



BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

This is the first book of the Bible, and its name means “beginning”. It’s a collection of origin stories, not just for the physical world but for some of the biggest forces which shape us and our desires.

Good and evil, togetherness, rejection, fruitfulness, frustration, grace and redemption all have origin stories in Genesis.

Thursday January 2: Genesis 1-3

In the beginning, God

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Isn't this awesome? Let me confess upfront that I'm a fan of God and of science, and I would find it weird to treat Genesis like a science textbook. Thankfully, I don't think it was ever meant as one. Instead, the Bible opens with a collection of stories which lay a foundation for making sense of our place and significance in the universe.

But look – it's not initially about us. That's important. I love that the writer of Genesis, with a huge stack of accounts to share about human nature, relationships, good and evil, big forces at play in human life, grabs our attention with this: "In the beginning, God".

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

This is the really big point. There will be no end to the books we could write about human nature, just as we keep discovering more about the physics of matter and how we are literally made of stardust from across the galaxy.

But how do we make sense of who we are? "In the beginning, God"

How do we understand why we feel the way we do? "In the beginning, God"

How can we account for our conflicts and how to deal with them? "In the beginning, God"

Because God was first, it's not my universe, world, country, city, house or chair that I'm sitting in. It only feels like it is, especially if I forget that "In the beginning, God".

And even more amazing, amid all that stuff, God knows and loves us. Even knowing what we would do, turning away from him to do things our own way, that love remains the defining force in our world.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to be better this year at beginning with God. I don't mean squeezing in a "quiet time" at 6am. I mean looking at life, things to plan, problems to overcome and stuff to celebrate in a way that recognises God's presence and love first. I've spent long enough worrying sometimes before turning to God. What if I remember God in the beginning instead?

Who am I going to share this with?

My main place of sharing about God, who he is and how he works, is within family. So I think this will shape our conversations about things we might be planning, looking forward to or worrying about in 2020. I especially want our son to know, from the beginning of his life, that God is the foundation and not an afterthought for us.

Friday January 3: Genesis 4-7

God is present in our struggles

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

These origin stories of outrage, anger, pride and destruction are not comfortable to hear. But I do find them relatable. It feels like human nature to react to hurt by pushing back harder. I'm sure most of us haven't gone as far as Lamech, who said, "I have killed a man for wounding me," but I recognise wanting to have the last word. We can probably all think of world leaders who believe that doubled-down aggression is the best way to deal with threats.

I don't like that at all. But I love that it's recognised in the first chapters of the human story here, told with purpose as God has a plan to deal with it and save us from ourselves.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I know people who doubt that God can be real because of suffering in their lives or in the world. Why can't God just wipe it out, make it go away? I think these stories show me how seriously God wants us to have the good lives he made us for, but also why it's not as simple as "just make it stop".

Noah's story shows the extent God could go to reset the world – listening to the ark filling up was like hearing creation in reverse. But God didn't call it a final day. Creation is in his nature, and he wants us to join him in that too. This includes remembering that God has always been present in the struggles we feel between good and evil, justice and injustice.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I think I'm a good (or at least not bad) person, but I recognise the battle with sin, especially when I'm feeling proud of doing well on my own, or when I let frustration with little things turn into anger and bitterness which affect everything. I'm going to bring that to God more often and trust him more.

Who am I going to share this with?

Our local school community is very interested in distinguishing good from bad so that the school is a healthy place for children to grow and not a battleground. The school recently introduced "restorative justice" as a way of dealing with bad behaviour, and as a governor I want to keep God's ideas of justice and mercy in mind as we evaluate this.

We also have our own son Noah to send into school every day, and we would love him to grow up as full of faith and readiness to obey God as Noah in the Bible. There is lots to share here as he learns to judge well and put love into practice.

Monday January 6: Genesis 8-10

It's time for a fresh start

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love that God knows who we are and chooses to love us. Life's emergence from the ark was like a recreation of creation and, through Noah, God established a covenant with us. This was despite God knowing that "every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood..." (chapter 8 verse 21)

God refuses to let go. The rainbow was a sign of the commitment from God to life on earth, all inclusive, regardless of our imperfections.

