

The ONE  
YEAR®

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**UNLOCKING  
THE BIBLE**  
DEVOTIONAL

**COLIN S. SMITH**  
*with* TIM AUGUSTYN

# The One Year® Unlocking the Bible Devotional



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## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Many people know some stories from the Bible but do not know the Bible's story.

Whether you've been reading the Bible for years or are just starting out, one of the great dangers you face is the real possibility of missing the forest for the trees. But once you begin to see the Bible as one story that begins with two people in a garden, ends with a vast crowd of people in a city, and all along the way points to Jesus Christ, God's Word will be wonderfully unlocked for you.

For years I've been encouraging people to read through the Bible in order to grasp the big picture of the Bible's story line. I first gave a series of eighty messages through the Old and New Testaments at The Orchard Evangelical Free Church, which were later adapted by Moody Publishers into four volumes called *Unlocking the Bible Story*. In this devotional, I've collected and arranged that material—and added some fresh insights—so that it can most profitably be read over the course of one year.

As you get started, you'll notice that you can travel either by date (January 1, January 2, etc.) or by day (Day 1, Day 2, etc.). I encourage you, whatever the date today, to start at the beginning with Day 1. As with any good story, the Author has left clues at the beginning that will help you to understand what is happening (and why it's happening) later on. Starting with Day 1 will help you better understand and more fully appreciate each part of the story so that you can see how it all fits together.

Welcome to the journey!



January 1 | DAY 1

## INTRODUCTION: GOD'S BIOGRAPHY

*In the beginning God . . .* GENESIS 1:1

THE BIBLE IS one marvelous story that people sometimes shelve in the *fiction* section of their mind, alongside myths, legends, and fables. But it belongs in the *biography* section. In this book God reveals himself. He tells us about who he is. He also tells us who we are, why we are here, what we were made for, and where we are going.

The Bible is one story that begins with two people in a garden and ends with a crowd, too many to number, in a city. In the Bible, God tells us the story of how we got from this beginning to where we are today, and how we will get from where we are today to the ending he has revealed.

Many people today know a number of stories *from* the Bible, but they do not know the story *of* the Bible. That is like holding a bunch of pearls in your hand but having no string to hang them on.

What we want to do this year is string the pearls together to make a necklace. If you stay on this one-year journey, you will be able to do that, and you will have a good grasp of the story of the Bible.

The Bible was written over a period of fifteen hundred years, beginning with Moses and ending with the apostle John, fifty to sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. But the whole Bible has one main subject or focus, and that is Jesus Christ himself.

After his resurrection, Jesus began with Moses and the prophets and taught the Old Testament to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As far as he was concerned, the whole of the Old Testament is about him. It shines a light on who he is, why he came, what he has done, and what he can do in our lives today.

As we move through the Bible's themes, it will be like taking a diamond and turning it in the sun. Each facet reflects another brilliant shaft of light. Each of these themes will help us to understand something of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE LUKE 24



January 2 | DAY 2

## PROLOGUE: RAISING THE CURTAIN

*In the beginning . . .* GENESIS 1:1

SUPPOSE YOU AND a friend have tickets to a major play called *The Bible Story*, but because of traffic, you arrive late to the theater. You walk into the lobby and discover that it's already intermission! You figure you might as well stay. Besides, you've heard that the New Testament is the best part.

You hear the buzz of conversation about act 1, then the lights fade. It's time to get a seat. You sit down just in time for the beginning of act 2. But you have entirely missed act 1, so you know nothing about what came first, the Old Testament.

The curtain rises, and a manger and a newborn child are at center stage. As the scene unfolds, you learn that this is no ordinary child. Unlike any other character in human history, he has no human father. He is born of a virgin, and an angel announces that this child is the Son of God, "God . . . with us" (Matthew 1:23), and that "he will save his people from their sins" (1:21).

You overhear a wife say to her husband, "This is it! He will be the one who was promised. You wait and see; it will all center around him. He'll be the answer to the problem."

