



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

# How to Study a Biblical Topic

## How to Discover What Scripture Teaches About a Subject

### The Short Answer

A topical Bible study asks: **WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH ABOUT THIS SUBJECT?**

Instead of beginning with one verse, word, or passage, topical study gathers relevant passages from across Scripture and studies them together.

**DEFINE** - Clearly identify the topic or question. **GATHER** - Find relevant passages. **CONTEXT** - Study each passage where it actually appears. **CATEGORIZE** - Organize passages according to what they teach. **SYNTHESIZE** - Bring the biblical evidence together. **TEST** - Check conclusions against the whole counsel of Scripture. **CHRIST AND THE BIBLICAL STORY** - Ask where the subject legitimately connects to Jesus and God's unfolding work of redemption. **APPLY** - Respond faithfully to what Scripture teaches.

The danger of topical study is proof-texting - collecting verses that appear to support a conclusion while ignoring their context or other biblical evidence.

The goal is not to find verses that confirm what is already believed. The goal is to discover as faithfully as possible what Scripture actually teaches.

Psalm 119:18 · Acts 17:11 · Acts 20:27 · 2 Timothy 2:15 · 2 Timothy 3:16-17

### Memory Anchor

**DO NOT GATHER VERSES TO PROVE A POINT.  
GATHER SCRIPTURE TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH.**



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## PART ONE

# BEGINNER GUIDE

### 1. WHAT IS A TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY?

A topical Bible study examines what Scripture teaches about a particular subject.

Possible topics include: PRAYER; FORGIVENESS; FAITH; GRACE; MONEY; FEAR; MARRIAGE; SUFFERING; WORSHIP; JUSTICE; THE HOLY SPIRIT; THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

A topical study differs from simply reading one passage because relevant teaching may appear in many biblical books.

For example, a study of forgiveness might include: Psalm 32; Matthew 6:12-15; Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 23:34; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13.

Each passage contributes something. But each must first be understood in its own context.

Topical study moves from MANY PASSAGES toward ONE CAREFULLY SYNTHESIZED BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING.

### 2. WHY CAN TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY BE HELPFUL?

The Bible develops many important subjects across multiple books, authors, covenants, and historical periods.

A topical study can help readers: Understand a biblical subject more fully. See connections across Scripture. Recognize how biblical teaching develops. Compare related passages. Correct incomplete assumptions. Answer practical questions biblically. See how a subject connects to Jesus and the Gospel.

For example, someone studying prayer could examine prayers in the Psalms, Jesus' teaching about prayer, prayers recorded in Acts, and instructions about prayer in the New Testament letters.

Together these passages provide a fuller picture than one isolated verse.

But there is an important safeguard: More verses do not automatically produce better interpretation. Every passage still needs context.

### 3. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST DANGER IN TOPICAL STUDY?

PROOF-TEXTING.

Proof-texting occurs when verses are removed from their contexts and used to support a conclusion they may not actually teach.

A reader may begin with an opinion and then search for verses that appear to prove it. That reverses the proper process.

Instead of: CONCLUSION → FIND SUPPORTING VERSES

use: QUESTION → STUDY SCRIPTURE → FORM A CONCLUSION

Consider Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Taken alone, this verse might be used to suggest that Christ guarantees success in anything someone attempts.

But the surrounding context concerns Paul learning contentment in both abundance and need.

READ: Philippians 4:10-13

The verse is powerful. Its actual meaning is even better understood when it remains inside Paul's argument.

#### Memory Anchor

**Never make a verse say more than its context allows.**

### 4. WHAT DOES A TOPICAL STUDY GONE WRONG LOOK LIKE?

Suppose the topic is: DOES GOD PROMISE CHRISTIANS SUCCESS IN EVERYTHING THEY ATTEMPT?

A reader searches for encouraging verses and gathers:

PHILIPPIANS 4:13 - "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

JEREMIAH 29:11 - God speaks of plans for welfare and hope.

MATTHEW 7:7 - "Ask, and it will be given to you."

The reader concludes: "Scripture promises that if Christians have enough faith, God will make their plans succeed."

The problem is not that the verses are untrue. The problem is that their contexts have not been allowed to determine what they mean.

PHILIPPIANS 4 - Paul is speaking about learning contentment in both abundance and need.

JEREMIAH 29 - God is speaking to Judean exiles living under judgment and promising eventual restoration.



