

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 God 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.

Please help us with your donation. Your support will not only keep this program on the air, but will allow us to continue providing these materials on a weekly basis to thousands of people as a gift of encouragement. We need YOU to partner with us. All gifts are tax deductible. Please make your gift payable to Celebration Ministries.

May God bless you and thank you for watching!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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FREEDOM
FROM
FEAR





When Al Denson speaks to students—more than 2,000,000 face to face — he comes with his own story of struggle and tragedy. In December 1994,

Al's much publicized, near-death experience in the crash of a small aircraft led him to a rare insight about the tenuous nature of earthly life.

With eight albums behind him and a string of #1 songs and awards that includes a Dove for "Best Praise Album of the Year", Denson's songs and messages to students from junior high through college continue to touch an ever-widening audience. In addition to his own performances, Al has been featured at crusades for Dr. Billy Graham, Franklin Graham, Ralph Bell, and Dawson McAllister. His new TV show, "The Al Denson Show", is seen by millions across America. The program targets and involves youth and the issues they face every day.

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FREEDOM FROM FEAR

When we hear stories of people showing great courage, it is easy to think, "I wish I could be like that." All of us want to be able to stand up to the difficult challenges and circumstances of life without being paralyzed by fear or anxiety. No one wants to be a coward. Perhaps one reason we desire courage so much is because we think having courage means not being afraid. None of us like the way it feels to be afraid because it makes us feel out of control. But, having courage is not about being fearless. In fact, courageous people have as much fear as cowards, they have just made a choice to handle their fears differently.

You see, having courage is just another way of being afraid. John Wayne once said, "Courage is being scared to death... and saddling up anyway" and Mark Twain put it this way, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not the absence of fear." General George Patton summed it all up with eight little words: "Courage is fear holding on a minute longer."

It is unfortunate that it seems the only time we hear about courage is when media attention is given to someone who does an extreme act of heroism, like running into a burning building or jumping into icy water to help someone. Risking your life to save another person is a wonderful thing, but seldom do those opportunities come in every day life.

It also takes a great deal of courage just to face life's ordinary, everyday challenges. You can be courageous in many different ways: trying something new, not giving up when you want to quit, taking a stand for something you believe in, admitting that you need help, or that you made a mistake.

All these take courage. Every day we all make choices to be courageous or cowardly, to chose the right thing or the easy, convenient thing. Here are three different kinds of courage that perhaps you have never considered:

Personal Courage

Having personal courage involves things such as:

A. No longer blaming others or your circumstances for your behavior, or excusing your behavior. You, and you alone, must be responsible for who and what you are and where you are in life. All of us have things in our past that we wish we could change. That's reality, but wishing or living in the past won't change that. You must choose to live beyond the past. In order to become a person of personal courage you must be willing to accept the fact that what you are today is because of the choices you've made in the past, and that you, and you alone, are 100% responsible for all those choices.

B. Making changes that need to be made in your life. It takes a lot of courage not only to face and admit the truth about yourself, but to find a way to deal with the weaknesses in your life. To look for solutions to your problems, instead of just doing nothing. It is easy to stay where you are even if that place is unpleasant, because where you are is familiar and all of us find security in the familiar. It takes courage to say, “I don’t like change because it makes me feel insecure, but I’m going to do whatever I need to in order to make the changes that need to be made in my life.”

C. Not giving up when something becomes difficult or unpleasant. It takes personal courage to try something again that you were unsuccessful at the first time. Often just the attempt at something is courageous, despite the result.

D. Admitting that you have failed or have made a mistake, and asking for and accepting help. When the great basketball superstar, Michael Jordan, left basketball to try his hand at major-league baseball, he went in fully expecting to succeed. He didn’t. The fact that he failed was not the important thing. What was important was that Michael knew that even if you fail at something, if you have given it your best effort, then you are a better person for the effort.

Michael Jordan said of that experience, “I can accept failure. Everyone fails at something, but I can’t accept not trying.” People who have personal courage are secure enough to admit that they have failed or have made a mistake, that they need help and try again.

Relational Courage

It takes a great deal of courage to build successful and meaningful relationships. The most important earthly relationship into which you will ever enter is also the one that takes the most courage. That relationship is marriage and marriage is not for cowards.

To have a successful marriage, there must be intimacy and that takes courage. Intimacy simply means that you are willing to let go of all your defense mechanisms, come out from behind the walls you have put up in your life, and take off your mask. It means that you are willing to be vulnerable with your spouse, to let them see who you really are and what is really on the inside. That takes a lot of courage.

One of the main reasons that the divorce rate in this country is so high is that, for the most part, we are a nation of cowards. Many people do not have the courage to fight for their marriages. It takes courage to say, “I’m going to do whatever it takes to solve these problems. I will not run away. I will not be a quitter.”

For a man or woman to walk out on a marriage partner that they promised to “love, honor and cherish in good times and bad, until death do us part” is a form of cowardliness. Good marriages take relational courage.

