

YouVersion Bible app hires former Facebook exec to fuel growth

by [Bob Smietana](#)

January 20, 2023



(Courtesy image)

This past Sunday, more than 12 million people turned on their smartphones to open up the Good Book. It was the highest ever daily engagement in the nearly 15-year history of the YouVersion Bible app.

If Bobby Gruenewald, the Oklahoma-based pastor who has overseen the free Bible app since the beginning, has his way, that number will soon become routine.

“That’s been an aggressive goal, but that’s the trajectory that we’re mapping towards,” said Gruenewald, innovations pastor at Life.Church, one of the nation’s largest congregations.

Gruenewald first thought of the idea of an online Bible while in a security line at Chicago’s airport in 2006. YouVersion began as a website, then [transitioned to](#)

[smartphones](#) when the app store for the iPhone launched in July 2008.

The app hit 500 million downloads in 2021. Gruenewald said he hopes to pass 1 billion downloads in the next five years. To help continue the app's growth, Gruenewald said YouVersion recently added some new leadership staff, including [Nona Jones](#), who until recently was an executive at Meta, where she had been head of global faith partnerships at Facebook.

[Jones](#), whose husband is a pastor, has served as a teaching partner for YouVersion and has authored several books on faith.

Some of the most recent growth for YouVersion, which Gruenewald said offers translations in 1,900 languages, has been in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. In December, Life.Church launched a new, low-data version of the app in several African countries. The new version is easier to use offline and takes up less space, making it better for low-capacity devices. YouVersion has also seen growth in Europe, which had not been a growth area in the past.

Hiring Jones and two other leaders from Fortune 500 companies is part of the larger plan to grow YouVersion. Currently, 165 people work on the app, said Gruenewald, and there are plans to double the team in the next few years. About 1,000 volunteers also help with the app, which offers 27,500 Bible reading plans in more than 80 languages, along with videos, a popular verse of the day, and other functions.

Sundays remain the highest-use day of the week, often around the hours when church services are normally held. Usage remains high at the beginning of the week, then tends to drop off by Friday and Saturday. Historically, there's usually been a spike in the month of January, often fueled by New Year's resolutions.

Gruenewald said he feels like YouVersion—which is a ministry of the church and supported by donors and church funds—is just getting started and plans to invest heavily so it can continue to grow.

“There's a lot of people that we want to be able to reach with the Bible,” he said.
—Religion News Service