

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!

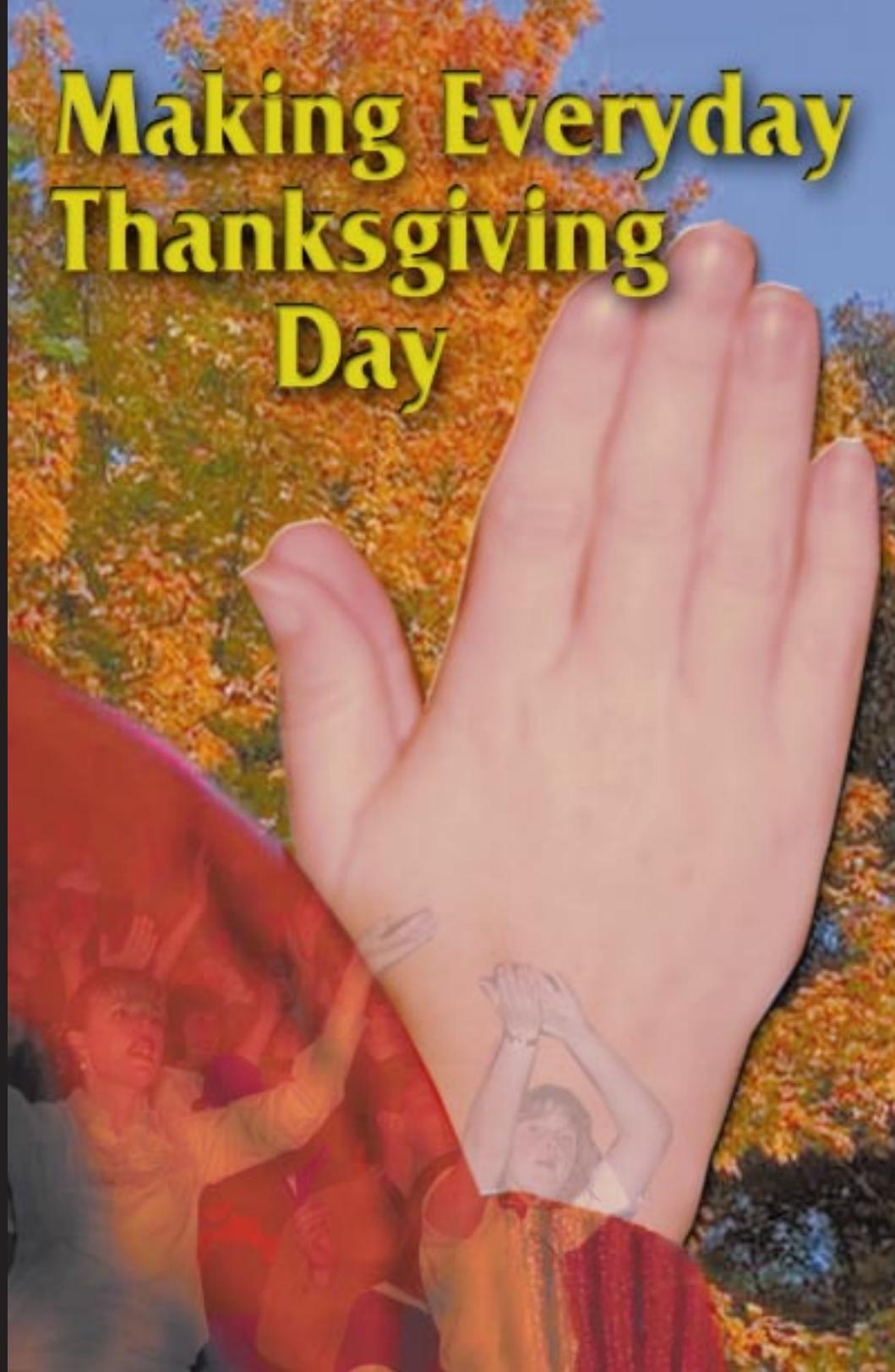
Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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Making Everyday Thanksgiving Day





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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When the New England colonies were first planted almost four hundred years ago, the Pilgrims endured the hardships of cold, hunger, disease, and all the dangers of the wilderness in search of religious freedom. Those were extremely difficult and trying times and these settlers would frequently take their problems before God in prayer and fasting.

That should have been a positive thing, but the practice eventually became counter-productive because when they took their problems to God, they didn’t leave those problems with God. As a result, the Pilgrims found themselves constantly focusing on the hard times they were experiencing. This caused them to be so discouraged and depressed that many of them considered returning to England, even though they had suffered much persecution there.

