

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at www.aldenson.com. Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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**Being The
Real Deal**



Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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Being The Real Deal

The dictionary defines “authentic” as something that “conforms to what it is represented or claimed to be.” Being authentic, or being the “real deal” for a Christian, is not about whether we are really saved; it is about

whether we are living like what we claim to be. Authenticity means being consistent in our words, actions, values, and priorities. Not being authentic or not being the real deal means that with our lips we are claiming to be Christians, but with our lives we are not consistently living like Christ. Inauthentic Christians are eroding the power, integrity, and effectiveness of the church and the message of Christ more so today than at any other time in the last two thousand years.

A number of years ago, the late John Denver starred in a movie called, *Oh, God!* In this film he plays a young man who keeps getting messages from God that he is supposed to relate to other people. In one scene, he goes to hear a flamboyant evangelist preach. John Denver interrupts the preacher’s sermon to tell him that God has a special message just for him. The evangelist stops the service and announces to the audience that a young man has come with a message from God. John Denver’s character looks at the preacher

and says, “God wants me to tell you to shut up because you are embarrassing Him!”

There isn’t a Christian on the face of the earth who, at one time or the other, didn’t deserve to have that same message delivered

to them because we have all said and done things to embarrass God and hurt the cause of Christ in this world. What a lost world thinks of God and of the church will be determined by the lives and lifestyles of those who call themselves Christians. God stakes His reputation on us. We must make sure that we understand and take very seriously the awesome

responsibility we have to represent God in this world.

Dr. Henry Blackaby said this at a conference at the Billy Graham Training Center in May of 1999: “If you put the United States up against the Scriptures, we’re in trouble. I think we’re very close to the judgement of God. The problem of America is not the unbelieving world. The problem of America is the people of God. You see, right now there are just as many divorces in the church as outside the church. There are just as many abortions inside the church as outside the church. There is only a one percent difference in gambling inside the church than outside the church.

..it is about whether we are living like what we claim to be.

George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the church, and he said there was virtually no difference between the two...How then should we live? This is a long answer to short question, but it depends on the people of God...it's God's people who hold the destiny of America. Don't fuss at the world. It's acting just like its nature. We've got to be salt and light again. We've got to have an **OBSERVABLE DIFFERENCE.**"

The only way to show the world an "observable difference" between our lives and the lives of those who don't know Christ is to be authentic, to be the "real deal." There has never been a time in all of history when the world was more desperate to know who Jesus is and to see what He is really like than

now. Jesus still is the only answer for individuals, for families, for our nation, and for our world. People must be able to look at our lives and say, "Jesus lives there." The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..." The dictionary defines an ambassador as "An agent of the highest rank. A personal representative or messenger." This is the honor God has bestowed upon us—we are His representatives in this world. This means to be the "real deal" we must be God's eyes and ears, His hands and feet. Authentic Christians will be the heart and soul of the Savior here on this earth.

In I Peter 2:9 it says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." Christians are not the source of light—Jesus is. But we are called to brighten this dark world, and we do that by "reflecting" His light. Just as a mirror reflects, disburse, and displays light, so our lives are to be a mirror which reflects the light of Jesus to our world. Many Christians today have lives so smudged by worldliness and compromise that Jesus isn't able to shine through their lives, and it is hard to tell these "smudged" Christians from the unbelievers who don't know our Savior at all.

Inauthentic Christians are those who seem to have an interest in spiritual things, but have areas in their lives where actions, attitudes, words, and values conflict with those of Christ. Jesus said in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." In other words, Jesus was saying that we can't say we love Him and live in a way which contradicts His Word. Inauthentic Christians decide to pick and choose which parts of the Word of God

they want to obey, and disregard the rest. These Christians believe that as long as they are keeping more commandments than they are breaking, God will ignore all the times they are striking out—like God is not interested in the specifics of their obedience, only in their "spiritual batting averages." Jesus says, "not so."

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Here are just a few examples of Inauthentic Christians:

- Christian teenagers who wouldn't think of missing a Christian Club meeting on campus, but cheat on tests, lie to teachers, use bad language on the team, drink on the weekend, gossip and are unforgiving when someone at school angers them.
- Christian couples who say they will never have intercourse before marriage but are OK with doing everything else sexually.
- Unmarried Christian couples who attend church together, then go home to the same address.
- Christian teenagers who are in church every time the doors are open, but who are disrespectful to their parents and have bad attitudes at home.
- Christian adults who give to the church but steal from their employers.
- Christian husbands and fathers who take their families to church but abuse them at home.

