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YEAR



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THE GOD  
OF YOUR  
STORY



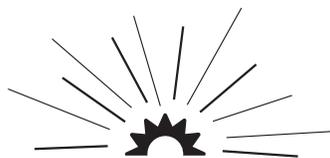
BRIAN HARDIN



*The One Year<sup>®</sup>  
Adventure with the  
God of Your Story*







THE ONE YEAR®

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# THE GOD OF YOUR STORY

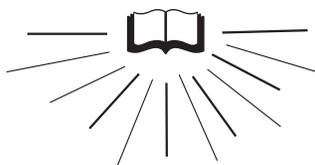
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BRIAN HARDIN

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The Team:

Don Pape, Publisher

Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor

Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor

Jennifer Ghionzoli, Designer

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# introduction

## DECEMBER 31 • *day 0*

**WELL, HERE WE** are. Together at the beginning. You may be feeling daunted by the idea of reading through the entire Bible over the course of this next year. And the Bible is an ancient, oversized book, to be sure. That's the problem most of us face when approaching it. We struggle to know how (or where) to begin. Part of that is because the Bible isn't one singular book, but rather a collection of sixty-six different writings, originally inspired in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek over millennia. Those different writings contain historical narrative, poetry, apocalyptic literature, wisdom tradition, public and private letters, prophecy, and Gospel narratives. Of course it's confusing! The Bible is a massive corpus that spans thousands of years of time and covers thousands of miles of geography.

But the Bible is a lot more approachable than we might think. You see, the Bible captures and preserves the account of God's unwillingness to be left out of the human story—and when we realize that, we soon discover that God is also unwilling to be left out of our own story. Understanding this changes everything, because the stories found in Scripture mirror our own lives profoundly.

If we approach the journey ahead as a relationship rather than a chance encounter or as a symphony rather than a pop song, we will quickly settle into a rhythm that will carry us from the first verse of Genesis to the final phrase of Revelation. And believe me, you will find much treasure between those two points as the God of your story reveals Himself.

Using these daily readings in conjunction with your own daily reading from *The One Year Bible*, you will be able to enjoy and appreciate the entire Bible without getting lost—and perhaps for the first time, the Bible will speak to you on its own behalf. Each day, we'll conclude with something to further think about or a moment of worship or prayer.

Obviously, we'll encounter all the famous stories we learned growing up. We'll also pass through all the famous passages that we quote to one another continually—but we'll experience them in their native context and understand why they were written in the first place, which is surprisingly important to how we understand their power in our lives. Even if we're students of the Bible who have spent much time and energy attempting to distill theological understandings, we still must remember to slow down and allow God's Word to unpack us, rather than the other way around.

If we'll settle into this rhythm, over the next year, the Bible will begin to have its own voice—and it will be the voice of a friend who is always honest. Many days, we will wonder how we ever negotiated life without this daily honesty in our lives.

This is the journey we are about to embark on. Our voyage will take 365 days and will be the journey of a lifetime. It's much easier to dream about than to do,

I admit. But this can be your year. You really can do this. All you have to do is show up every day. The Bible you might have been avoiding is about to become the best friend you've ever had.

Having said all that, a final word of counsel before we begin: Look in the mirror. Look at yourself inwardly and consider how your life feels right now. Perhaps you are anxious about the future. Maybe, for the first time, you feel lost within your own being. Perhaps the past year has brought you bloodied and limping to the Bible as a final hope. It doesn't matter. You are here now. Right now matters. Everything that comes next matters. Take a mental snapshot and remember this moment and how it feels. Three hundred and sixty-five days from now, you will look in the mirror and see a different person—if you show up every day.

This book comes from fourteen years of showing up every day, seven days a week, and allowing the Bible to speak as I've given it voice on the Daily Audio Bible.\* It also comes from two hard years of distilling what has come from that spoken work into written form. I have done my best to show up and offer a pathway through the Bible that will allow irreversible change from within. The rest is in your hands. The choices you make over the next 365 days will determine the story of your year. Make the Bible a daily decision. The journey awaits.

\* For ease of understanding, I sometimes interject the speaker's name when quoting Bible passages in daily readings.



## JANUARY 1 • *day 1*

*Genesis 1:1–2:25; Matthew 1:1–2:12; Psalm 1:1–6; Proverbs 1:1–6*

**OUR JOURNEY BEGINS** as all must—at the start, or in the beginning. Today’s reading is an important first step, because knowing where we’ve come from gives us the context we need to properly observe our own life’s story.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). These words launch us into the grand adventure. In one year, we will travel many dusty miles and meet deeply fascinating people who will become meaningful friends—for they are our spiritual ancestors. In their stories, our own hearts will be revealed.