MATTHEW 7 - Jesus is teaching His disciples to trust the goodness of their heavenly Father.  
None of these passages, properly understood, establishes the proposed conclusion.  
The study gathered biblical words but did not actually listen to the biblical passages.

#### Memory Anchor

**A collection of true verses can still produce a false conclusion when their contexts are ignored.**

### 5. STEP ONE - DEFINE THE TOPIC

Begin by clearly stating the subject. Broad topics can become overwhelming.

Instead of: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS?

consider: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH ABOUT FORGIVING SOMEONE WHO SINS AGAINST ME?

Instead of: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT MONEY?

consider: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH ABOUT CONTENTMENT AND POSSESSIONS?

Instead of: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT PRAYER?

consider: HOW DID JESUS TEACH HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY?

A focused question makes it easier to identify relevant passages and avoid wandering into unrelated subjects.

Write the question before beginning the search. Then allow Scripture to shape the answer.

### 6. STEP TWO - GATHER RELEVANT PASSAGES

Next, locate passages that genuinely address the topic.

Helpful methods include: Bible cross-references. A concordance. Bible-search tools. Topical indexes. Study Bible references. Related passages already known.

But do not rely only on searching for one English word.

Why? Because biblical concepts can appear even when the exact English word does not.

A passage about forgiveness may describe: Canceling a debt. Showing mercy. Not holding sin against someone. Reconciliation. Repentance. Restoration.

Likewise, the same English word may translate different Hebrew or Greek words.

Keyword searches are useful starting points. They are not the entire study.

#### Memory Anchor

**Search for the word. Also search for the idea.**

### 7. STEP THREE - STUDY EACH PASSAGE IN CONTEXT

This is where careful topical study differs from collecting quotations.

For every important passage, ask: Who wrote or spoke these words? Who received them? What is happening in the passage? What comes before? What comes after? What kind of biblical literature is this? Is this describing what happened or commanding what should happen? Does this belong to a particular covenant or historical setting? What is the author's main point?

Readers also bring assumptions from their own culture, time, and experience.

Ask whether modern ideas about FAMILY, SUCCESS, JUSTICE, LEADERSHIP, WORK, FREEDOM, WEALTH, or RELATIONSHIPS are being imported into the passage rather than learned from it.

Historical and cultural background can help readers recognize assumptions the original audience may not have shared.

For example, a command given specifically to Israel under the Mosaic covenant should not automatically be applied to the Church in exactly the same way.

Likewise, something a person does in a biblical narrative is not automatically something Scripture approves.

Context must be established before a verse is added to the topical conclusion.

### 8. HOW DOES GENRE AFFECT A TOPICAL STUDY?

Different kinds of biblical literature communicate differently.

NARRATIVE - Describes people and events. Ask whether the text is merely describing what happened or presenting something readers should imitate.



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**LAW** - Contains covenant commands given within Israel's historical relationship with God. Ask how the command functioned within that covenant and how the rest of Scripture develops the principle.

**POETRY** - Uses imagery, emotion, metaphor, parallelism, praise, and lament. Do not flatten poetic language into technical definitions.

**WISDOM** - Frequently presents general principles for wise living rather than unconditional promises about every circumstance.

**PROPHECY** - Often combines historical warning, judgment, repentance, hope, and future restoration.

**LETTERS** - Frequently develop theological teaching through sustained arguments. Read individual verses as part of those arguments.

**GOSPELS** - Reveal Jesus through His teaching, actions, death, and resurrection.

Genre is part of context. A topical study should respect the kind of literature God gave.

### 9. STEP FOUR - CATEGORIZE WHAT THE PASSAGES TEACH

After studying several passages, organize them. Do not categorize merely by Bible book. Categorize according to what Scripture actually teaches about the subject.

For a study of forgiveness, categories might include: GOD FORGIVES SIN. FORGIVENESS IS CONNECTED TO GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE. JESUS TEACHES HIS FOLLOWERS TO FORGIVE. CHRISTIANS ARE TO FORGIVE AS THEY HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN. REPENTANCE, RECONCILIATION, AND FORGIVENESS ARE RELATED BUT NOT IDENTICAL QUESTIONS. FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MAKE EVIL GOOD. FORGIVENESS DOES NOT REMOVE EVERY EARTHLY CONSEQUENCE.