- Christian wives and mothers who go to Bible Study but are unkind to their neighbors and unloving to those who are different.
- Christians who don't respect the rights and property of others.
- Christians who speed and break other traffic laws.

Is it any wonder the world is so turned off by most Christians? Too many of us are advertising to an unbelieving world something with our lives that is very confusing. Inauthentic Christians want to know how much they can get away with. What they are really asking is, "How close can I get to the line between right and wrong, between pure and impure, without going out-of-bounds?" An authentic, Christ-like lifestyle cannot be defined by an activity; it is an attitude which involves our bodies, minds and spirits. Instead of asking, "How much can a Christian get away with?" We need to ask, "How much like Jesus can we be?"

The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:14 "The love of Christ compels (motivates, propels) us..." The great unconditional love of Christ and what He has already done for us should be enough to motivate us to live an authentic, Christ-like life. To be the "real deal" our attitudes, actions, and words should consistently line up with the Word of God and be motivated by a heart full of love for the Savior.

There are five areas where it is especially important for Christians to be the real deal if we are going to show the world an "observable difference" in our lives. These areas are self-control, honesty, work ethic, materialism, and consistency.

~ SELF-CONTROL ~

In Galatians 5:22, there is a list of characteristics which will be present in the life of an authentic Christian. The last one, but certainly not the least, is "self-control." There are two things about self-control we cannot afford to miss: First, self-control is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit's power in our lives. Secondly, it is impossible for a Christian to live a Christ-like life without self-control.

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God makes available to us the very same power which raised Jesus from the dead to help us discipline ourselves, choose the right action, and follow through with the right behavior. But His power is not given as a “shortcut to perfection.” God will do His part but we have to do ours, too. He won’t do our work for us, but He will provide what we need. The Bible says in Phillipians 2:13, “For God is at work within you, helping you WANT to obey Him, and then helping you DO what He wants.” In this verse God promises not only to give us the power to do the right thing, but also the desire to do the right thing if we will ask.

In Romans 12:1-2, the Bible tells us not to let the world squeeze us into its own mold. In other words, we are not to be like the world in the way we think and live our lives, but rather we are to be transformed into the image of Christ by having our minds renewed or changed. To live a life of self-control, we must guard what we feed our minds and begin to think God’s thoughts. The Bible says in Isaiah 26:3, “You will keep in perfect peace, him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” If we are struggling with

self-control, we need to commit our minds and our thoughts to God every day. We must determine, with an act of our will, to let Him have total control of our thoughts and to keep our minds fixed on Him. Remember, whatever we feed is going to grow, and whatever we starve is going to die.

We must understand that we can choose the thoughts we allow ourselves to dwell on. We can’t always keep thoughts from coming into our minds, but we can choose what we will do with the thought once it is there. What we think about is going to determine how we feel, and how we feel is going to determine what we do. The Bible says very clearly in Phillipians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praise worthy—think about such things.” If we are really committed to living lives that are characterized by self-control, we will be serious about our thought life. Remember, the desires we focus on and think about will only become stronger, while the desires we ignore and starve will weaken and die.

Most Christians mistakenly believe that self-control means resisting what is wrong—that self-control is all about willpower. But that definition puts the emphasis on the wrong thing. Self-control is about wanting what is right so badly that resisting what is wrong is natural. It is loving what God loves and hating what He hates. When we spend all our time focusing on what we shouldn’t be doing, it will make us want to do it even more. But when we make our focus what is good and right, then our desires will follow. Self-control should include every area of our lives: What we think about, what we say, and what we do. To put it another way, authentic Christians will have words and actions that match up, regardless of the circumstances, where they are, or who they are with.

~ HONESTY ~

To be authentic we must be completely truthful in all situations of life. Many times in an effort to preserve our reputations or justify our actions, many Christians will try to rationalize something that is wrong by giving it another name so it doesn’t sound as bad. There are many ways this is done:

- Bending the rules
- Telling a “white” lie
- Telling a partial truth
- Not reporting something that is wrong
- Lying to cover up for someone else
- Exaggerating the facts
- Making excuses



...and how we feel is going to determine what we do.

