

Millions Connect to God in This Unique Way

never set out to be a leader in the app world – it simply wanted more young people reading the Bible. Yet Tuesday the Edmond, church celebrated reaching an astounding 10 million-plus users with a smartphone application that remains one of the world's most popular.

YouVersion, the free online and mobile Bible launched as an app in April 2008, includes 41 different translations in 22 languages. According to Bobby Gruenewald, 's innovation leader and the app's developer, someone new installs YouVersion every 2.8 seconds, while in the same time span 12 people open the Bible app.

"When we set out to find a way to help people engage with God's Word and to have a deeper relationship with Christ, we never realized that God would use one idea in such a way that could change so many lives and draw people closer to each other and closer to Him," Gruenewald said during a webcast on Tuesday.

Gruenewald recounted how in 2006 the innovative multisite church wanted to find a way to spark a revolution in Bible engagement using today's technology. It launched an online version in 2007, yet when church leaders saw more than 60,000 downloads during YouVersion's first three days in an app store," the Bible app went from a side project to a main project."

The app's reach continues to expand at an alarming rate, with more than 100,000 people installing it last weekend and more than 1 million in the last month alone. Users have spent a combined 3.5 billion minutes engaging with Scripture on YouVersion.

"I love the access that YouVersion gives me to God's Word," said Stephanie Mielke from Owatona, Minn. "It allows me to read His Bible, His Word, wherever I'm at or whoever I'm with when I need to share something."

Many users report having never read or understood the Bible until they downloaded the app, while others have made decisions to become followers of Christ through the smartphone tool. In countries where Bibles are illegal, users report they now read the Bible on public transportation since the government sanctions the use of phones.

"People can have the Bible with them all the time," said Kevin Thomas, senior pastor of in Queensland, Australia. "They can engage when they've got a moment during the day. They can integrate with each other by Facebook or Twitter to share what God's saying to them. Make no mistake, YouVersion is transforming the way we do discipleship in the 21st century."

For those behind YouVersion, however, the aim is still the same as when it first launched. "Our emphasis is not our apps," Gruenewald said. "The Bible is what we're passionate about. Whether it's our apps, another app, or the Book, we want you to be engaged with God's Word."

During the Nov. 16 webcast, also announced that YouVersion will release topical Bible reading plans in December. Gruenewald hopes this will motivate users to read even more and explained that users can read through more than one plan at once. Some reading plans can be completed in only three or four days, which Gruenewald hopes will help users establish daily reading habits. YouVersion currently offers 23 reading plans and will add a Christmas plan later this week.

YouVersion's developers also announced a new note-taking feature on all mobile platforms that allows users to journal thoughts privately or make public contributions viewed by other users. The church is working to add more audio and video

features so users can save audio or video thoughts as well. YouVersion has partnered with Faith Comes By Hearing to include audio in multiple languages on the YouVersion website.

With the ongoing success of its app, has issue a new challenge to users: Spend 1 billion minutes reading the Bible in one month. Starting in December, the church will implement several strategies—including an initiative to share the Bible on Christmas Day—to spark users toward engaging with the Bible more during January.

“There’s natural momentum for Bible reading that begins in the New Year,” Gruenewald said. “People are thinking about making New Year’s resolutions. Even those who aren’t Christians consider reading the Bible this time of year.”