Since we’re at the beginning, let’s orient ourselves to the territory we will first encounter in the Old Testament. Genesis is part of a larger grouping of writings that encompass the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). This grouping is called the Torah, or the Pentateuch. When we consider the book of Genesis, normally we think about the Creation story. But Genesis covers more time than any other book of the Bible—more time than the remainder of the Old Testament combined. Within the first eleven chapters of Genesis, we will cover a couple of millennia and a couple of thousand miles before slowing things down and focusing on several specific generations of people who fundamentally shape the rest of the Bible and influence our world today.

On this first of 365 days, we see God’s care and intentionality with all His creation. Our human experience has been fashioned in God’s own image, deriving its animating life source from the breath of God Himself. According to the Scriptures, we exist not by chance but by intention. Each of us is supposed to be here, and we each bear the image of a God who is intertwined with our story much deeper than cells and atoms.

Today we get an amazing and rare view of how things were always supposed to be for us: a perfect world with perfect people created in God’s image. When we contrast this image of perfection with the world we currently live in, we get a sobering sense of how the story has turned over the millennia—but we’ll get to that over the next few days.

Together, we’ll be surprised by how often what we read in the Bible will mirror our own hearts and motives. And we’ll be delighted to understand that God is not a distant and uninterested Being. He is deeply invested in the human story and deeply in love with what He has fashioned.

**MEDITATION:**

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. PSALM 1:1-3

## JANUARY 2 • *day 2*

*Genesis 3:1–4:26; Matthew 2:13–3:6; Psalm 2:1-12; Proverbs 1:7-9*

**TODAY'S READING UNVEILS** one of the saddest stories in the Bible. We know this story as “the fall of man,” and it reveals the trajectory of the rest of Scripture. This story is the beginning of the larger story: the reason for God’s willingness to come here in the person of Jesus to rescue His creation.

In the Garden of Eden, God offered Adam and Eve the tree of life and prohibited them from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It’s easy to wonder at the purpose of a prohibited fruit. But this tree gives us an incredible picture of how deeply invested God is in a first-person relationship with us. True love isn’t something that can be faked. Enslavement can shape someone’s behavior—if the consequences are dire enough—but authentic and true love can only be offered freely from the heart. Love can’t be true if there is no way out. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil appears to be exactly that.

Unfortunately, a deception was hatched, and our first mother and father dreamed of becoming like God, tragically forgetting that they already were. Adam and Eve chose to eat, contrary to God’s command, with devastating repercussions. The catastrophic depths of this choice is revealed in God’s heartbreaking question: “What have you done?” (Genesis 3:13).

“I was naked, so I hid,”<sup>1</sup> was the response. We have been hiding ever since. We see it every day in the way we interact with each other. We curate and present our best selves while hiding who we really are. The trade was perfection and true love in exchange for knowledge, and we have attempted to use that knowledge to imitate Sovereignty—with frightening and terrible results.

Throughout history, humankind has worked to remain self-directed, but this has not brought us back to God. We will not find our way back to God. Only God can bring us back to Himself, and He is. This is the story of the Bible.

**MEDITATION:**

Serve the LORD with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling. PSALM 2:11

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s paraphrase.

# JANUARY 3 • *day 3*

*Genesis 5:1–7:24; Matthew 3:7–4:11; Psalm 3:1-8; Proverbs 1:10-19*

**IN OUR FIRST** few days, we've gained a context for the stories that are beginning to unfold before us. Yesterday, we learned of humankind's fall from perfection and complete intimacy with God. Murder and death entered the human story—things we were never intended to endure.

Today in Genesis, we jumped a millennium into the future and saw the devastating results. Humankind had become so corrupt that they acted as animals and had only evil intentions. God regretted creating them. To see us so far from our created state of perfection and intimacy grieved His heart (Genesis 6:5-6). But there was one righteous man: Noah. And we saw a redemptive thread weaving its way into the story as a reset of the earth came by way of a great flood.

Since we took a moment a couple of days ago to orient ourselves to the book of Genesis, we should also consider the first book of the New Testament, and the first of a grouping of four books known as the Gospels: Matthew.

When Matthew became a disciple of Jesus, he left his prosperous former life altogether. He had to. He had previously been a tax collector and was considered a betrayer of his people, the Jews.