These may sound more “socially acceptable” but they are just a dressed up way of saying, “I lied.” A solid commitment to always being truthful is the only way we can show our world what Jesus is really like. The truth must be the basis for all our decisions, actions, words, relationship, and beliefs. An authentic Christian will not only be truthful personally, but will also be a defender of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This kind of person will always make sure they not only have all the facts, but give all the facts, as well. Anything we do that leads our listeners to make inaccurate assumptions is being untruthful and not being who we claim to be.

If we are going to be authentic Christians, then honesty also must carry over into the area of our emotions. This is critical, not only just for our witness, but also to our own emotional health. We live in a world full of suffering—that is a fact of life. Many Christians, in an attempt to

be “spiritual,” will deny their pain, loss, anger, or hurt. They don’t understand that it is OK to cry or to voice deep anger and pain. Denying our emotions is not a sign of spiritual maturity, it is a sign of an inauthentic Christian. At the same time, the Christian who deals with loss or suffering with hopelessness, self-pity, and despair is just as wrong, and sends a confusing message to unbelievers about who Jesus is.

The apostle Paul lived an authentic Christian life—he was the “real deal.” He knew what it was like to live with suffering of all kinds; yet he admonished us in the book of Philippians to “rejoice always.” That wasn’t an over-spiritualized denial of reality, it was the balanced response of a mature, authentic faith. Paul taught us with his life not to deny the problems we face or to ignore the hurt we experience, but to not despair or lose hope because of whose we are.

Paul wrote in II Corinthians 4:8-10, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” Authentic Christians need to cry over death and separation; we need to be sad about the disappointments we face; we need grieve our losses; and we need to get angry over injustice. But all that must be balanced by a real faith in the sovereignty, wisdom, goodness, and love of God. Suffering must always be put into the context of the overall plan and purpose of God in our lives and in our world.

~ WORK ETHIC ~

Many Christians have a serious misunderstanding about work—they mistakenly believe that work is a curse and treat it like a four-letter word. They think that when Adam and Eve sinned work was the curse God put on Adam, but that wasn’t the case at all. The Fall of man contaminated the earth and, as a result, man’s work was made much more difficult. But we need to remember that God introduced the man and woman to work before the Fall. In fact, God put them to work as soon as He created them. God designed human labor to be a blessing not a curse. He knew that humans would need the challenges, structure, satisfaction, and rewards that honest work brings to our lives. Nothing will make us feel any better about ourselves than working hard and knowing we have done a job well.

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There are many Christians today who are miserable in their jobs. They are unhappy and frustrated, and it shows. It is true that some people don't enjoy their work because they are lazy or because they are impatient and unwilling to "pay their dues." Starting at the bottom and working their way up is not a concept they are willing to embrace. Others are in positions where they are not being properly compensated, or where they are being abused by management. Most, however, have this in common: These Christians are unhappy because they are not working in a field that is consistent with the abilities, talents, and interests God has given them.

God wants our vocation and the work we do to be a natural expression of who we are. In the wrong line of work, it is easy to feel bored, frustrated, and insignificant. When that happens, discouragement and defeat will follow, and we can quickly end up being totally overwhelmed by our circumstances. This is a miserable way to live and a terrible witness to the world. For these reasons, it is imperative that Christians find a career that is

consistent with the way God has created and shaped them. Many times our circumstances will make it necessary for us to settle for jobs that are not compatible with our strengths and interests, but these jobs should be considered temporary.

Whether we are blessed to have a job that we love or one that we pray will only be temporary, it is important that we do our job for the right reason and with the right attitude. Our motivation on the job should be the same as any other area in our life—to honor God. We need to understand that wherever we are, for whatever reason, God has allowed us to be in that place, and for however long, we are there to be salt and light. Our goal is to give all those with whom we come in contact a clear and accurate picture of what God is really like, and to honor God in all we do.

Colossians 3:23-24 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." The Bible is saying in these verses that

we are to do our jobs in such a way that the Lord will be pleased and honored because He is ultimately the One to whom we will answer. Unfortunately, many Christians are poor witnesses on the job because they are terrible workers. A Christian who is tardy, careless, lazy, or irresponsible is one who gives the world a distorted view of God. If we are truly going to be the real deal in this world, it is important that we earn the reputation of being hard-working and conscientious employees. There should be no better workers in the marketplace than Christians, and we should always do our work in such a way that God is honored.