Finally one day an old man stood in one of their meetings and said that he thought it was time that they began to focus on their blessings, not their problems. The colony was growing stronger, the crops were doing better, the rivers had fish, the woods had game, their wives were healthy, their children were being obedient, and most of all, they now possessed what they had come for—full civil and religious liberty. The old man proposed that in place of another day of fasting, they celebrate instead one day of thanks giving each year. Hopefully that day would help

change their attitudes the other 364 days of the year. So, in 1621, those who settled this country began the tradition of setting aside a day to thank God for all His blessings.

That tradition became known as Thanksgiving Day and has been passed from generation to generation in this country. But somewhere along the way, it seems to have lost its original meaning and purpose. Most Americans still enjoy the feast and some may even briefly verbalize their thanks on that day, but few live lives all year long which are characterized by a spirit of thankfulness. It is understandable that people who do not know and honor

God would not daily acknowledge, much less, be grateful for His provision. But what about Christians? Thanksgiving for us should not just to be a special day we celebrate once a year; it should be a lifestyle.

Here are four questions we can ask ourselves that will help us decide if we have lifestyles which are characterized by grateful spirits:

I. Are We Thankful for What We Have?

A lifestyle of thanks giving begins with an “attitude of gratitude.” The thing that will prevent us from having this kind of attitude, more than anything else is comparison —constantly focusing on what we don’t have instead of what we do have.

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It seems most of us want to compare ourselves to those who have more of what we want and not less of what we want. Choosing to compare ourselves to those with more will not change our situation, it will only make us and everyone around us, miserable.

Contentment is the cure for comparison and learning to be content with what we have is the key to having an attitude of gratitude.

One of the most important life lessons we can learn is this: I must own my attitude. The attitude we have is always a choice, and we must remember that we are the only ones who can choose to control our attitudes. The ability to control our attitudes is not something we are born with, it is a skill we have to learn.

The apostle Paul knew that he couldn't always control his circumstances, but he could control his attitudes and choose to be content no matter how unfair, unkind, or difficult life became. Paul

explains this in Philippians 4:11-12: "...for I have LEARNED to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 want."

If we have determined that happiness for us is just another purchase, another boyfriend, girlfriend, car, degree, job, bigger house, or better neighborhood away, then we will never know contentment. Most people mistakenly believe contentment is a place or a thing, but it is not. Contentment is a state of mind. The secret to having an attitude that brings contentment in life is choosing to trust God no matter what our circumstances.

This means we must accept that God has us where we are at this time in our lives for a reason, and that reason is to ultimately bless us and not harm us. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans that I have for you," says the

Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." Learning to trust that God is always and only good, that He is too wise to make a mistake, that He is, and can only be, loving, and that He is in total control of everything that happens in our lives, is the key to developing an attitude that will bring contentment in every situation of life. If we truly believe God knows best, then we will trust Him with everything in our lives.

One of the most important questions we can answer is this: What is my attitude of choice? It doesn't matter what's happening around us. What's happening inside us—that's what counts the most. We can choose to either be grateful or

ungrateful. It must be a choice, an act of the will. Like the Pilgrims, we must decide every day what we are going to focus on—our problems or our blessings.

Sir Moses Montefiore, the Hebrew philanthropist, had as the motto for his family, "Think and thank." In the old Anglo-Saxon language thankfulness means "thinkfulness." Each of us has approximately 50,000 thoughts each day. Someone once said, "Our life is what our thoughts make it." Remember, our feelings are always going to follow our thoughts, so the choice is ours—to be positive, thankful people or to be negative, ungrateful ones.

Contentment is a state of mind.



II. Are We Thankful for The Contributions of Others?

Truly thankful Christians are those who have a healthy sense of indebtedness to those who have blessed their lives. The word gratefulness comes from the Latin word *gratus*, meaning, “free, ready, quick, willing, prompt.” Grateful people are free, ready, quick, willing, and prompt to let others know with their words and actions that they are thankful for the contributions which have been made to their lives.

The abilities that we have are a gift from God and any achievements we have made have only come with the help of many other people. Dr. James Moore tells the story of a distinguished professor who taught at the University of Chicago. Quite often, his preschool granddaughter would come to visit him at his office. She loved to reach up and hold his hand and walk around the campus with her grandfather.

One day, the professor was carrying his granddaughter around on his shoulders. They met a friend who had seen the little girl just the week before. The friend looked up at the little girl riding on her grandfather’s shoulders

and said with a smile, “My goodness! Look at you! Look at how much you’ve grown since I saw you last week! The little girl replied, “Not all of this is me!”