I'm struck by how the massive growth of life and families which followed was under this rainbow covenant sky.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I'm continuing to notice what makes God a good father. His parental commitment to us includes unconditional love. Whatever rotten choices we make, God doesn't ignore evil or call it good, but he still loves us and calls us to call him Father. A family, we believe and keep discovering, needs stability to grow, and God leads us by showing how this can work.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

We have two rules for bringing up our son Noah. One is that he must know how much he is loved, which enables the other rule, that we should encourage and expect him to grow in loving others. I am reminded here that no-one can know how much they are loved until they know God's love, because it's the biggest and best. So for me to do my promised parental job, I must check more about how Noah is learning and believing in God's love, not just ours.

Who am I going to share this with?

This is a great family discussion topic! My wife Helen and I will need to lead the way in how we share about what we know and keep seeing about God's love. Then we will encourage Noah to do the same, and I'm looking forward to learning from him too!

Tuesday January 7: Genesis 11-14

What can God build with us?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

The difference between life remembering or forgetting "In the beginning, God..." is a big theme of Genesis. From its early chapters and our own experience, we have seen the pride and violence which multiply when trying to build life around human achievements and material.

So while Babel's story is intriguing, I love the contrast between trying to build a tower and succeeding in building an awesome family line. We might think our legacy is bound up in what we make, but we're already part of something God has been building since the beginning of everything.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God loves relationship with us. He didn't leave it to chance and took the initiative to call Abram into relationship and build a special, recognisably miraculous family line through him.

It's clear that God chose to do this despite Abram not being perfect. He was a normal person with fears about life and family, and he made some questionable choices. But God knew that he would grow in faith, listening to God, worshiping and obeying, crediting God when blessed. So he and his family could be an example to the world of what can happen in relationship with God. I'm sure Abram could not imagine the effect God would have on the world through him.

This means that our lives are not about what we can build as much as what God can build with us.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Spend more time today in prayer, little and often. I like that God has entrusted us to do things, but I want to be sure in my heart that I am following him like Abram, and not trying just to make a name for myself like the Babel builders.

Who am I going to share this with?

My family and some people in our community that I would like to reach out to pray with.

Thursday January 9: Genesis 15-17

Can we believe in an incredible God?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

When God makes a promise, he sticks with it, even when it seems impossible to believe. The steps Abram needs to walk through as a sign of God's covenant promise are incredibly vivid, with blood everywhere, symbolising the cost of breaking a covenant. Even though the promise of a natural-born son seemed ridiculous, Abram believed God, and that was enough for God to judge that his life was right on track, or "righteous".

What I find most amazing is that God stuck to his covenant plan, even when Abram's wife had enough doubt to arrange a more sensible sounding "plan B".

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is incredibly relentless in his efforts to turn us from destructive, self-centred lives to creative, God-centred lives. He takes the initiative in making covenant commitments and credits our faith in him as the main thing in a healthy life.

The covenant sign of circumcision is intimate and, some would say, extreme. It's something no adult would want without a very good reason. Why would God command it? While we can't say for sure, we can see from centuries of Jewish history that it led people to remember God and take their distinctive sign of identifying with the covenant tribe seriously. God knows how important symbols can be for us, and he uses them a lot to make his work meaningful and memorable in our lives.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I'm glad that we have a new covenant through Jesus! But is my life truly defined by my faith in him? Next time I am trying to succeed in something purely by my own strength, I want to be quicker to credit what God has done and wants to do with me instead.

Who am I going to share this with?

I hope we'll have a chance to chat about this soon with others from church, including our house group and people who did "The SHAPE of you" course last year.

Friday January 10: Genesis 18-21

God takes action

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Although Genesis has already established that God promised not to deal with sin by drowning the world, does that mean that God just lets us get on with it? I'm glad that he does not, at least according to the story of Sodom.