These categories begin turning a collection of passages into an organized biblical understanding. But the categories remain provisional. Scripture - not the outline - has authority.

### 10. STEP FIVE - SYNTHESIZE THE EVIDENCE

Synthesis asks: WHAT DO THESE PASSAGES TEACH WHEN CONSIDERED TOGETHER?

Look for: Repeated truths. Clear commands. Promises. Warnings. Important distinctions. Biblical patterns. Apparent tensions. Development across Scripture.

Then summarize carefully.

A good topical conclusion should be able to say: SCRIPTURE CLEARLY TEACHES... SCRIPTURE ALSO SHOWS... THIS PASSAGE APPLIES SPECIFICALLY TO... THIS PRINCIPLE APPEARS THROUGHOUT... SCRIPTURE DOES NOT EXPLICITLY ANSWER... SOME CHRISTIANS INFER...

These distinctions help prevent conclusions from becoming more confident than the evidence allows.

### 11. WHAT IF PASSAGES SEEM TO SAY DIFFERENT THINGS?

Do not immediately discard one of them. Sometimes apparently conflicting passages address different questions.

For example, Scripture strongly commands Christians to forgive. READ: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13

Scripture also speaks about repentance, confrontation, reconciliation, discipline, justice, and accountability. READ: Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4; Romans 12:17-21

These truths should not automatically be collapsed into one idea.

Forgiveness does not necessarily mean: Trust is immediately restored. Consequences disappear. Reconciliation always occurs instantly. Authorities should ignore wrongdoing. Someone must remain in an unsafe situation.

Likewise, justice should not become an excuse for vengeance or bitterness.

Good topical study allows Scripture to provide the categories rather than forcing every passage into one oversimplified answer.

#### Memory Anchor

**Do not solve biblical tension by deleting one side of it.**

### 12. WHAT DOES A TOPICAL STUDY LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Consider the question: WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH ABOUT FORGIVING OTHERS?

Begin by gathering representative passages.

PSALM 32:1-5 - David describes the blessing of having sin forgiven and the importance of confession.

MATTHEW 6:12-15 - Jesus teaches His disciples to pray for forgiveness while also forgiving others.

MATTHEW 18:21-35 - Jesus responds to Peter's question about forgiveness with a parable emphasizing the enormous mercy received from God and the obligation to show mercy to others.

LUKE 23:34 - Jesus prays for those involved in His crucifixion.



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EPHESIANS 4:31-32 - Paul contrasts bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness grounded in God's forgiveness in Christ.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-13 - Believers are instructed to bear with one another and forgive as the Lord has forgiven them.

Now categorize the evidence.

GOD IS THE SOURCE AND MODEL OF FORGIVENESS. Forgiveness begins with God's mercy toward sinners.

CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO FORGIVE. Forgiveness is not presented merely as an optional personality trait.

FORGIVENESS IS GROUNDED IN GRACE. Christians forgive because they themselves have received mercy.

FORGIVENESS OPPOSES VENGEANCE. The believer releases personal vengeance to God. READ: Romans 12:19

FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MAKE SIN INSIGNIFICANT. Biblical forgiveness takes sin seriously enough to recognize that mercy is needed.

Now synthesize:

Scripture presents forgiveness as a response to the mercy believers have received from God. Followers of Jesus are called to reject vengeance, release bitterness, and extend forgiveness, while Scripture also recognizes repentance, justice, accountability, wisdom, and reconciliation as related but distinct questions.

That conclusion comes from several passages studied together rather than one isolated verse.

### 13. HOW DOES A TOPICAL STUDY LEAD TO APPLICATION?

Application should come after understanding.

Ask: What truth about God should be believed? Is there a command to obey? A sin to confess? A promise to trust? A belief that needs correction? An attitude that should change? A relationship requiring faithful action? A reason to worship? A reason to hope?

For the forgiveness study, possible applications might include: Remembering how much God has forgiven. Refusing to nurture personal vengeance. Praying for willingness to forgive. Seeking wise reconciliation where appropriate. Maintaining necessary boundaries when safety or serious wrongdoing is involved. Trusting God with justice.

Application should flow from the whole biblical teaching rather than one emotionally powerful verse.

## PART TWO

## WANT TO GO DEEPER?

### INTERMEDIATE

### 14. HOW DOES TOPICAL STUDY DIFFER FROM A KEYWORD SEARCH?

A keyword search finds words. A topical study investigates concepts. These overlap, but they are not identical.