Although Matthew appears first in the New Testament, it is likely the second Gospel chronologically, with Mark being first (we'll get to that later). Matthew was written in Greek but was originally intended for a Jewish audience. We know this because it quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) more than any other Gospel and reveals Jesus as the Hebrew Messiah by demonstrating the ways in which Jesus fulfilled Hebrew messianic prophecies.

In today's New Testament reading, we followed Jesus as He went into the wilderness, where Satan challenged Him. While in the wilderness, the evil one tempted Jesus with an invitation to abort his mission and inherit the earth the easy way. All Jesus needed to do was bow to him. Jesus was the first perfect person to walk on the earth since Adam, and Satan put the same type of humanity-twisting temptation before him. But Jesus made a different choice: He rebuked the evil one and sent him away.

We confront similar temptations every day. And we either respond to them like Adam and Eve—or like Jesus. Each of us daily choose whether to eat of forbidden fruit or to know God by intimately walking with Him in every thought, word, and deed. How will you choose today?

## **WORSHIP:**

You, O LORD, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high. PSALM 3:3

# JANUARY 4 • *day 4*

*Genesis 8:1–10:32; Matthew 4:12–25; Psalm 4:1–8; Proverbs 1:20–23*

**TODAY IN GENESIS**, we watched the floodwaters recede and Noah and his family once again place their feet on dry ground. Scripture unfurls a list of the generations that followed, revealing the ways in which the earth’s population grew and spread.

In Matthew, we saw Jesus’ earthly ministry begin and how He called together men who left everything behind to follow Him. We’ll get to know them well, for they become the band of brothers who will walk alongside Jesus throughout His ministry.

Our reading from Psalms today hits us between the eyes, but before we get to that, let’s begin to understand what we are reading when we read from the psalms. Believe it or not, Psalms is actually five books in one, and we’ll notice when we’re moving into another book because it’s announced. The books are largely separated by author, theme, or purpose, and from antiquity, the Psalms have been considered a priceless collection of 150 of the most beautiful songs, hymns, congregational singings, individual songs, and poems of worship the world has ever seen.

A voice we will truly get to know in the Psalms will be that of Israel’s second king, David. Although we will be offered an intimate portrait of this courageous and deeply human king in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, the Psalms will reveal his heart.

“Don’t sin by letting anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent,” the poet-king David told us in the Psalms today (4:4). David will teach us a lot about ourselves in the days ahead. After all, how often are we reactionary, as if life is happening to us rather than the other way around? David gave us compelling advice that echoes across the millennia. Imagine the immediate effect it would have on our daily lives if each of us was not controlled by anger and allowed for silence and perspective instead.

“Come and listen to my counsel. I’ll share my heart with you and make you wise,” we read in Proverbs, as if to bring the point home (Proverbs 1:23). May we accept this invitation and make space in our lives for wisdom to guide us.

## **MEDITATION:**

You can be sure of this: The LORD set apart the godly for himself. The LORD will answer when I call to him. PSALM 4:3

# JANUARY 5 • *day 5*

*Genesis 11:1–13:4; Matthew 5:1–26; Psalm 5:1–12; Proverbs 1:24–28*

**IN OUR READING** from Genesis, humankind planned to build a tower to the heavens as a memorial to themselves. But again, God intervened. We were never intended to be sovereign unto ourselves. Self-sufficiency is contrary to our true

nature, which is to be intimately connected with God. So God disrupted the plans at Babel—He confused the language of the people, and humans spread across the earth as a result.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus began to teach one of His foundational messages, known as the Sermon on the Mount. This disruptive message describes a world that we long for but have no idea how to achieve—which may be the point. Like the people at the tower of Babel, we cannot achieve the life we long for by our own cunning and ingenuity. We may accomplish marvelous things, but without a total dependence on God, we are completely unable to fill the void within ourselves. Jesus spoke of the countless blessings for those who reach the end of their own strength and ability, only to find God there. We are happiest when we depend on God for everything we are and everything we ever will be.

May we truly depend on God today in every choice we make and word we speak, knowing that we are safe in His care when we live in the light and walk in truth. It’s our choice.

In Proverbs today, we see that this choice has always been before us:

*I called you so often, but you wouldn’t come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. You ignored my advice and rejected the correction I offered.* Proverbs 1:24-25

These words resonate because we know we’ve been that person. But this is a new day. May we pay vigilant attention to the voice of Wisdom as we move forward. We’ll be surprised at how often it will snap us awake and clearly speak clarity into immediate situations.