I think it's important that we get what Sodom's sin was, especially as we have an English word which could distract us from the point. The only sex threatened in this story was violent rape, but even that was not the main thing described by Ezekiel: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16:49)

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God takes the quality of our lives seriously. He is concerned about the root causes of the sin which causes problems for us. He also made it clear in this story that he would not want the innocent to suffer for other people's sin. But he has the power to deal with the worst irredeemable situations.

Having said that, as we now know Jesus, this reminds me of how his followers once asked him if they should call fire down from heaven, and he rebuked them. He gives us power to deal with sin differently, as we can find and share forgiveness.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

How seriously do I take arrogance, being overfed and unconcerned in my own life? That's probably something I'm not able to judge on my own! So while I love being forgiven thanks to Jesus, I need to consult with others to avoid some of the root causes of sin.

Who am I going to share this with?

Not sure at the moment. There are people I want to be praying with more regularly this year, so this will come up in conversation then.

Monday January 13: Genesis 22-24

"Faith is spelled R-I-S-K" (John Wimber)

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I'm completely amazed by the faith Abraham shows when he is willing to sacrifice his God-given son who meant so much to him. I don't think God needed to test Abraham to know his heart, but if anyone else (including Abraham) doubted his faith, this would show them!

I think it's also a very extreme example of God expressing his Genesis 1 desire to involve his people in his work - Abraham is drawn into nearly acting out what God is going to do with his son, Jesus, although Abraham will not realise this in his lifetime.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

If Genesis 22 shows how God builds up faithful people through difficult situations, Genesis 24 is a great example of how God just likes to take care of things for us sometimes too. It also suggests to me how much God values a good story - always a great way for us to share meaningful things in life - because he's given Isaac some amazing ones to tell his kids... how I met your mother... fun times with granddad...

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I need to reaffirm to God and myself that the stuff I think is mine is really his, and recognise that God might want to re-direct me and my use of it.

Who am I going to share this with?

Right now, with the people I pray with. Later on, I expect there will be more stories to share with friends and colleagues about what God has been doing.

Tuesday January 14: Genesis 25-28

Is life unfair?

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Sometimes I wonder why stories like these are in the Bible. Aren't these people being really mean with each other? What's good about Jacob tricking the blessing from his father which should have gone to his older brother Esau? Why is God blessing the world through these people? Where's the justice?

I think there's a purpose beyond "that's just what happened," though. The writer of Genesis isn't telling this story to give us an example to try and copy. Instead, this is a big theme of Genesis – the origin stories of things we relate to, like unfairness, struggle and long-standing grudges between people, nations and races.

Should we feel sorry for Esau being cheated? Or should we point to how he didn't value his birthright when he sold it for a bowl of soup? I don't think it's meant to be simple to pick a side here, but if we can relate to the story, we can also start to see it from God's point of view.

These are the people he's chosen to bless the world, and neither son deserves his favour. So while we struggle for stuff, God gives his blessings by grace. Is that unfair in a good way?

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God is full of love and grace. He knows what these people are like, and acts to protect them from famine and enemies. God wants us to know that he understands us too and offers hope when we feel life is unfair. This is part of God's bigger plan to bring the world to recognise him again through this signature love and grace expressed in Jesus.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I don't like being treated unfairly - no-one does. But I should moan less, at least about the kind of injustices which can be overcome with a bit of love and grace. And I want to get better at grace - it's so much better than being fair!

Who am I going to share this with?

I recently had an unfair complaint from a radio listener about a song lyric they misheard as rude when it wasn't. My first instinct was to be fair, point out how they had made a mistake and justify why we didn't need to edit the song. But grace seemed like a better idea to me and my client who owns the radio station, so I did some editing anyway. I don't always share why grace is important to me, but I'd like to share this with my client. Hopefully God will be visible through a bit of faith sharing and practical service!

Thursday January 16: Genesis 29-31

All kinds of love, actually

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I'm amazed at the character of these people God has chosen to bless. Jacob couldn't tell the difference between the woman he loved and her sister on his wedding night, but he's clever enough to work out how to get revenge through selective animal husbandry. But there are bigger forces at work. Jacob's children come from all kinds of love mixed with various degrees of frustration, bitterness and dysfunction.

