# How to Do a Book Study: Workbook

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

Paul (2 Timothy 2:15)

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**

□ Pick a time and place to read in one sitting. Write the time, date, and place here:

Time: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

□ 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.

**Step 2. Identify the Theme and Main Point**

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 to identify the theme and main point.

Use the pages that follow to write, brainstorm, and make your conclusions.

□ As you read, keep a running tab of your questions and observations (see the next page for where to write those out).

□ Also as you read, list potential book themes. 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. This is a single word or phrase.

□ Using your main theme, now identify the main point of the text. This is one sentence. 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.

**Write Your Questions and Observations**

*From Your Once-Through Reading*

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**Brainstorm on the Main Themes**

**Decide on the Main Theme**

*From your brainstorming notes, pick the main theme, which will be a single word or phrase. Write your main theme here:*

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**Brainstorm on the Main Point**

**Decide on the Main Point**

*From your brainstorming notes, pick the main point, which will be a single sentence. Write what you believe at this the main point of the text is here:*

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**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.

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.

3a. Make Section Divisions

□ 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.

□ Write down your section divisions with chapters and verses and label each section division.

**Brainstorm Section Divisions**

**Decide on Section Divisions**

*Use if it has three sections.*

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*Use this if it has four sections.*

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*Use this if it has five sections.*

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Step 3b. Make Subsection Divisions

Then, scanning the book as a whole, divide each of the three to five major sections you created into three to five subsections each:

i. Use your copy of the book in raw format to divide the subsections.

ii. Type out a chart in Word or Pages that shows your sections and subsections. See the example below, and use the next page for yours. 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.

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| Example Structure of Matthew | | | | | | | |
| P R O L O G U E  1:1–25 | The Reign of God:  *Jesus’ Ministry to the Sheep of Israel*  2:1–18:35 | | | The Reign of God:  *Jesus’ Ministry in Jerusalem*  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: *He Preaches, Heals, and Exorcizes*  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 |

iii. Label each section and subsection with a name you choose that represents those verses by topic.

[Your Chart Here]

**Step 3c. Conduct an Analysis about How the Sections and Subsections Relate**

Take your chart and connect the major sections with one of the ten major relationships. These ten major relationships can be grouped into the pairs below for easier memorization. *I’ve adapted these from Asbury Theological Seminary’s David Bauer’s class notes on “Major Structural Relationships,” where he lists a total of seventeen types of relationships.*

**Contrast or Comparison**

* Contrast is when two sections emphasize different or opposite aspects of a topic.
* Comparison is when two sections are related by the same or similar aspects of a topic.
* Key question: Do the sections stand in contrast or comparison with one another?
* Key terms: For contrast, look for terms like “but” or “however.” For comparison, look for terms such as “like” or “as.”
* Examples:
  + Contrast: Forthcoming
  + Comparison: Forthcoming

**Particularization or Generalization**

* Particularization is when one section offers a general truth and the following section is a particularization of that section.
* Generalization is when there’s an example or set of examples that then are generalized in the next section.
* Key question: Do the sections move from particular to general, or from general to particular?
* Key terms: *No key terms.*
* Examples:
  + Particularization: Forthcoming
  + Generalization: Forthcoming

**Climax or Cruciality**

* Climax is when one section is lesser than the next and as you move to the next, there’s a culmination and rise in intensity.
* Cruciality is when the first section goes in one direction and the next section goes in very different direction or even reversal of the first direction.
* Key question: Does the change here represent a major change in direction or climatical point in the flow?
* Key terms: *No key terms.*
* Examples:
  + Climax: Forthcoming
  + Cruciality: Forthcoming

**Causation or Substantiation**

* Causation is when the preceding section offers a cause and the next section offers the effect of the previous section.
* Substantiation is when the preceding section offers an effect and the next section offers the cause.
* Key question: Do you see a cause-effect or effect-cause relationship at play here?
* Key terms: For causation look for the terms “therefore” or “consequently”; for substantiation, look for the terms “for,” “because,” or “since.”
* Examples:
  + Causation: From Romans 1:18–4:25 to Romans 5:1–8:39 (key verse: Romans 5:1)
  + Substantiation: Forthcoming

**Preparation or Summarization**

* Preparation is when one section sets up the coming section with background material to prepare the reader.
* Summarization is when one section sums up the previous section.
* Key question: Is there an obvious introduction or summation between sections?
* Key terms: *No key terms.*
* Examples:
  + Preparation: From Romans 1:1–17 to Romans 1:18–4:25
  + Summarization: Forthcoming

For additional categories and explanation, see David R. Bauer and Robert Traina’s *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014 [2011]).