The story is told of a man who was walking by a construction site one day when he stopped to ask the three workmen there what they were doing. The first man replied, "Puttin' in time until a better job comes along." The second man smiled and replied, "Stone-cutting." The third man waited a moment then said simply, "I'm building a cathedral!" This story is a good example of the difference that attitude makes on the job. Our attitude really will determine our altitude at work and whether we are able to rise above

all the problems that pull the majority of employees down. Attitude is everything if we are going to be authentic Christians on the job.

Whatever
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We also need to remember that our attitude at work will be a direct reflection on our Heavenly Father. Christians who are constantly complaining, whining, angry, disloyal, or ungrateful will greatly hurt the cause of Christ. The marketplace mentality today is usually, “every man for himself,” and most workplaces are very political and even cut-throat. Christians who are the real deal, will shun those self-centered and self-seeking attitudes, and instead bring compassion, kindness, love, forgiveness, and concern to their jobs every day. They will pitch in and help, even if it means doing something that is not in their job description, or offering to help with a fellow employee’s work load. The bottom line is simply being like Jesus where we are.

Being the real deal on the job doesn’t mean we are perfect. We don’t have to be plastic or phony or super-spiritual. When we blow it, we need to be honest and admit our mistakes and ask for forgiveness when necessary. Being an authentic Christian doesn’t mean that we will never have conflicts or problems in relationships at work. However, it does mean that we must always be working to resolve conflict and always try to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Being the real deal and honoring God on the job is not easy, but it gives us the opportunity to make an eternal impact on the lives of people who may never be touched by the Gospel any other way.

~ MATERIALISM ~

Many Christians today who are quick to sing, *Christ Is All I Need*, are the same ones who are chasing after the material things of this world with the same intensity and ruthlessness everyone else does. The world’s idea of success is what we are worth in dollars and cents. Money is the measuring stick by which our value as individuals is determined. The bumper sticker that says, “Life is a game. Whoever dies with the most toys wins,” was meant as a joke; but unfortunately, too many people have come to measure success in terms of how much money they can make and how much “stuff” they can buy. What the lost world is really trying to do is to fill the emptiness in their soul with “stuff.” Christians who fall into this same trap are sending a very confusing message to unbelievers and raising questions about their authenticity.

Materialism bombards us from every angle, day in and day out, and “things” seem to be screaming at us for attention. Everywhere we look, the lie is being marketed that material things will bring us happiness. Sadly, even many Christians have bought into this lie and use their possessions to validate their worth as individuals. We may want material things because they bring us a certain amount of satisfaction and comfort, and because they can entertain us and help us forget our real problems. But this can’t last long because we were never created by God to be fulfilled by anything but Him.

Christians who run after material things don’t have a money problem; they have a heart problem. They have allowed Satan to convince them that God alone is not enough to satisfy them—that it takes other “stuff” to fill the emptiness inside and meet their needs. When we do this, we have fallen into the trap of thinking like the world, and as a result, we end up giving our hearts to other gods. In I John 2:15-16 it says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—

the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” These verses are telling us that we must choose what we are going to value in life. Money and material things can never fulfill the deepest desires of our hearts because that is a place only God is big enough to fill. When we make loving God our focus, we will know a true, lasting satisfaction and deep, abiding joy which billions of dollars can’t buy.

...we must choose what we are going to value in life.

...if we really are serious about living consistent Christian lives...

Is it really possible to avoid the trap of materialism and to be happy with what we have? In Philippians 4:12 the apostle Paul writes, "I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." It sounds like Paul knows something we need to know about being content. If we skip down to verse 19, we find his secret. It says, "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Notice Paul doesn't say God "can" meet our needs or "may" meet our needs, but God WILL meet our needs. The secret to Paul's contentment was he had learned that God could be trusted to keep His promises and meet his needs.

Being content doesn't mean we are passive, lazy, or don't care. It simply means we do our part and then we trust the sovereignty, the wisdom, and the love of God to provide what He knows we need, when we need it. We must always remember that contentment is a choice. If we choose not to trust God and be contented, then the alternative is to

believe the lie which says material things bring happiness and meaning to life. If we believe this, we will waste our lives away struggling and wishing for what we don't have, while missing what is really important and worthwhile in life. We can only begin to be authentic Christians when we realize that contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want, but the realization of what we already have.

