

THE
Daily Bible®

EXPERIENCE

F. LAGARD SMITH



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The Daily Bible® Experience

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To Randy and Mary Emily
for their constancy of friendship,
encouragement, and shared dreams.

WITH APPRECIATION

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And to my heavenly Father, whose elegant hand of providence made this work possible with surprising but impeccable timing.



Welcome to the Journey

Welcome to *The Daily Bible Experience*, a companion volume to the bestselling *The Daily Bible*. Readers familiar with *The Daily Bible* will know that it is a chronological arrangement of the New International Version, narrated for clarity and insight and divided into 365 readings. By design, the 365 devotionals in this book are written to correspond with each day's reading in *The Daily Bible*. Rich insight will be gained if the two books are read in tandem each day—the Scripture text first, followed by the accompanying devotional. However, if you are not following along in *The Daily Bible*, the devotions in this book each begin with a brief passage taken from the day's reading, allowing them to stand alone. May this unique chronological panorama of God's interaction with mankind—from creation to John's visionary new creation to come—inform, inspire, and draw you higher. Along the way, my hope is that together we can explore timeless, often-troubling questions about the nature of God, the mystery of his providential working, and the profound complexity of our own response to such a sublime Creator.

Needing consolation, comfort, understanding, hope? This book is for you. Wanting to be boldly challenged in your faith life? This book is for you. Desiring fresh insight into Scriptures with which you may already be familiar? Hopefully this book is for you as well. In a spiritually vacuous, fast-paced world, even a few moments of quiet reflection spent each day in the presence of our Maker can uplift and transform.

Welcome to the journey.

F. LaGard Smith

The Wondrous Spark of Creation

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:27

If you and I are to truly believe that we're made in the image of God, shouldn't there be evidence that we are indeed *godlike*? Dare we even be so presumptuous knowing that our first forebears were made from the dust of a tiny planet in the remotest corner of a vast universe by a creator God whose intelligence and power defies imagination? How is it remotely possible that we could be like such a God? God is spirit and we are but dust. Then again we're not just any old dust. We are dust that breathes...and dust that dies. And—if the end of the story be told—we are souls made for eternity. So when we begin to search for parallels between us and our Creator, we typically speak of ourselves as intelligent, morally conscious beings, communicators, and spiritual beings beyond mortal flesh. Yet, is it possible that we have overlooked the obvious—that we too are *creators*?

No, it doesn't mean that you and I are purposed to create a cosmic universe from nothing. It simply means that, like him, we too can dream big dreams and have the creativity to make them happen! In crafting this intricate universe, God was a genius engineer, architect, scientist, musician, mathematician, and artist. And all to his glory. To be made in the image of the Creator is to be a creature who creates! Whether it be breathtaking beauty in music or art, sheer genius in math, or molding a child into a precious person of faith, God has gifted us all with a tiny touch of his own creative spark.

■ **A question worth pondering is: How will I use that creative spark in me today, and will it be to the glory of God?**

The Problem of Sin

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

GENESIS 4:7

When God declared that all he had made was “good,” he set in motion a necessary consequence with regard to the moral law, which was as much a part of his creation as the laws of nature. *Good* is only “good” if there is an opposite reality of *evil* from which *good* can be distinguished. Taking a huge risk, God has placed us in a moral universe of good and evil, knowing full well that we might choose the evil he never intended for us instead of the good he created for our benefit. Adam and Eve had the same choice as you and I and chose badly, as did Cain. And with each of those bad choices came built-in consequences that none of us can avoid—shame, guilt, fear, and regret.

Why, then, would we ever choose to sin? Perhaps because sin usually masquerades as good. It looks, tastes, and feels “good” because in the proper context the same act might actually *be* good. Or perhaps we choose to sin because we have convinced ourselves in a variety of subtle ways that we cannot help but sin. How many times have we told ourselves, for example, “But I’m only human” or “Nobody’s perfect”? Cain may have rationalized his sin in much the same way. The problem is that his brother Abel was equally human, and yet he was able to make the right choices that Cain was not willing to make. The frustrating problem of sin is not that we *can’t* make right choices, but that we *don’t*. If, like Cain, we are called to “master” sin, it must surely mean that we *can*.

■ **So the question of choice is: The next time I’m faced with some enticing temptation (perhaps a familiar one), will I choose what merely *feels* good or what truly *is* good?**

A God with Feelings

The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

GENESIS 6:6

Have you ever considered that the creator God of the universe is profoundly affected by how you and I live our lives on this earth? Or that he takes genuine delight when we live the way he envisioned we would live, but is heartbroken when we disappoint him? Unlike the idols of wood and stone worshiped by pagans, the amazing thing about our God is that he seeks a personal relationship with us and is truly touched by how we respond to his overtures of love. If there is some way in which we are like God, there must be some way in which he is like us. Who among us doesn't know the hurt of being spurned by the object of our affection? If broken relationships are painful for us mortals, how much more so for the One who is immortal? Or do we think that God, being God, sheds no tears?

A God who sheds no tears would also be a God who takes no delight. If all we had to go on was the horrific destruction of the flood, we might believe that God is a cold-hearted, angry, vindictive God who doesn't care. But when Noah found favor in God's eyes because of his exceptional righteousness, he enabled us to see that our God is both just and loving. Even though God's heart breaks at the sight of our sin, he takes great joy when we rise above a corrupt world and walk in righteousness before him. Though this sinful world remains vulnerable to the wrath of a holy God, the good news is that God has a tender heart for those whose own hearts are equally broken when they disappoint him.

■ **The painful question is: When I repeatedly disappoint God, do I understand that I have genuinely and truly broken his heart?**

The Language of Pride

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves.

GENESIS 11:4

Have you ever taken pride in learning a second language? Do you realize that there never would have been second or third languages had it not been for the sin of pride? Isn't this the reason we have the story of Babel? We know, of course, that the word *pride* can have two very different connotations—one good and one bad. For example, it is good to take pride in your accomplishments, especially when they are achieved only with great effort, and to have enough personal pride to do a job right or keep your possessions neat and tidy. And what doting grandparent doesn't have button-popping pride in their newborn grandchild (with endless pictures to prove it)? We can even speak with justified pride about being followers of Christ. There is no need for false humility when we're proclaiming our Lord and Savior!

It is that other kind of pride that gets us into all sorts of trouble—that insidious pride which boasts and brags, schemes and manipulates, exaggerates and falsifies. That cosmetic pride that vainly attempts to cover up deep-seated insecurities we are unwilling to confront. Above all, there is that self-assured, defiant, “terrible twos” kind of pride that pretty much says to God, “I can do it my way, thank you very much!” The language of pride is mostly “babel.” It may fool others, and even ourselves, but it doesn't fool God. He knows that human pride is at the very heart of all sin—elevating our will above his. How could we possibly ever take pride in that kind of pride?

■ **So the humbling question is: What kind of pride do others see in me—an appropriate sense of pride, which they will notice with respect, or a self-focused pride shouting to the world that it's all about me?**