**Write your structural relationships here.** *State the name of the structural relationship from the**list of ten above, then offer a brief explanation for each structural relationship*

Structural relationship from your major section transition: From 1 to 2

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Structural relationship from your major section transition: From 2 to 3

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Structural relationship from your major section transition: From 3 to 4

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Structural relationship from your major section transition: From 4 to 5

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**Step 3d. 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.*

**i. Record your subsection questions and observations.**

Read slowly through your subsection, writing 10–15 questions and 10–15 observations. Label your observations and questions with specific chapter and verse citations.

**Write Your Questions and Observations**

*From Your Subsection*

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**ii. Brainstorm Topics, Themes, or Concepts**

Read through the subsection again to identify a few topics, themes, or concepts that interest you. Write those down.

Topics, Themes, or Concepts that Interest You:

3e. Detailed Observations and Questions on Your 1–3 Verses

i. From this subsection, select one to three verses that are the most interesting, confusing, or convicting to you personally.

Write the citation of your 1–3 verses here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

ii. Write down as many observations and questions about your verse(s) as possible.

**Write Your Questions and Observations**

*From Your 1–3 Verses*

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iii. Make a few initial and obvious conclusions about what you think your passage says about God, people, and obedience based on a) the immediate context of your subsection and b) the book as a whole. Use Scripture citations from those two contexts in your answer. Then, answer an obedience question for yourself. (Note: This is not when you’re expected to do thorough exegesis, but draw out some conclusions where possible of the plain implications for these three topics.)

A few conclusions about God:

A few conclusions about People:

A few conclusions about Obedience:

How is God asking you to obey his Word?

**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.

In order to do this phase, the assumption is you picked 1-3 verses you're interested in. Then you can move forward. If you’re not sure what to choose, pick Romans 3:21–24 and study the word “righteousness.”

1. Pick a word from your verses that is prominent, interesting, or rare from the one to three verses you focused on from your chosen subsection.

2. Take a word you're interested in and look it up on biblegateway.com in five different translations to see how each of them translate it.

What are your 1–3 verses? This should match what you picked in the last part of Step 3.

How is your word translated in five translations?



3. Pick the most common translation of your word among those five. Which is the most common translation of that word among the five?

4. Then do an English-only word study using the steps in the guide, "How to Do a Book Study" (Step 4). Choose an English translation from among the Bibles that have the most common translation of your selected word. Which Bible translation is that?

5. Use Bible Gateway (biblegateway.com), select your translation, and type in your word in the search bar so you can see all the occurrences of your word in your chosen translation Bible. Once you have pulled up 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.

4. Apply your word study findings to your particular 1–3 verses. Prioritize and weigh how the word is used (in this order): the author's use, the corpus of the author, and the testament, Old or New (for OT words, ignore NT references). Write at least one paragraph.

5. Do a "concept study" just using Romans as a whole (or perhaps just the major section in which it lies). That is, take your word study findings, and decide on the concept. Then, read your document again looking not for that word but for that concept. Write your conclusions in at least one paragraph, letting the teacher know if you are using the whole book or if just the major section, which section of verses you did your concept study in.

**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:

* **Two paragraphs:** “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.
* **One sentence or paragraph:** Crossing the “Principlizing Bridge.” Answer the question: What is your primary takeaway?
* **Two paragraphs:** “Own Town.” Apply the meaning of your primary takeaway principle to our world today.
* **One sentence or paragraph:** 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. Do this for sure, and if you wish to share you may but are not required to do so.

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,” “Principlizing 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.