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,

[Signature]

An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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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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The basic cause of most of the emotional and spiritual problems that Christians have personally and the basic cause of all dysfunction in our homes is: the failure to receive and live out God’s unconditional grace, and as a result, the failure to offer that same grace to others.

A person who has not received grace, has no grace to give and is ungracious toward others. NOWHERE are these difficulties more apparent than within parenting and in the home. You see, parenting doesn’t cause problems, it reveals problems. Pressure introduces us to ourselves, to what is really inside. Performance-oriented Christians are hard on themselves and on their kids. This will destroy a home from inside out. God intends that our greatest developmental years: 1. Your concept of self. Home is like a MIRROR in which we see ourselves. Our self-estimate will largely depend upon the worth or worthlessness we see reflected in the people who mean the most to us. Parental grace provides acceptance, affection and affirmation. 2. Your concept of GOD. The home is like a SKYLIGHT through which we get our first glimpses of God. This is an awesome responsibility! Few parents realize that most children will grow up having God and their parents all tangled-up, and how they see us is how they see God. 3. Your concept of OTHERS. The home is a WINDOW through which we look at others. It affects the way we see others and the way we THINK they see us. 4. Your concept of LIFE. Home will either help or hinder us in living a life of grace. However, we must remember that even the best Christian parenting cannot make a child’s nature morally or spiritually good, nor can it guarantee that a child will automatically choose the right. All parents would like to believe that there is a formula we can follow in raising children that will guarantee results. For too many years Christian parents have looked to Proverbs 22:6 as that guarantee. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”. Listen, to imply that this is a formula for success is an abuse and misuse of this verse. First of all, it is not a guarantee. Proverb means probability, not promise. Parenting, like every other area of life, carries no guarantees. Thinking that our children will have an accurate perception of God and a passion for spiritual things because they are well-churched is naive. Our children’s concept of God will be shaped more by their relationship (or lack of it) with us, then with any other influence in life. Healthy, grace-filled relationships have many characteristics. I’d like to give you 6 that I believe are essential to this kind of relationship: 1. HONOR Dr. Gary Smalley says that the most important principle in raising children is: Increase Honor and Decrease Anger. Both parts of this principle are all about grace. We honor a child by making them feel valuable, loved and accepted. That takes grace. We decrease their anger levels by releasing our anger to the Lord daily. That is also grace. The more honor and the less anger a child feels, the greater the probability that they will want to make our values and faith their own. The more these two principles are violated, the greater the probability that they will reject our ways. Honor is simply a decision to place high value, worth and importance on another person. The one thing that will best help ensure that children have a hunger for God is a GRACE-FILLED RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR PARENTS.
We do this by viewing that person as a priceless gift, and granting them a position in our lives worthy of great respect. We honor our children by loving and accepting them unconditionally, by listening, supporting and encouraging them. In other words, by having a relationship based on grace. The choice to honor our children is one of the most important choices we will ever make, and the effects of that choice will be felt for generations to come.

2. FORGIVENESS

The emotional wounds that parents inflict, whether intentional or unintentional, are the deepest and most long-lasting of any that we can ever receive in life. Many people carry those wounds for the rest of their lives. Hurt will happen, that is a fact of life, to be human is to be hurt. The only way those hurts can be healed is through forgiveness. Sadly, not many Christians know much about real, scriptural forgiveness, but it is an essential part of grace-filled relationships.

Most of us mistakenly believe that forgiveness is a feeling. It is not. It is an act of the will, an act of obedience. Forgiveness is giving up our right to get even. It is making a decision not to hold on to anger, hurt or negative emotions.

Some parents use unforgiveness as a tool to try and control their children’s behavior. It’s a way for them to feel they have an upper hand, making the child feel like he or she must EARN their way back into their parent’s favor.

Some Christians have a hard time with forgiveness because they believe that if they forgive they are excusing the behavior, or letting the other person off the hook. Nothing could be further from the truth. Forgiveness is acknowledging that what was done was wrong and inexcusable, but choosing to show someone else the same kind of forgiveness God showed us.

Colossians 3:13 says, “Bear with each other and FORGIVE whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as God forgave you.”