It also takes a tremendous amount of courage to be a parent. Children need boundaries and consistent, loving discipline if they are going to feel secure. It takes a lot of unconditional love, time, patience, unselfishness, as well as physical and emotional strength to be a good parent. It is very hard not to give in to the demands of a child because you as a parent don’t want to endure their anger or disapproval. It is also extremely difficult sometimes to put your own needs on the back burner so you can be consistent with the discipline and boundaries your child needs. Good parenting takes relational courage.

It takes courage to be a real friend. Sometimes our friends need compassion, sensitivity and encouragement from us. That isn’t hard to do when you care for someone. But at other times, being a real friend involves confrontation and tough love. All of us need someone who will care and have enough courage to intervene in our lives when they see that we are on the edge of serious trouble.

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YOU can choose your response to anxiety

Maybe we are pushing our lives to the limits or wandering around aimlessly going nowhere. We all need someone to have the courage to look us in the eye and say, "I love you too much to allow you to destroy yourself. You are wrong and somebody has to tell you the truth. I don't like doing this, but I'm willing to put our friendship on the line because I care too much to keep quiet when I see you hurting yourself. Your well-being is more important to me than my own comfort level."

Being tough does not mean being insensitive or unkind. You start by affirming your friend and telling them how important their friendship is to you. Don't attack or accuse, just simply state the facts as honestly and firmly as you can. Let your friend know that you believe he or she is worth fighting for, and that you care enough to hold on and hang in there. Don't expect that your friend's immediate response to the confrontation will be positive. You may be verbally attacked or totally rejected, but tough love is willing to take that risk to help a friend. Being a real friend takes relational courage.

Moral Courage

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Courage is the strength to face pain, act under pressure, and maintain one's values in the face of opposition. You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face... You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

It takes courage to not only adopt a set of morals (standards, values, ethics), but to live by those morals every day. Once you decide to be a person of courage (notice again it is a choice), you can write it down; those morals will be tested on a daily basis. It will take a great deal of courage to stick to those convictions when it seems at times that everyone else in your school, your office, your neighborhood, or the society in which you live thinks you are weird, old-fashioned, idealistic, judgmental or even prudish to live your life by the standards you have chosen for yourself.

When you are willing to face your fears, decide what the right thing is to do and summon the will to do it, you become brave yourself and in doing so, help others learn to be courageous as well. Every time you force yourself to face a fear, regardless of how you feel, you will grow in confidence and courage. Make the decision to spend your time with courageous people. If you surround yourself with people who always cave in, quit, run away or compromise, you will become like them. If you want to be courageous you will need constant exposure to courageous people.

A life that is worthwhile is never easy. Anyone who wants to know God's best in their life will have to choose courage over fear. Remember, courage isn't made in the crisis moments of our lives. It is in those times that our courage is revealed. Courage is developed and made in the everyday challenges that we face. Bill Hybels says, "You cannot sit still and expect courage to come and find you. You have to go after it."

This is all good advice for the normal, everyday fears that we face. But, what about the fears that are so large they seem to take over our lives? These fears become "phobias" or exaggerated, destructive reactions. These are known as anxiety disorders, and they are the number one mental-health problem in the United States for females, and the second leading mental-health problem for males.

Fear focuses on a real, immediate danger, but anxiety is internal tension over something that may or may not happen. People caught in anxiety usually find it difficult to concentrate and make wise decisions. They are unhappy a lot, have problems in relationships, and often feel tired or ill. Because anxiety produces a feeling of being out of control, it can easily accelerate to a feeling of panic. Panic causes a person to have a rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, dizziness, nausea, chills, choking or feelings of extreme loneliness.

Anxiety is a symptom of emotional overload that comes when you are unable to recognize and deal with your own feelings. However, you can choose your response to anxiety. You can either let your emotions get so out of control that they completely destroy your life, or you can make the choice to overcome your anxiety and be free from your fears. There are two ways to do this:

I. COMMIT YOUR TRUST

Fear has a way of escalating into anxiety when you CHOOSE to trust anything or anyone other than God. One of the most important truths you can ever learn is that God can be trusted with whatever frightens you today. If it concerns you, it concerns your heavenly Father. Fear is the most paralyzing problem that most of us face. It can be the biggest roadblock to a contented and peaceful life. If you are worried about tomorrow, it will be impossible to have peace today. Psalm 27 is a great portion of Scripture on fear. Verse one says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation (protection, defense) — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?"

When David wrote this Psalm he was running for his life from King Saul and his army who were all trying to kill him. If anyone had a right to be in the grip of fear, it was David. How did he get the kind of confidence that enabled him to trust God?

What you believe about God will determine whether you live in

FREEDOM OR FEAR.

First, in verse 4 David says that he wants to dwell in the Lord's house all the days of his life. Does that mean that he wanted to live at the church? No, the word "house" is symbolic of God's presence and protection. David was saying that he wanted to be aware of the Lord's presence and protection at all times, and that he didn't want anything, including fear, to disturb his fellowship with God.

