides meaning; application provides the significance of that meaning for our world today. Step 5 helps you find both the meaning and significance of your passage.

- Write between 250 and 300 words that include these elements:
 - “Their Town.”* Determine the meaning of your one to three verses, using 1) your word study, 2) your subsection study, and 3) your understanding of the theme of the book as a whole.
 - Crossing the “Principilizing Bridge.” Answer the question: *What is your primary takeaway?*
 - “Own Town.” Apply the meaning to our world today.
 - Your life. In one sentence that begins with “I will . . .” answer the question: *What is God asking me to do as a result of this study?* If God speaks, listen and obey.
- Process your study with a trusted mentor, teacher, or fellow student of the Word. As you do, ask them what they think as you:
 - Explain to them your process.
 - Tell them about your observations and questions.
 - Show them your structural and subsection divisions chart.
 - Tell them about your word study.
 - Share with them your exegesis and application.
 - Then, ask them these three questions to end:
 - Have I missed anything?
 - Is my application in line with God’s Word as a whole and with wisdom?
 - What else would you add?

*The language of “Their Town,” “Principilizing Bridge,” and “Our Town” comes from J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays’s book *Grasping God’s Word* (page 179).

Supplemental Reading

For more information on the Inductive Bible Study method, see David R. Bauer, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

This resource provides insight into the theoretical foundations behind this method in general, along with practical guidance on conducting a book study in particular.

Another useful tool I recommend is J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays's book *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). This book provides a solid introduction to hermeneutics, including a thorough explanation on how to read a book of the Bible in context. It's an excellent resource to help readers understand how to make connections between the ancient cultures of the Bible and our world today.