It's twisted, but love is the theme and maybe it's a distorted echo of God's love. It all begins with Jacob working seven years for love, like the seven days of creation - seven is a Godly number. They seemed like only a few days to Jacob, as a thousand years seem like a day to God (Psalm 90 verse 4), and just like God in his love for people, Jacob gets frustration instead of the relationship he wanted.

What I like most is that God still loves his people and will redeem a nation through the firstborn son from Jacob's true love.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminds me of the importance of love, defining God's character and everything he wants for us, and makes me think of 1 Peter 4 verse 8, "Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins."

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Worry less. Focus more on God's amazing love and the good things which can come from sharing it.

Who am I going to share this with?

I know a few people who think their lives are not something God would like or be interested in. Sometimes we talk about weird family backgrounds. This seems a pretty good story to share with them!

Friday January 17: Genesis 32-35

Struggles can make us stronger

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

I love that Jacob is a contender. Struggling has its down sides, and this is a pretty troublesome family, but I think God saw something in Jacob which marked him out as a leader after his own heart despite the obvious problems. Jacob would not take life as it was, but worked to better things, even to put right his oldest family dispute. Worshiping God was central in how he lived and led others, and the better life Jacob wanted his people to have included rejecting foreign and false gods.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

I like that God's response makes it clear that we aren't alone in struggle - God overcomes opposition to give us good things too, even bringing life out of death.

Also, God wanted Jacob to struggle with him - not struggle against him, but with him. This brought out important aspects of Jacob's character, developing and transforming him, which God affirmed with a new name and freshly stated purpose. I think God loves to develop us, sometimes through struggle.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I've never been the sort of person to believe that life has to be accepted as it is just because that's how it is. But it should increase my faith and readiness to get involved when I remember the God's kingdom does overcome evil, and God does call me to struggle, develop and grow. I want to be clearer with people about God's role in things I'm working for.

Who am I going to share this with?

In our school community, there are regular conversations about how we deal with challenges and struggles. While many are from a Muslim background, we share a heritage in stories like Jacob's, who is also highly regarded in the Quran. So I think he might be a good example to share with one of the school governors next time we chat about how we are developing through struggle.

Monday January 20: Genesis 36-38

Redemption's origin story

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

It's time to get out your technicolour dreamcoat and sing along with Jason Donovan, Philip Schofield, Gareth Gates, Joe McElderry or... how many Josephs can you name? (Lots of answers here!) <https://www.digitalspy.com/showbiz/theatre-news/a781162/joe-mcelderry-philip-schofield-gareth-gates-all-the-josephs-and-their-technicolour-dreamcoats-through-the-years/>

After looking at the origins of life, good and evil, struggles, love and grace, the last and biggest story in Genesis might be one of the most important origin stories for us. It's about redemption – how a life can seem to have been valueless and lost, but transform into something with massive world-changing value when God reshapes what people throw away.

I like that Joseph wasn't afraid to dream and share about it. It's not hard to see why he might have got beaten up, but it turns out that he wasn't just showing off a young ego. He saw real visions from God about the future which were important for him to know. Prophets, who hear from God and pass on what they hear, are often badly received by people and look a bit odd in a group, but God always looks after people who honour him.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God doesn't get much of a mention in these chapters, but I can see him getting Joseph ready for an incredible life. His redemption story isn't just encouraging for people who are treated unfairly, but it points forward to Jesus, the rejected and suffering servant who would ultimately redeem us all, showing the immense value God places on us.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Pay more attention to things God might want to say to me, directly or through other people. Sometimes I can't see the value that God places on things which I ignore or reject. Prophecy is one way of hearing from God about this, but I shouldn't need to be reminded that the people God loves (all people!) have more value than I sometimes credit.

Who am I going to share this with?