Dr. Moore goes on to say that all of us should be able to relate to this story, because the truth is we all are riding on the shoulders of others. All of us are bigger and better people because of our families, our teachers, our friends, our mentors, our ministers, our coaches, our teammates—anyone who has made a contribution to our lives. Gratefulness is never an attempt to “make up” or “even the score” for what others have done. It is simply a way to outwardly demonstrate how much we appreciate what other people have done for us. We shouldn’t wait for a convenient time or opportunity to show our gratitude to others.

III. Are We Thankful to God?

The highest form of praise and service we can offer God is to continually exercise a spirit of thanks giving. Psalm 103 is one of the greatest sources of instruction on this subject in all the Scripture:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul,” David begins this psalm by talking to himself—he is commanding himself to praise the Lord.

“all my innermost being, praise His holy name.” He is commanding all of his understanding, his powers of reason, his emotions, his personality—all of his being to praise the Lord.”

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” It is a sin to forget all God’s blessings in our lives, and sin grieves the heart of God. David was ordering himself not to grieve the Spirit of God by forgetting all His blessings.

“who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.” David puts at the very top of his “I am thankful for list,” God’s forgiveness. Notice that David reminds himself here that God’s forgiveness covers all his sins.

David is also acknowledging that not only is God able to take care of the condition of his soul but God is also concerned about his physical body, too. David’s afflictions, infirmities, and diseases are all known and matter to God. Whether the healing God brings happens here on earth or in heaven, David knew it would happen.

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There is nothing that hurts a parent more...

“who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with compassion.” David is again reminding himself of an important truth: His life—his entire life—whatever the span of years on earth may be—from the beginning and throughout eternity, is redeemed by God. This is a reminder for us, as well, that we were redeemed for time and for eternity—for life on this earth and for life in heaven. David is verbalizing here his thanks that his compassionate God, crowns, or surrounds him with loving kindness and mercy. David is also acknowledging how God had lavished goodness on his life in every conceivable way.

“who satisfies your life with good things” The Bible says that “every good and perfect gift” is from above. David knew that this was true and that all he had in life was from God. Anytime a physical need was met in David’s life, it was a gift from God. But David also understood a deeper truth which is that only God can satisfy the longings in human hearts.

“so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” As a result of having the innermost needs of our hearts met, we can continually be renewed and strengthen to rise and fly above the storms of life, just as eagle’s do. God is using David’s song of praise to remind us that thanks giving is what lifts us up and enables us to soar with eagles.

Christians should be the people who are the most thankful for all God has done for them. But how many of us know what it truly means to have a lifestyle of gratitude? This is a very serious matter to God. In I Corinthians 10:1-12, we are reminded of the story of the children of Israel. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt with great and awesome miracles. He had faithfully met every need they had, but they were not thankful for God’s provision for them. As a result, the Bible says in verse 5: “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them...” In verse 6, God says that He is letting the rest of us know what

happened back then to “keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.”

The scriptures then go on in verses 7-10 to warn us about four things God says are evil: Committing idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord, and grumbling. This means that God calls complaining or not having a thankful heart, evil, and puts it in the same category with idolatry, sexual immorality, and testing the Lord.

There is nothing that hurts a parent more than having a child who is ungrateful. God is our Father and probably nothing grieves His heart any more than having His children be ungrateful. In Luke 17:12-19 there is a story about ten lepers who came to Jesus for mercy and healing.

Jesus gave all ten of them the very things they asked for, but only one out of the ten came back to say “thank you” to the Lord. Jesus was hurt that day by the ungratefulness of nine men for whom he had done so much. The nine may have been appreciative in their hearts, but they got in such a hurry to get back home to their families and to their lives that they simply didn’t take the time to go back and thank Jesus. How many times do we find ourselves doing the very same thing? We must remember that appreciation is the thought, gratitude is the feeling, and thanks is the action. We haven’t really thanked God for what He has done for us until we have expressed that thanks in a tangible way.

**...than
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Some Christians don't live lives characterized by thanks giving to God because they mistakenly believe they must "feel" thankful in order to express their thanks. In I Thessalonians 5:18 the Bible commands us to give thanks in every situation, however, the Bible never commands us to "feel" thankful in every situation. To give thanks when we don't feel like it is not hypocrisy, it's obedience. This doesn't mean we should deny our negative thoughts and feelings. The Psalmists were always honest about their feelings and told God about them, but they always combined the pouring out of their feelings with sincere praise. Psalm 69 is a good example of this principle. In verse 29 David says, "I am in pain and distress..." But in verse 30 he goes on to say, "I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving."

Ephesians 5:23 says, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of

our Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrew 13:15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that praise His name." Ephesians 5:23 says, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Does this really mean we are to thank and praise God in all things at all times? Psalm 34:1 also says, "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Wait a minute—continually praise?" And then Hebrew 13:15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that praise His name." There it is again: "...continually offer to God." How can we do that? It sounds impossible because it is! It is impossible in our own strength to continually offer sacrifices of praise to God. He is our power source. Unless we stay plugged into His strength, we are totally

powerless. We are totally dependent on God for everything in life and nothing keeps us aware of this like giving thanks.