~ CONSISTENCY ~

Probably one of the things that damages the witness of Christians more than anything is inconsistency. So many of us start the Christian life well, but finish poorly. Take the church youth group that goes off to camp or a mission trip and comes home all fired up and ready to charge Hell with a water pistol. After a great summer of emotional highs, resolutions, turning over new leaves, and good intentions, the group heads back to school to take their campuses for Christ. They usually make an impact for a little while, but by Christmas vacation most have dropped out of the race. By May there will usually be only one or two left who are still consistently maintaining their authenticity.

What kind of message does this send to the unbelievers on their campus?

For too many of us, the gap between our good intentions and reality is filled with frustration and failure. Is there a way to establish patterns in our lives that will help us live consistently authentic lives? The good news is "yes, there is." When Jesus walked on this earth, He was the epitome of consistent authenticity and He is the One we want to be like. Therefore, it stands to reason that if we truly want to be authentic Christians and imitate the life of Christ we will have to do the things He did and practice the activities He practiced. Dallas Willard says, "If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that He knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities He engaged in, by arranging our

whole lives around the activities He Himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of His Father."

If we study the life of Jesus we first see that He knew the value of solitude and silence. This is not a popular point, especially when we are young, but if we really are serious about living consistent Christian lives then we must be willing to SLOW DOWN. Our very survival depends on it. Most of us have overloaded schedules that are filled with many things—some of these are even good things. But the good things are crowding out God's best in our lives and wearing us out to the point that we are becoming fatigued, discouraged, and disillusioned. Many Christians are sincerely trying to live consistent lives but are at the end of their physical and emotional ropes.

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No one has ever had more pressure or demands on His life and time than Jesus did, yet He never got in a hurry and never failed to live consistently. He understood the limitations of the human mind, body, and emotions. He knew when it was time to say, “enough is enough” and get alone in a quiet place. Jesus understood the importance of being still before His Father, to reflect and relax so God could refresh and rejuvenate Him. Christians who are not able to live consistently over the long-haul are usually those who never mature spiritually because they are too busy to follow the example of Christ. When we live our lives according to the break-neck pace of the world, we lose our perspective and our joy. In contrast to what the world is telling us, God says in Psalms 46:1 says, “Be still (relax, cease from striving) and know that I am God.” When we choose to ignore God’s Word and the example of Christ, we pay the price with inconsistent, broken lives.

Jesus also knew the importance of daily prayer and meditation on God’s Word. If it was important for Jesus to maintain these spiritual disciplines, then how much more important is it for us to make these a part of our daily lives? Many Christians lack the discipline to be consistent in their walk with Christ because they make decisions based on how they “feel.” They have never understood or been taught that their relationship with God has NOTHING to do with how they feel. These Christians will pray and do their Bible study as long as they “feel” like it, but when the feeling is gone, so is their time with God. As a result, they never mature, never grow, and easily give up on living an authentic, consistent Christian life.

Authentic Christians know that the decision to be obedient and consistent in their walk with God has to be made in advance. Like a well-trained athlete, they decide to go to practice every day and how they are to run

the plays before they ever get in the game. An athlete doesn’t wait until the alarm goes off to decide whether or not he “feels” like working out that day. The decision and the commitment are made long before. As a result, the athlete prepares the night before by making decisions that will move him in the direction he wants to go.

There is another important element in living an authentic, consistent life, and that is accountability. Bill Hybels says that spiritual growth (which is the foundation of a consistent life), is a three-legged stool—prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. God designed spiritual growth for us in such a way that it requires the involvement of other believers. The apostle Paul understood the importance of accountability when he wrote in Romans 12 that Christians are to watch out for one another, warn one another, challenge one another, encourage one another, and rebuke one another.

We all need brothers and sisters in Christ who will love us enough to hold us accountable

for our decisions, our standards, ethics, values, vocabulary, and lifestyle. We also need to be held accountable for the level of commitment we are displaying in our relationship with God. We need someone to tell us when we are not being authentic in every area of our lives. When we refuse at least one special Christian access into our lives not only to hold us accountable, but to encourage and support us, we are headed for disaster and will never live a consistently authentic life.

The life of Jesus was a perfect reflection of His Father. As a result, He was able to show the world what God was really like. Our job, until Jesus comes again, is to take over where He left off. If we are to be authentic Christians who are reflections of Christ, then Jesus must be the consuming fire of our lives. He must be our reason for living, and our relationship with Him must be our highest joy. Nothing can be more important in our lives than honestly, properly representing God in this world.

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