But you've just arrived, and you don't know what the problem is.

You hear that he is the Son of God, but you don't know who God is. You hear that he will save his people, but you don't know who his people are or what they need saving from! Having missed act 1, you struggle to grasp what this story is about.

That is the position many people are in today. They hear the story of Jesus, but they do not understand it because they don't know the Bible story. If you don't know who God is, humanity's problem, or the promise God has made, the coming of Christ will seem like nothing more than a sentimental story. This is why we need to unlock the Bible story. Act 2 won't make sense until we have grasped act 1.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE ACTS 17

January 3 | DAY 3

## THE AUTHOR TAKES THE STAGE

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* GENESIS 1:1

IMAGINE YOURSELF AT a theater for the performance of a new play. The curtain goes up and the stage is empty. Then the author walks out and introduces himself. He tells you who he is, why he wrote the play, and what it is about. Without apology or argument, the author simply begins to speak about himself and his work.

The Bible begins with God walking onto the stage and introducing himself. This is his story, and so right at the beginning, God introduces himself to us. As we follow the Bible story, we will discover more about who he is and what he has done, but the first thing God wants us to know is that he is here.

God wants us to know that what we are about to see is entirely his work. This is of great importance because the creator has the rights of an owner. If I say, “Have it your way,” you will probably think of Burger King, or if I say, “Just do it,” you will think of Nike—because a slogan belongs to its creator.

A creator always has the rights of ownership, and God owns all that he has made. If your life were an accident arising from millennia of human history, then you would be a free agent, accountable to no one but yourself. But if you were created, then your Creator has the full rights of ownership over your life.

Either you are an accident of history and completely free to do whatever you please with your life—to indulge it or trash it or end it—and if that is the case, your life is ultimately meaningless; or you are a created being, and your Creator has absolute rights of ownership over your life.

God introduces himself as our Creator and therefore our owner. You are not your own. Your life is a trust given to you from God. You are not worthless or aimless; God chose to bring you into being. He did it on purpose, and you will discover that purpose as you get to know him.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE GENESIS 1

January 4 | DAY 4

## THE IMAGE OF GOD

*Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image."* GENESIS 1:26

AFTER FIVE DAYS of creation, the crowning moment has come: "Let us make human beings . . ." It is almost as if God has a conversation with himself: "Let's do it! Let's make them in our image, in our likeness." An image is a reflection, so God is telling us that he made us, male and female (see Genesis 1:27), to reflect something of his own nature and glory.

This image of God is what distinguishes people from animals. The animals were made *by* God, but they were not made to be *like* God. That is why no man or woman should ever be treated like an animal or behave like an animal.

At the center of the Bible story, we find God taking on the form of a human. Why did he take the form of a man and not an animal? Because man was made in the image of God. People who believe that they are simply developed animals have missed the most fundamental thing God says about them.

God made the first man from the dust of the ground, so we should not be surprised that animals have a biological makeup similar to ours. But there is more to man than biology: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person" (Genesis 2:7).

God formed a corpse, complete with a skeletal frame, and breathed his own breath into it. It became a living being. God is always doing what he did that day, giving "everyone life and breath" (Acts 17:25, NIV). He sustains you one breath at a time. You are absolutely dependent upon God.

If you can grasp that you are made in God's image and that you are dependent on him, you will discover great dignity, and at the same time, profound humility.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE COLOSSIANS 1

January 5 | DAY 5

## TAKING A WALK WITH GOD

*When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. GENESIS 3:8*

**GOD IS INVISIBLE.** He is Spirit. Yet right from the beginning of the Bible story, he has been reaching out to make himself known. That's why the Lord God made himself visible, "walking" with Adam in the Garden.

God revealed himself first in a beautiful garden called Eden. We call each appearance of God in visible form a "theophany." The Old Testament has many examples of this, and in the New Testament the Son of God became a man, so it should not seem strange that he should appear in a visible form here. These appearances show us God's intense desire to establish fellowship with humans.