**PRAYER:**

Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread your protection over them, that all who love your name may be filled with joy. PSALM 5:11

## JANUARY 6 • *day 6*

Genesis 13:5–15:21; Matthew 5:27-48; Psalm 6:1-10; Proverbs 1:29-33

**YESTERDAY, WE GOT** a brief introduction to a man named Abram, who we’ll get to know much better in the coming days. Eventually, his name will become Abraham, and the reverberations of his life echo until today—for it is through him that the faith we freely enjoy finds an anchor.

God called Abram to a land he did not know and promised him that the land—as far as he could see in all directions—would one day belong to his family. This land would eventually become known as the “Promised Land.” There was a problem, though: Abram was getting old and had no children to inherit the land, regardless of the promise. God invited him outside and, against the backdrop of an immense sky of stars, told him:

*Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That's how many descendants you will have!* Genesis 15:5

Abram had faith in God at that moment, and God considered him righteous because of it (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's faith is going to become very, very important when we begin to explore Christian doctrine through the eyes of the apostle Paul.

The next time you have a moment of uncertainty regarding your faith, go outside and look at the stars. Remember that God is faithful to those who trust Him.

In the Proverbs today, the voice of Wisdom shows us the alternative to trusting God:

*They hated knowledge and chose not to fear the LORD. They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. Therefore, they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes.* Proverbs 1:29-31

We have a choice in this. We can fall into the overwhelming grace of a loving God by doing nothing more than trusting and intimately walking with Him, or we can choke on our own schemes. This is always the choice before us, but it's not because God is pompous or tyrannical. It's because this is how we were made—to know and be known by God.

**PRAYER:**

Return, O LORD, and rescue me. Save me because of your unfailing love.

PSALM 6:4

## **JANUARY 7** • *day 7*

Genesis 16:1–18:15; Matthew 6:1-24; Psalm 7:1-17; Proverbs 2:1-5

**ABRAHAM RECEIVED A** promise from God that his progeny would one day inherit a Promised Land. But Abraham had no children. And in today's reading, God told Abraham how He was going to fulfill His promise.

"I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!" God told Abraham (Genesis 18:10).

Sarah overheard this and laughed to herself because she was too old to have children. But God confronted her and reiterated that she would in fact bear a son.

What have you been holding out hope for in life? What if you were promised, "About this time next year . . ."? Would hope rise? Or have you been laughing at the impossible?

In our New Testament reading, Jesus has much to teach us about living in the Kingdom of God. Throughout His life on earth, Jesus was the picture of true servanthood, and His words point us to how we should live:

*If you're going to help somebody, don't make a big deal about it, broadcasting your good deeds so that you get praise and affirmation. If that's what you're after, then you already have your reward. But if you want to find a correct heart's posture, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Do it in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will give you your reward.*

*When you pray, don't be fake and proclaim elaborate and complex prayers so everyone can see how "godly" and "spiritual" you are. Go into your private room, pray to your Father in secret, and he will hear you.<sup>2</sup>*

And then—a statement that we ignore at our own peril: “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Mic drop. Jaw drop.

Forgiveness is not an option in God's Kingdom. But forgiveness does not mean that we pretend things didn't happen. Rather, it means that we have a place to release those people and events in our lives that may have sabotaged us for too long. Forgiveness is a command—yes—but it's also an invitation to the emancipation of our souls. When we forgive, we are forgiven.

**WORSHIP:**

I will thank the LORD because he is just; I will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High. PSALM 7:17

## JANUARY 8 • *day 8*

*Genesis 18:16–19:38; Matthew 6:25–7:14; Psalm 8:1-9; Proverbs 2:6-15*

**IN OUR OLD** Testament reading today, we witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God came and verified for Himself the evil reputation of the civilizations in the Jordan valley, and He did not let their sin stand.

But as devastating as the scene is, we find amazing beauty in how God engages with Abraham here. Abraham's nephew Lot was among those living in the valley, and God first asked, “Should I hide my plan from Abraham?” (Genesis 18:17). Was this a rhetorical question? Why would God ask if He didn't want to share His heart? And why would He want to share His heart if He didn't want Abraham to know it?

A conversation ensued in which Abraham asked God if He would spare the towns if fifty righteous people were present. Then forty-five. Then forty. Then thirty. Then twenty. Then ten. What's beautiful about this exchange is that God was willing to have the conversation. As Abraham continued to negotiate lower numbers, God's response revealed the truth: God wasn't interested in indiscriminately causing destruction. The presence of the righteous could certainly hold

<sup>2</sup> Author's paraphrase of Matthew 6:1-5.