Forgiveness is not a suggestion, it is a commandment, and God gives it to us for our own well-being. When we have been offended, we experience the pain of the offense when it happens. But, the initial pain of the wrong done to us is usually quite small compared to the pain of reliving the offense over and over again in our minds. Unforgiveness is like a tape recorder that rewinds and plays the hurtful experience again and again.

God knows that unforgiveness is also the soil in which bitterness grows. Bitterness is a poisonous plant with deadly fruit: depression, anger, hostility, resentment, rage, physical, mental and emotional disorders, and the inability to love and trust others. Bitterness makes a person extremely vulnerable to unwise decisions and destructive patterns of living. It is like a cancer of the soul that will go on to destroy you physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally. This is a highly contagious condition that will spread down through generations, if left unchecked.

Our children will either learn forgiveness or unforgiveness from their parents. The forgiveness that Jesus offers is unconditional and complete. We don’t deserve it, and He provided it before we ever asked for it, or even knew we needed it. This is exactly the kind of forgiveness that MUST be active in our homes and in every grace-filled relationship.

3. TRUST

Children will never embrace the values of, or be loyal to, someone with whom they have no relationship, and all successful relationships are built on trust. Children must know that they can trust their parents’ lifestyle, motives, love, provision, protection and word. A child who can trust his parents, will respect and obey his parents. But, a child who does not trust his parents will not accept their teaching or training.

It is our job to depend on Him and equip our children to make wise choices. The goal of grace-filled discipline is to help our children be responsible for their own choices.

If we were honest, most of us would admit that sometimes we are more concerned about how our child’s bad behavior will make us look to other people than we are about them. We need to remember that children should not have to act appropriately so we can feel like a valuable person. It isn’t their job to validate us as parents with their performance.

4. LOVING DISCIPLINE

One area where many sincere Christian parents promote an atmosphere of “gracelessness” and conditional, performance-earned acceptance is by excessive emphasis on the “dos” and “don’ts” of the Christian life. Too often as Christian parents we work hard, but at the wrong job. We make our focus the “wrong” or “unspiritual” behavior, then set out to apply pressure, control behavior, and do everything in our power to change our kids. The end result is exhaustion, depression, hopelessness and the desire to quit. We must learn the difference between our job and God’s job. It is God’s job to fix and to change our kids. It is our job to depend on Him and equip our children to make wise choices. The goal of grace-filled discipline is to help our children be responsible for their own choices.
In Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21, Paul cautions parents not to "provoke, which means exasperate, or embitter" their children to anger... lest they become discouraged." In other words, "Don’t overcorrect them, or they will grow up feeling inferior and frustrated." Paul is not saying here that we should never do anything about which our kids will feel angry. A person’s anger is their own responsibility. We are not in charge of controlling our children’s anger anymore than they are in charge of controlling ours. No one can “make” you angry.

There are three Greek words for anger in the New Testament. The word used for anger here (perigismos) is referring to anger that is forced and anger. A child may respond to something they don’t like in anger, but in a grace-filled relationship the anger is not provoked by the parents.

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You know, many Christians get very defensive when you start talking about grace, because they think that grace and discipline can’t co-exist, or that grace lowers the standards. ABSOLUTELY NOT! God doesn’t condone our sin. In fact, He insists that we walk in holiness before Him. An accurate picture of God’s grace doesn’t cause us to take advantage of His forgiveness and acceptance. Rather, it motivates us in gratitude to walk in obedience.

4. Violating their boundaries. Forcing a “yes” from them (yes is really only yes when no is really an option).
5. Turning a deaf ear. They deserve to be heard and respected. They deserve the right to state their case or defend themselves before being disciplined.
6. When parents are absent.
7. When we shame our children by sending messages that they are an embarrassment to us, or defective or worthless.

Whenever we crush a child’s spirit we leave them with unresolved conflict and anger.

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Rules and regulations are important and should be enforced, BUT only in the atmosphere of a loving, grace-filled relationship or the results will be destructive, not redemptive.

Sometimes we believe that if we can just pour on enough guilt, raise our voices high enough, frown hard enough, or lecture long enough we will insure obedience in our children. But, James 1:20 says “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires”. On the other hand, Romans 2:4 says that “kindness, tolerance and patience lead to repentance, and to God.”