Suppose the topic is THE TRINITY. The word "Trinity" does not appear in Scripture. Yet Christians use the term to summarize biblical teaching concerning the one God and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Likewise, important concepts may be expressed through several different words.

A good topical study therefore asks: WHAT WORDS EXPRESS THIS IDEA? WHAT PASSAGES TEACH THIS IDEA WITHOUT USING THE EXPECTED WORD? WHAT RELATED CONCEPTS BELONG TO THE SUBJECT?

This is why topical study requires more than typing one word into a Bible search box.

### 15. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND PROOF-TEXTING?

Proof-texting gathers verses without adequately considering their contexts.

Biblical theology pays attention to how God's revelation unfolds across Scripture.

For many topics, it can be helpful to ask:

CREATION - What does the topic look like in God's original design?

FALL - How has sin affected it?

ISRAEL AND THE COVENANTS - How does the subject develop within God's dealings with Israel?

JESUS - What does Jesus reveal, fulfill, accomplish, or teach concerning it?

CHURCH - How are followers of Jesus instructed to live in light of the Gospel?

NEW CREATION - How does Scripture's promised future complete or transform the subject?

Not every topic requires a statement under every heading. Do not force the framework.

Its purpose is to help readers recognize that Scripture tells one unfolding story rather than functioning as a collection of disconnected quotations.

### 16. WHY DO OLD AND NEW COVENANT DISTINCTIONS MATTER?



## Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

Not every biblical command was given to every person in every age.

God's commands to Noah, Abraham, ancient Israel, Israel's priests, Israel's kings, Jesus' apostles, and New Testament churches occur within particular settings.

For example, Israel received dietary laws, sacrificial regulations, priestly instructions, and national covenant commands.

Christians should not simply ignore these passages. They remain part of inspired Scripture.

But the New Testament explains how Jesus fulfills the law, sacrifice, priesthood, and covenant promises. READ: Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 8-10

A topical study must therefore ask not merely: "Is this command somewhere in the Bible?" but: "WHO RECEIVED THIS COMMAND, AND WHERE DOES IT FIT WITHIN THE BIBLICAL STORY?"

### Memory Anchor

**All Scripture is for God's people. Not every command was given directly to every person.**

## 17. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE PASSAGES?

A DESCRIPTIVE passage tells what happened. A PRESCRIPTIVE passage instructs what should happen.

For example, Acts records many events in the life of the early Church. Some clearly model Christian faithfulness. Others simply report historical events.

Likewise, Old Testament narratives describe both faithful and sinful behavior.

David's actions are recorded. That does not mean every action David took should be imitated.

When building a topical conclusion, explicit teaching normally provides a stronger foundation than merely observing that someone in a narrative did something.

## 18. SHOULD EVERY VERSE RECEIVE EQUAL WEIGHT?

Every biblical text is inspired Scripture. But not every passage addresses a topical question with equal directness.

Suppose the topic is marriage. A passage explicitly teaching about marriage should normally carry more interpretive weight for that question than an incidental reference to a married person in a narrative.

Distinguish between:

DIRECT TEACHING - The passage explicitly addresses the topic.

CLEAR IMPLICATION - The passage strongly contributes to understanding the topic.

RELATED PRINCIPLE - The passage contains a truth relevant to the subject.

POSSIBLE CONNECTION - A relationship may exist, but the passage does not clearly establish it.

This helps prevent weak connections from being treated as though they were explicit biblical teaching.

## 19. HOW SHOULD DIFFICULT OR DISPUTED TOPICS BE STUDIED?

Some topics involve passages faithful Christians interpret differently.

Examples include: Baptism. Spiritual gifts. End-times chronology. Church government. Divorce and remarriage. Women in ministry. Election and human responsibility.

When studying disputed topics: Read the major passages fully. Identify what Scripture explicitly says. Separate explicit teaching from inference. Understand the strongest biblical reasoning behind major Christian interpretations. Do not build an opposing position in its weakest form merely to dismiss it. Ask which conclusions best account for the full biblical evidence. Acknowledge uncertainty where Scripture does not resolve every question equally clearly.