It is almost as if the Son of God could not wait to come. He burst out of heaven, entering human time and space, and he came to earth so that he could walk with the first man and woman in the Garden. Adam and Eve heard the crackling of twigs and the rustling of leaves. They walked with the Son of God in Eden as surely as Peter, James, and John walked with the Son of God in Galilee.

As Adam and Eve walked with God, they asked questions and enjoyed conversation. Can you imagine what this must have been like? God was interested in what Adam had done during the day, and he listened to whatever was on Eve's mind. God also spoke to them. The man and the woman were literally walking in fellowship with God.

When God appeared *visibly* to Adam and Eve, he did for them what he does *invisibly* for all his people. We cannot see God, but Jesus Christ gives us access to the Father when we come in faith. This is God's way of creating a relationship with you. His presence is as real as it was when he appeared in visible form to Adam. Think about that when you pray.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE 1 JOHN 1

January 6 | DAY 6

## A PLACE CALLED HOME

*The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east,  
and there he placed the man he had made.* GENESIS 2:8

IT IS DIFFICULT to be precise about the location of Eden, but it is important to grasp that it was a real place. The book of Genesis is part of the revelation God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai, so when it says Eden was “in the east,” we are talking about a location somewhere east of Sinai.

We are also told about four rivers (see Genesis 2:10-14)—the Pishon and the Gihon, which are not known to us, and the Tigris and the Euphrates, which run through modern-day Iraq. These landmarks do not give us an exact location, but we can have confidence that the Lord planted a garden somewhere in this area of the Middle East. What a garden it must have been!

The significant thing is that the Lord put the man there. God created a particular place where Adam would know and enjoy his blessing. It is quite possible that God created Adam outside the Garden and then brought him to Eden, saying, “This is the place I have prepared for you!”

I find it helpful to remember that God does the same thing for us. He has determined the exact places for us to live (see Acts 17:26). Try to imagine God walking with you into your home, saying, “This is where I want you to be,” or walking with you into your church, saying, “This is the place I have prepared for you to grow.”

The place where God puts you will not be perfect—even Eden was exposed to the possibility of evil. But there is no better place to be than where God has set you down. You are not where you are by accident, but by the plan and purpose of God. This is one of God’s greatest blessings to us. When we know, as Adam did, that God has placed us where we are, we will find strength in the most difficult of times.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE PSALM 16

January 7 | DAY 7

## THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE

*[God] brought them to the man to see what he would call them,  
and the man chose a name for each one. GENESIS 2:19*

ONE OF THE contributions of science is naming things. Scientists observe, reflect on what they see, and then describe it. You may remember that it was God who named the day and the night (see Genesis 1:5), but now he invites Adam, the world's first scientist, to participate in his work, giving him the responsibility of naming each creature.

Right from the beginning, Adam was occupied with the work of naming the animals and caring for the Garden: "The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it" (Genesis 2:15). This should not surprise us, because the Bible begins with God working. Work is a good gift from God, a reflection of his own character and activity.

It is important to note that Adam was never overwhelmed by his work *while he was in the Garden*. Work existed *before* sin entered the world, and work will continue *after* sin has been taken away. Adam never knew what it was like to be frustrated with his work until after he was outside the Garden.

Unfortunately, frustration with work did not end with Adam. It is something we all need to be saved from, and God's saving purpose includes restoring us to the position from which Adam fell—that means being master *over* our work instead of being mastered *by* our work.

Notice that God brought the animals to Adam. God took a personal interest in Adam's daily work. That's worth thinking about as you work at your desk, on the shop floor, in school, or by the kitchen sink.

It may be hard for you to imagine that God would enjoy the documents you prepare, the tests you take, the components you assemble, or the home you create, but he does. When you know this, you'll begin to find a new joy in your work.

FOR FURTHER READING, SEE ROMANS 6