Secondly, in verse 11 he says, "Teach me your way, O Lord..." In other words, David was saying, "Give me your perspective on this situation, God, and that will stabilize my emotions and balance my life." Once David had an awareness of God's presence and protection in his life, and, with his emotions under control, he was able to say in verse 13: "I am confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

He then goes on to encourage the rest of us by saying, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." You see, David's focus was not on the size of King Saul's army, but his focus was on the size of His God. As a result, he was able to live in confidence and not in fear.

The apostle Paul also learned this same lesson through difficulty and problems. He, too, discovered the way to deal with his anxiety was to trust God. Look what he writes in Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul is saying that the way we demonstrate our trust in God is with an act of our wills to turn our attention from our anxiety and our fears, and put our attention on our Father. When we bring our anxiety to God in prayer, we are admitting our helplessness and neediness to Him. No longer are we focusing on the problem, but we are focusing on God and what we know about Him. In order to do that, there are two things about God of which we must be sure:

1. GOD IS SOVEREIGN. If we are going to have freedom over the difficult situations in life that cause us to feel anxious or fearful, we must first know that our situation is no surprise to God. It did not sneak up on Him and His back was not turned. God is sovereign, and that simply means that He is in charge of the final outcome. Nothing touches us that does not come through Him and without His permission. He is in control at all times.

2. GOD IS GOOD.

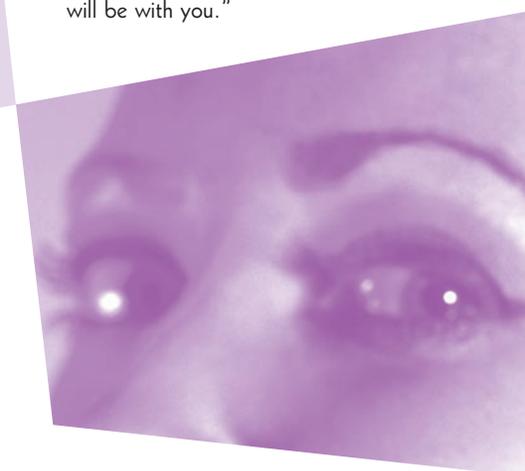
If we are going to experience freedom from fear, then we must believe that God is good, even if everything in our lives is screaming, "GOD IS BAD!" C.S. Lewis said in his book — *A Grief Observed*: "I am in no danger of ceasing to believe in God; the great danger is in coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I fear is not — Well, so there is no God after all; the conclusion I dread is, so, this is what God is really like — deceive yourself no longer."

If you ever CHOOSE to believe that God is not good, you will never escape the hold that fear and anxiety have on your life. Psalms 73:28 literally says "this is my good, that He is ever with me." Remember, the goodness of God is not an immunity from problems. The goodness of God is the nearness of God. He promises to be right there to go through your problem with you. What you believe about God will determine whether you live in freedom or fear. When you know you can trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God, you will have a peace that passes all understanding.

When you know the character and the nature of your Father then you are able to trust Him with confidence, knowing that He will take care of you. That is where the "with thanksgiving" part of Philippians 4:6 comes in. You can thank God for who and what He is doing as you trust Him with all your fears and anxiety. He promises that as you do, His peace will guard your hearts and minds and not let anxiety take over you.

II. CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS

Most of our emotions or feelings come from what we CHOOSE to think about. We must control our thoughts. Paul goes on in Philippians 4:8-9 to say, "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things... And the God of peace will be with you."



God knows how weak we are and how easy it is for us to become fearful. So His Word is full of true, noble, right, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy, encouraging things to help Christians manage our thought lives. Here are just a few examples of what we should CHOOSE to think about:

Romans 5:1 — “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

John 14:27 — (Jesus said) “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Ephesians 2:14 — “For he (Jesus) Himself is our peace...”

Isaiah 26:3 — “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is fixed on You.”

II Timothy 1:7 — “For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline.”

Psalms 56:3 — “When I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God, whose Word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.”

We must know God’s Word if we are going to control our thoughts. Freedom from worry, fear, and anxiety are only possible when we digest the Word of God and allow it to permeate every part of our lives. Jeremiah 15:16 says, “Thy Words were found and I did eat them, and Thy Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart...”

Just as food is taken into the mouth and then digested to become part of every cell in our bodies, the Word of God must be taken in and allowed to become a part of all that we are. Then, and only then, will we be able to control our thought life. It is only the person who is thinking God’s thoughts that can experience freedom from fear.

Peace is a gift from God to Christians through Jesus Christ. So, it makes sense to focus our thoughts and attention on the “Prince of Peace,” rather than on our circumstances and fears. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do EVERYTHING through Him who gives me strength.” Peaceful people understand that their strength comes from knowing that the power of Jesus is enough to meet every need in their lives. No fear is too big for Him to handle.



You can CHOOSE to let go of your fear and anxiety. You can CHOOSE to trust Him and you can CHOOSE to control your thoughts. Make the choice NOW to turn your focus from the problem to Him, and He will walk with you through whatever causes you to fear. Joshua 1:9 says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

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