Our children MUST know and be assured of our unconditional love and acceptance. They MUST be secure in the fact that we will always love and accept them, even when we can not accept their wrong behavior or attitudes. The most important key to imparting our values and training our children is our relationship with them, and it MUST BE a reflection of our heavenly Father’s relationship with us, which has nothing to do with our performance and everything to do with GRACE. His GRACE — His unmerited favor and acceptance — is extended to us despite our failings, weaknesses and sin. God’s unconditional love was proven two thousand years ago in that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Roman 5:8).

Our attitude toward our children must be the same as God’s attitude toward us. Our interaction, communication and responses MUST BE characterized by acceptance of them, regardless of their performance. When we get frustrated and discouraged with our children, we MUST remember that God never gets frustrated or discouraged with us. See if this verse is not our goal as Christian parents: Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the GRACE of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It (grace) teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, EAGER TO DO WHAT IS GOOD.”
God doesn’t nag, manipulate, shame or shout at us to get us to live this kind of lifestyle, one that is “self-controlled, upright and godly,” and it will not happen in the lives of our children by our nagging, manipulating, shaming or shouting either. Learning to discipline our children in grace can produce exactly what we are looking for — not just obedience, but the EAGERNESS for them to “TO DO WHAT IS GOOD”.

We are ALL still fallen sinners, both by nature and by choice, and stand in need of God’s saving grace. There are no guarantees, but parental grace in the home can greatly increase the probability that a child will accept God’s offer of grace. Parents are the most effective communicators of truths, values, concepts, and lifestyles. We should get our earliest experience of agape love in the home. This taste of love and grace should whet our appetite for God’s perfect love and grace.

Children need:
• to feel they are accepted, loved, and affirmed.
• a predictable, reliable sense of security and belonging.
• limits as well as affection.
• an atmosphere where they feel these needs are met because of who they are and not because of what they do.

The home must be the place where the first seeds of undeserved, unconditional acceptance are sown. The impressions about life and about themselves that are implanted during the early years will have long-lasting, sometimes life-long effects on their personalities. That is exactly why this is such a serious issue, because just as parental grace has the greatest potential for helping our children, a lack of grace has the greatest potential for hurting our children.

It is the will and the design of the Father that grace reign in our homes. The way we love and forgive, our response to stressful situations and to life, will all either draw our children to the Lord or turn them away. Just as Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that it is grace and grace alone that will ALWAYS be the basis of our relationship with God, grace and grace alone must ALWAYS be the basis of our relationships in our homes.

To the natural mind, righteousness has always equaled rules, restrictions, regulations, and requirements. But Jesus redefined righteous to a young legalist one day who wanted to know which was the greatest of all the commandments. Jesus said that it ALL could be summed up this way, “love God and your neighbor as yourself.” Where should our emphasis be according to Jesus? On RELATIONSHIPS, not REGULATIONS. Yes, every home must have its rules and regulations, but the greatest principle we can teach our children is that righteousness, or right-standing with God and with us, is first about relationships, not regulations. God’s love is an action toward us, not a reaction to something good in us. As we have received this love, we are also to walk in it. In other words, we are OBLIGATED to pass it on to others.

How does the brand of love and grace that you have offered others compare to what God has freely given you? If you love conditionally, and have been “graceless” in your relationships, perhaps it is because you have never really known experientially the love and grace of your heavenly Father. If grace is only head knowledge, then you will be driven and frustrated, living with anxiety and condemnation. Grace must be an experience with God, not something we believe about God. Just as this grace makes it possible for us to have a new life, this same grace can give us new relationships and homes.

You can REFUSE the love of God, but you can’t STOP the love of God. Grace is the unconditional love of God in Christ given to the sinful, the undeserving and the imperfect. Grace is a free, undeserved, unmerited, unrepayable favor, graciously offered to you and to me. How do we love the sinful, undeserving, imperfect, unlovable people in our lives? By understanding the way that God has unconditionally loved us, reminding ourselves of how much we have been forgiven, and extending the same free, undeserved, unmerited, unrepayable grace to others.