

Daily podcast that leads listeners through Bible's narrative is No. 1 in U.S.

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS)(UPDATED) – If great minds had brainstormed how to create a podcast that would jump to No. 1 in Apple's podcast rankings, they never would have landed on "[The Bible in a Year](#)," joked Jeff Cavins, a Bible scholar and creator of the Great Adventure Bible Timeline.

Yet, two weeks into 2021, "The Bible in a Year" with Father Mike Schmitz tops the charts – and has since 48 hours after its Jan. 1 launch.

With the backing of Ascension, a multimedia Catholic publisher, Cavins and Father Schmitz, a priest of the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota, and popular Catholic speaker and author, created "The Bible in a Year," a daily podcast that leads listeners through the Bible's narrative.

The aim is for listeners to understand how God's plan for mankind's salvation undergirds biblical events and the lives of its central figures.

"Instead of just knowing stories of the Bible, we're trying to get people to know the story of salvation, of salvation history," said Cavins, a member of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

Each episode is about 20 minutes and includes Father Schmitz reading several chapters from Scripture, often from different books, and then giving a short reflection on the readings.

The reading chronology is based on the Great Adventure Bible Timeline reading plan, which organizes the 14 narrative books of the Bible into 12 periods in order to help readers

understand how they relate to one another and to God's plan for salvation. That plan is designed for three months, so Cavins expanded it for "The Bible in a Year."

What makes the reading plan for "The Bible in a Year" – and the Great Adventure Bible Timeline – successful is that it helps readers follow the story without losing a sense of the narrative in a non-narrative book, Cavins told *The Catholic Spirit*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Many people approach the Bible as a book to be read from cover to cover, and when they start at the beginning, they read through Genesis and Exodus – narrative books – only to get stuck in Leviticus – a non-narrative book – and abandon the project.

Rather than a single book, the Bible is better understood as a library, Cavins said, and people benefit from a "librarian" to help them understand how it works together.

"People are lost about how to read the Bible, and we feel that it's a crisis in the church today," he said. "God wants us to know his heart ... and he wants us to know his plan."

Cavins and Father Schmitz expected to meet a need among Catholics for an entry point into understanding Scripture, but Cavins said he was amazed the program is so popular, with more than 1 million downloads in its first five days, and more than 3.5 million by Jan. 12.

Apple Podcasts listed it at No. 1 Jan. 3, above chart-toppers "The Daily" from The New York Times, "Crime Junkie" and "The Joe Rogan Experience."

There's widespread hunger for the word of God and people want to find – and do – something positive after the hardships of 2020, Cavins said.

“I think that the reaction is fantastic,” Father Schmitz told *The Catholic Spirit*. “It reveals that many people truly do want to know and understand the Bible, but that they also want a plan and a guide. My hope is that this BIY is a helpful plan, and that I am a reliable guide.”

In a Jan. 5 news release, Ascension founder and president Matthew Pinto said the company is “overwhelmed by the staggering response to this podcast.”

“We had hoped that this program would be exciting to our listeners, but this huge level of response is truly unbelievable,” he said. “People are hungry for God, and we’re honored to help them encounter God’s word through a daily podcast, especially as so many of us continue to be cut off from our parishes, communities, and loved ones during these difficult days.”

Cavins attributes the podcast’s out-of-the-gates success to the simplicity and mobility of the medium itself, Catholics’ familiarity with the Great Adventure Bible Timeline learning system and Father Schmitz’s popularity as a speaker, which includes a large following for his catechetical YouTube videos, “Ascension Presents.”

“We wanted to shine a light in the darkness,” Cavins said. “The greatest message that people need in their life right now is that God loves them and has a plan for their life. They are two things that we’re trying to emphasize.”

The podcast format makes it simple for subscribers to listen to the daily episode while commuting, making dinner or starting their day, Cavins said. And because most listeners are likely accessing it from their smartphones, it’s “salvation history in your pocket,” he said.

In Ascension’s Jan. 5 news release, Father Schmitz said he wanted to create the podcast “because my own mind was being filled with a lot of chaotic voices.”

“Some were wise, many were merely distracting,” he said. “I think that a lot of people are tired of those same distracting and temporary voices. And they want what I want: to allow our hearts and minds to be shaped by something eternal – God’s eternal word.”

He said that Cavins’ Great Adventure Bible Timeline changed his own relationship with Scripture, and called it a “phenomenal resource” for organizing the 73 books of Scripture.

“I hope that, by being exposed to the word of God in Scripture, everyone who listens will find the way they see the world, others, and themselves through the lens of the wisdom of God,” Father Schmitz told *The Catholic Spirit*. “I desire that all those who participate in the BIY will allow their worldview to be shaped by God’s word.”

“The Bible in a Year” includes a reading plan so subscribers can also read the day’s readings themselves, but Cavins said that “there is something powerful about hearing the word of God that goes into your heart.” He pointed to Romans 10:17, “so then faith comes by hearing the word of God.”

“We really do truly believe that if people will listen to God’s word, it has a way of changing your life and your thinking,” he said.

The show’s 365 total podcasts will cover every verse of the Bible.

“The Bible in a Year” is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other podcast platforms, and through Hallow, a Catholic prayer app.

Wiering is editor of The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.