A useful principle is: WHERE SCRIPTURE SPEAKS CLEARLY, BELIEVE IT. WHERE CHRISTIANS DRAW INFERENCES, IDENTIFY THEM AS INFERENCES. WHERE SCRIPTURE LEAVES MYSTERY, DO NOT MANUFACTURE CERTAINTY.

## 20. WHAT ROLE SHOULD TOPICAL BIBLES, STUDY BIBLES, AND COMMENTARIES PLAY?

They can be very helpful. But their categories and notes are not inspired Scripture.

A topical Bible may place verses under headings such as: ANGER; PRAYER; MARRIAGE; SUFFERING; SALVATION.

These headings were created by editors. They can help locate passages, but they should not determine what those passages mean.

Likewise: Study Bible notes are interpretation. Commentaries are interpretation. Topical indexes are organizational tools.

Cross-references are editorial tools.

They can help enormously. But every suggested passage must still be read in context.



#### Memory Anchor

**Tools can locate Scripture. Only Scripture carries Scripture's authority.**

### 21. WHAT TOOLS CAN HELP WITH A TOPICAL STUDY?

A basic topical study can be done with: A trustworthy Bible translation. Bible cross-references. A concordance. A notebook. A trustworthy study Bible.

Digital Bible-search tools can make gathering passages faster.

Resources such as BLUE LETTER BIBLE and BIBLE HUB provide searchable Bible texts, translation comparisons, cross-references, concordance tools, and additional study resources.

A topical Bible or topical index can also suggest passages.

Use outside tools as starting points rather than final authorities.

A helpful order is: BIBLE → CROSS-REFERENCES AND SEARCH TOOLS → CONTEXTUAL STUDY → STUDY BIBLES / COMMENTARIES WHEN NEEDED → RETURN TO SCRIPTURE

#### RESOURCE SAFEGUARD

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological position, methodology, study note, commentary, interpretation, or conclusion it contains.

Compare resources carefully and continually return to Scripture.

### 22. HOW SHOULD A TOPICAL STUDY CONNECT TO JESUS?

Scripture ultimately reveals God's redemptive purposes fulfilled in Jesus Christ. READ: Luke 24:25-27, 44-47

But topical study should not force Jesus artificially into every verse.

First understand each passage in its context.

Then ask whether the topic connects legitimately to Christ through: Promise. Covenant. Sacrifice. Priesthood. Kingship. Kingdom. Sin and forgiveness. Grace. Redemption. Resurrection. New creation. The Gospel.

For example, a study of forgiveness naturally leads to Jesus because the New Testament explicitly grounds Christian forgiveness in God's forgiveness through Christ.

A study of sacrifice naturally leads toward Jesus because Hebrews explicitly presents Christ's sacrifice as fulfilling and surpassing the Old Testament sacrificial system.

These are textual and biblical connections. They are different from inventing hidden references to Jesus in unrelated details.

#### Memory Anchor

**Do not force every verse to mention Jesus. Follow Scripture's story to Him.**

### 23. HOW DOES TOPICAL STUDY RELATE TO OTHER BIBLE-STUDY METHODS?

Different methods begin with different questions.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY - Begins with a passage and moves through observation, interpretation, and application.

VERSE MAPPING - Usually slows down around one verse or short passage to investigate context, words, translations, and connections.

WORD STUDY - Examines how an important biblical word functions within its context and across relevant passages.

BOOK STUDY - Examines the message, structure, themes, and argument of an entire biblical book.

TOPICAL STUDY - Begins with a subject or question and asks what relevant passages across Scripture teach about it.

These methods can strengthen one another.

A topical study depends upon good inductive interpretation. A word study may clarify an important term within the topic. Verse Mapping may help examine a particularly important verse. Book study may reveal how one biblical author develops the subject.

The methods are tools. Scripture remains the authority.

### 24. A SIMPLE 3NAILS TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

FOCUSED QUESTION: \_\_\_\_\_



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**PRAY** - Ask God for understanding and approach Scripture humbly.