How God values us and how we value ourselves and each other is a big topic. I'm writing more about it and sharing online in a blog (maybe a book one day!) called "You And Your Million Pound Notes". If you're interested, there's a link on my website, bernleckie.com

Tuesday January 21: Genesis 39-42

The road to success is not comfortable

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Joseph is probably one of the best examples in the Bible of people who lived a good, God-pleasing life. I love that we can see how his talents, and ultimately his immense value, come from God. Joseph gives God the credit for his ability to interpret dreams and make wise decisions. This helps people to see that God is with Joseph, so when God gives Joseph success, this looks like part of God's big plan to draw people back to him.

I'm also challenged by the fact that Joseph's prosperity doesn't always look like success, and certainly not like being comfortable, He is badly treated and spends years unjustly in prison. But the glory which would come to God by Joseph faithfully following would be more than Joseph could ever have planned out.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

Joseph reminds me of Jesus - son of a nation's founder, shepherd of his father's sheep, good but unfairly and viciously treated, sold, falsely accused and punished with two other prisoners (one saved, one lost!), but ultimately bringing salvation for his people. I think God used Joseph not just to redeem his family but to show people a bit of his bigger plan to save the world.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Joseph's work standard and success always seemed to come from God, and he could point the way directly to God as a result. I don't know how God will direct or speak to me this week, but I'll be sure to credit him when he does.

Who am I going to share this with?

The people I work with and the people I pray about work and school with.

Thursday January 23: Genesis 43-46

Dreams can come true!

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

It's a family reunion packed with surprises. Joseph falls from favour (literally) into a pit, but his fortunes reverse dramatically until his dreams come true... the most vulnerable little boy falls into peril, but is redeemed by his brothers whose character is tested and changed... trust meets betrayal, struggle overcomes hardships and enemies become friends... Even if you don't think about the deeper meanings, simply as a story Joseph's exploits are entertaining and worthy of song.

It got me thinking that there must be a reason why stories like this resonate across cultures and centuries. Screenwriting guru Robert McKee claims that "story is a metaphor for life." I think Joseph's story reflects a bigger story, and a bigger life, that we want to be part of. In God's really big story, the world changes and bad people turn back to good life with him in a surprising way - not because of our effort, but because of his - and that is something I believe many of our friends want in their lives.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

The mind boggling bit is Joseph crediting God for where he ended up after his brothers sold him as a slave. I don't think that meant God caused his brothers to sin, but I do think it shows that God can redeem the worst looking situations. We can recognise this when we choose to see him as King and look for his kingdom to come and his will to be done.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Find something this week which looks like God at work and tell people about it.

Who am I going to share this with?

People I work and pray with, or anyone else God wants to prompt me to tell.

Friday January 24: Genesis 47-50

God can be found in blessings and big deals

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Bern Leckie:

What did I like about today's reading?

Joseph's success in his job is capped by an amazing deal - he buys all the Egyptians and their land for his Pharaoh, who now have to recognise that the lives and things they thought they had are not their own. It's a shadow of how Israel recognises God's ownership of everything. Of course Pharaoh is no God, so this arrangement can go horribly wrong, but that's another story (coming soon!). In contrast, Joseph refuses to accept his brothers' offering of themselves to him as slaves, and directs them to God instead.

I also love the blessings Jacob gives his sons - not just good wishes but prophetic words which speak to their characters and relationships. Blessings like this can be meaningful and encouraging, shaping us for a lifetime.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

God's guiding hand on Joseph's life is clearly acknowledged by Jacob, and I'm wondering if the archery picture is a bit more than a standard "you won battles!" type of blessing. God has brought his people into what's going to be a very tense and difficult situation and, just as if they are an arrow in his bow, they are being drawn back now, ready to be released with an incredible force soon. I like the way God is setting up an almighty demonstration of his way of life, and his power, through the people who trust in him.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to be able to share blessings the way Jacob did, and that's not about cleverness or kindness on my part, but listening to God and sharing faithfully - I need to pray more for opportunities to do that.

Who am I going to share this with?

People I pray with this week, and hopefully others who receive a blessing in the future!