But what about when bad things happen? Why should we give thanks in the middle of trials? Most folks will tell you that the answer is found in Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him."

That is a great and comforting verse, but the answer is incomplete without verse 29. "For

those God foreknew He also predestinated to be conformed to the likeness of His Son..."

This verse gives us that the reason God allows things that are not good in our lives. The reason is to make us like Jesus. We need to always remember that if we are in a painful place in life God has a purpose in our being there. The purpose is to use that painful situation to make us more like His Son. That's why we can thank God even when life hurts.

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The incredible thing about thanks giving is that it not only reveals God's purpose for our lives, but it releases God's power in our lives, as well. Psalm 50:23 says, "He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God." A sacrifice is something that is not easy to do. It's not easy to thank God when life hurts, but if we are obedient in spite of our feelings, our thanks giving will pave a highway over which God's blessings and deliverance will come to us.

IV. Are We Thankful For Who We Are?

Many times Christians don't have an "attitude of gratitude" because they don't realize who they are in Christ and don't understand what God has done for them. The scripture promises if we are saved, God's acceptance of us is not based on what we do, or don't do, but only on His unconditional love for us and the price that

Jesus paid on the cross to redeem us. In Ephesians 1:6, the Bible says that Christians are "accepted in the Beloved." We are accepted because we are "in Christ" (the Beloved). If we have been saved, Christ is not only in us, but our lives were also placed in Him for eternity. God can never reject us because it would be impossible for Him to reject His Son.

There is also another verse that explains this truth and it is Colossians 2:14. It says, "having canceled the CERTIFICATE OF DEBT with its regulations that were against us and that stood opposed to us, He took it away (removed forever), nailing it to the Cross."

Today the term "certificate of debt" is not one that we are familiar with, but if we had lived in Paul's day, this verse would have painted a powerful word picture. Back then, whenever a person was convicted in a Roman Court of Law, the scribe of the court would make a written list

of all the crimes for which that person had been convicted. That list was called a "certificate of debt." This certificate would be taken, along with the criminal, to the place of imprisonment and nailed to the large wooden door of his cell.

When the sentence had been completed, the scribe would take down the certificate of debt and write across it the word that meant, "It is finished," roll it up, give it to the prisoner, and he could never be convicted of those crimes again. In this verse Paul was saying that 2000 years ago a

"certificate of debt" was prepared for each of us. A list was made of all our sins, and that list was nailed to an old, rugged cross. The words Jesus spoke from the cross were not a cry of defeat, but a shout of victory. "It is finished!" It

meant paid in full! All our sins, past, present and future, have been paid for and we can never be found guilty of them again. Because God accepts Jesus, He completely accepts us because we are "in Christ." We don't have to perform or meet certain standards to win God's love and acceptance or to prove that we have value and worth.

Many times Christians don't have an "attitude of gratitude" because they don't realize who they are in Christ and don't understand what God has done for them.

Our salvation is the result of God's unconditional love for us and the price Jesus paid on the cross to redeem us. The relationship we have with Him is based on the truth of God's Word and His eternal, unchanging faithfulness to us. The word "eternal" in the scriptures means "from age to age" and describes a forever experience. The salvation Jesus gives offers is eternal.

And if that wasn't enough, Romans 6:23 says, "...the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." This is just one of many verses in the Bible that tells us that salvation is a gift from God to us. A wage is earned. A gift is offered freely. The gift of salvation is a gift offered to us by the grace of God, not on the basis of our goodness. Salvation does not begin in the merit of man but in the mercy of God. It does not

begin in the life of man, but in the heart of God. Salvation is not something we attain, it is something we obtain.

God made a way across the grand canyon of sin that separated mankind from Himself. He did something for us that we couldn't do for ourselves. We are the ones who dug the canyon with our sin, but God is the one who provided the bridge, who is Jesus. We cannot change what we are on the inside, which is a sinner. We also can't remove the guilt of what we have done, which is sinned. We deserve justice, but God offers us His grace and mercy. Grace is simply getting what we don't deserve, and mercy is not getting what we do deserve. The basis of salvation past, present, and future is grace, and the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

We, who call ourselves Americans, have much for which to be thankful. But how much more do we, who call ourselves Christians, have to be thankful? Unconditional love and acceptance, complete and total forgiveness, unlimited grace and mercy, new and eternal life. For Christians, Thanksgiving Day should be every day.

Grace is simply getting what we don't deserve, and mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