**DEFINE** - What exactly is being studied? Can the question be narrowed? \_\_\_\_\_

**GATHER** - List relevant passages. \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTEXT** - For each major passage ask: Who is speaking or writing? Who received it? What comes before and after? What genre is this? Is it descriptive or prescriptive? What covenant or historical setting matters? What cultural assumptions might affect interpretation? What is the passage actually teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

**CATEGORIZE** - What major truths or categories emerge? 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

**SYNTHESIZE** - Complete: "Taken together, these passages teach that..." \_\_\_\_\_

**TEST** - Does the conclusion account for all major relevant passages? Are any verses being taken out of context? Does another passage challenge or qualify the conclusion? What is explicit? What is inferred? \_\_\_\_\_

**JESUS AND THE BIBLICAL STORY** - Where does this topic legitimately connect to Jesus, the Gospel, or God's unfolding work of redemption? \_\_\_\_\_

**APPLICATION** - How should this biblical truth shape belief or life? \_\_\_\_\_

**FINAL CHECK** - Did Scripture shape the conclusion-or was Scripture used to support a conclusion already chosen? \_\_\_\_\_

## 25. WHAT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED ABOUT TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY?

Topical Bible study can reveal the richness and unity of Scripture. But it requires discipline.

Do not begin with a conclusion and hunt for supporting verses. Begin with a question. Gather broadly. Read carefully. Respect context. Respect genre. Respect covenant setting. Be alert to cultural assumptions. Distinguish description from command. Give greatest weight to passages that address the question most directly. Preserve biblical tensions rather than erasing them. Distinguish explicit teaching from inference. Trace legitimate development across Scripture. Follow the biblical story toward Jesus where Scripture itself leads. Then apply what Scripture actually teaches.

The goal is not to collect the largest number of verses. The goal is to understand the biblical truth those verses communicate.

### Memory Anchor

**DEFINE THE QUESTION. GATHER THE PASSAGES. STUDY THE CONTEXT. ORGANIZE THE EVIDENCE. LISTEN TO THE WHOLE BIBLE. FOLLOW THE STORY TO JESUS. RESPOND TO THE TRUTH.**

## REVIEW

1. What is a topical Bible study?
2. Why can topical study be helpful?
3. What is proof-texting?
4. How can a collection of true verses still produce a false conclusion?
5. Why should a topic be narrowed into a focused question?
6. Why is a keyword search not enough?
7. Why must every gathered verse be studied in context?
8. How can cultural assumptions affect interpretation?
9. How does genre affect topical study?
10. What is the purpose of categorizing passages?
11. What does it mean to synthesize biblical evidence?
12. What should be done when passages appear to be in tension?
13. Why do covenant distinctions matter?
14. What is the difference between descriptive and prescriptive passages?
15. Why may some passages contribute more directly to a topical question than others?
16. How should disputed topics be handled?



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**17. What authority do topical Bible headings, study notes, and commentaries have?**

**18. How should topical study connect to Jesus?**

**19. How does topical study differ from Inductive Bible Study, Verse Mapping, Word Study, and Book Study?**

**20. What is the ultimate goal of topical Bible study?**

#### **TOPICAL STUDY PRACTICE PATH**

PRAYER - How did Jesus teach His disciples to pray?

FORGIVENESS - What does Scripture teach about forgiving someone who sins against another person?

FEAR - What does Scripture teach about trusting God when afraid?

MONEY - What does Scripture teach about contentment and possessions?

SUFFERING - How should Christians understand suffering and respond faithfully to it?

WORSHIP - What does Scripture reveal about worship that pleases God?

JUSTICE - What does Scripture teach about justice, mercy, and care for vulnerable people?

THE HOLY SPIRIT - What does the New Testament teach about the Holy Spirit's work in believers?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - What did Jesus mean when He proclaimed the kingdom of God?

Begin with a question. Then allow Scripture to shape the answer.

#### **ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE - POINTING TO JESUS**

A topical study can travel across dozens of passages. But the destination is not a list of verses.

A concordance is not the destination. A topical Bible is not the destination. A search result is not the destination. A commentary is not the destination. Even the study outline is not the destination.

The goal is to know God through His Word.

Ask the question. Open the Bible. Gather relevant passages. Read them in context. Listen carefully to each biblical author. Respect genre and covenant setting. Be alert to cultural assumptions. Look for repeated truths. Notice important distinctions. Do not hide difficult passages. Do not erase biblical tensions. Do not make Scripture say more than it says. Bring the evidence together. Follow God's unfolding story. Recognize Jesus where Scripture legitimately points to Him. Respond with faith and obedience. Then keep reading.

The best topical study does not merely answer a question. It teaches readers to ask better questions, search Scripture more carefully, and increasingly allow God's Word to shape what they believe.