What is the point of the Bible?



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"I've read and read… but what's the point?!"

My friend Joel* was confused and his frustration boiled over as we talked. A college student with a girlfriend and a new baby at home, Joel sincerely wanted to make better decisions for his young family. In his desperation he told me that he had begun to read the Bible for the first time in his life. And read he did!

Using a read–through–the–Bible–in–a–year approach, he bounced between much of the Old Testament and most of the gospels in only a few months' time. But his motivation was fading–fast!

Joel's efforts were highly commendable. In fact, many seasoned Christians would do well to learn from his diligence. But the sheer volume of new information, as well as the shuffling of the Bible's chronology, left Joel confused. He arrived at an unfortunate conclusion:

"The Bible has no point," he thought.

But nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible does have a main point. There are irreducible minimums—core essentials woven through its pages that combine into the greatest message anyone can know. But, like Joel, if one cannot identify and understand these truths, then trusting God's message might seem, well… **pointless**.

Of all the concepts taught in Scripture, what are the core essentials people need to grasp?

The Bible's core message has **FOUR irreducible minimums**:

1. A Holy God: God exists in all His majesty, being the Creator–Owner of the Universe. He is a loving, caring God but equally He is also a holy lawgiver. His holiness demands that His law be kept perfectly. He can have nothing to do with any lawbreaker. Only perfect people can live with a perfect God.

2. A Helpless Sinner: I was born into the world as a lawbreaker, alienated from God. I am far from perfect. God's law says that all sin demands the death penalty. Not only do I die physically, but I face something the Bible calls the second death–an eternity of suffering in the Lake of Fire. Since I am a sinner, there is no way I can avoid death. I am helpless.

3. A Sufficient Substitute: Jesus, God Himself, came to this earth to live as a man. He was perfect–sinless. Because He had no sin of His own to die for, He could die for someone else's sin. In His love, He died in my place–taking the consequences of my sin on Himself. As evidenced by Jesus' resurrection, God accepted that death as an overwhelmingly sufficient payment for my sin – a fulfillment of the requirement of His holy law.

4. A Personal Faith: I believe that when Jesus died on the cross, He died in my place. I rest in the fact that He alone has saved me from the judgment on my sin. In Him, my resurrected Savior, I now have a perfection that is not my own, but is counted as mine because I trust Him. I will enjoy life with God both now and forever in Heaven.

These four irreducible minimums are the core of the gospel. We want to communicate nothing less. Our students may forget other details, but when teaching the gospel, we want to make sure that they come to grip with these essentials.

What method of communication is used? As Joel and countless others have discovered, the Bible is a big book! To understand the above key facts, there are four principles of learning that need to come into play:

The Story–Telling principle: One does not read a story by starting halfway through the book, jumping to the last chapter, and then wrapping it up on page one. But much Bible study is built on that approach and, as Joel discovered, it can be a confusing method for first–timers. In studying the central message of the Bible, you need to start at the beginning of the story and then work through the Bible to a satisfactory completion. In other words, you get the whole story–the whole picture.

The Priority Principle: The Bible is a thick book with incredible detail, but not all its information is equally important. The message found in John 3:16 is of greater significance than that contained in the entire book of Song of Solomon. Both are scripture, both are profitable for the soul, but the message found in John 3:16 should have priority when teaching a novice about the Bible.

The Mathematical Principle: Another key to understanding the Bible is to build from the foundation up–a very simple educational concept. You don't start children in kindergarten by teaching them algebra. Rather, you begin with basic numbers and move from the simple to the complex. If you skip the fundamentals, even rudimentary algebra will be beyond your grasp. It's the same way with the Bible. If you neglect the foundations, your understanding of the Bible will be confused.

The Clarity Principle: Even though there are only a few key themes that run through the entire Bible, confusion results if you mix them together.

The use of these four learning principles is a highly effective means of helping people realize the "point" of the Bible's message. In GoodSeed, we call it The Emmaus Road Message (TERM). This approach achieves remarkable comprehension as it explains the person and work of Jesus Christ.

When I told my friend Joel that I understood his frustration and then explained the importance of understanding the Bible's irreducible minimums first and foremost, it really grabbed his interest. Both Joel and his girlfriend eagerly accepted an invitation to join my wife and me in a study through By This Name, using an approach to the Bible that we teach at our TERM Seminars. In the course of our study, the principles of learning brought clarity to their confusion and calmed their frustration.

> *"…they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Isaiah 6:10b NIV*

In other words, Joel and his girlfriend saw the point, heard the point, and understood the point of the Bible's message. And in the end, it made all the difference–they believed the point!

(*Name changed as per GoodSeed policy.)

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