

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.

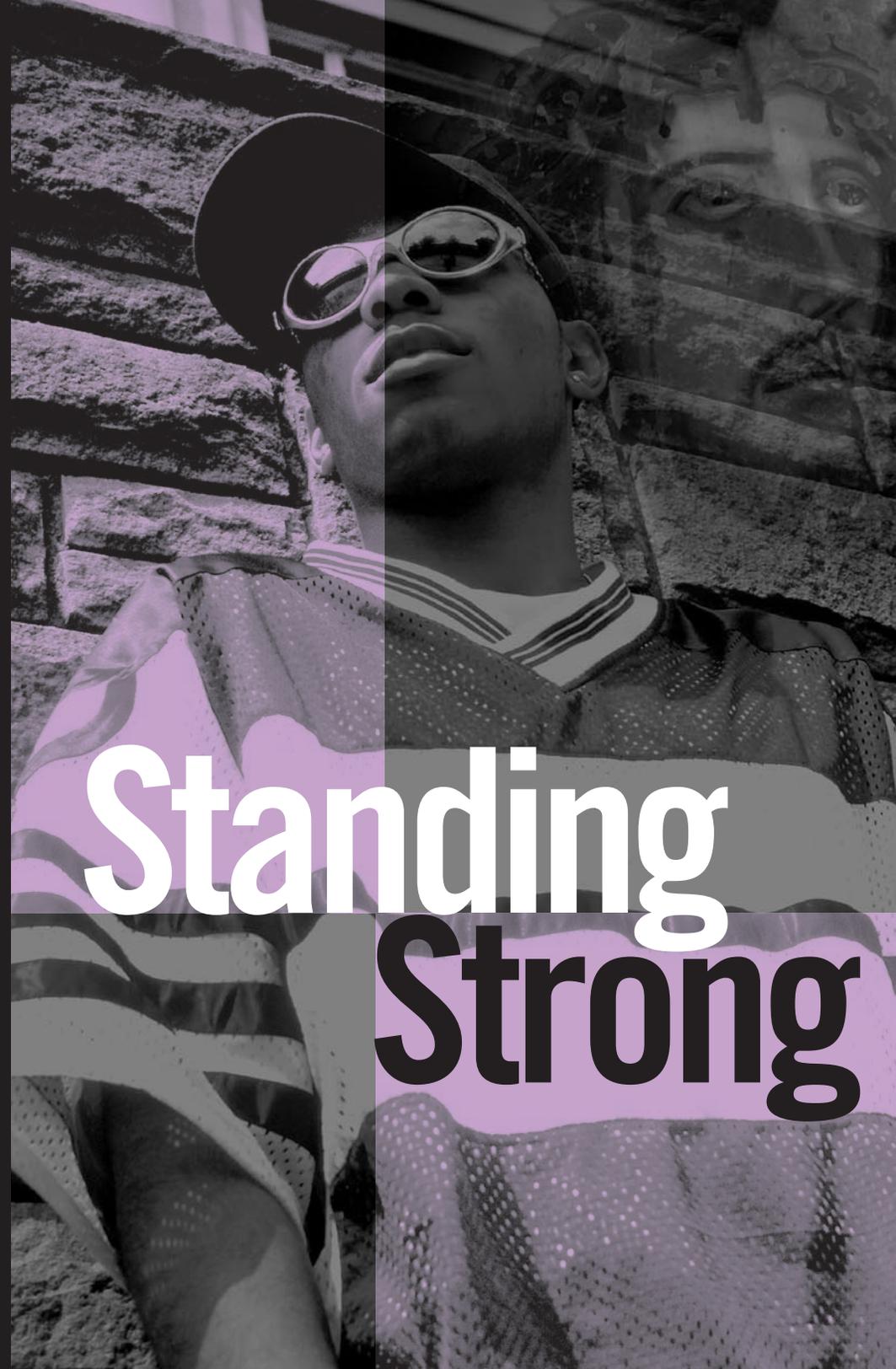
May God bless you and thank you for watching!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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Standing Strong



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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Standing Strong

The word STRONG means powerful, able to resist attack, not easily moved, determined and FIRM. Firmness takes strength a step further because it is about being consistently strong. In other words, standing strong for Christ implies continuous action. It is not just about being unwavering today, it is about being consistently unwavering over the

long haul in the face of fear, pain, discouragement, fatigue, rejection or ridicule.

Standing firm carries with it the picture of ancient Roman soldiers prepared for battle. These soldier had to be sure-footed to stand and fight on rocky ground. They even had a special shoe that they wore to help stabilize them in battle and keep them from falling down. But, being able to stand strong or stand firm for those soldiers wasn't simply about their shoes. They stood strong because they first had an attitude of confidence and commitment. In other words, the outcome of the battle was more about who and what they were, than about what they did or what they wore.

For those of us who are Christians, standing strong is about having a consistent, unwavering witness for Christ that also starts with an attitude of confidence and commitment. There are many

books you can read and tapes you can listen to on "how to witness." These are all important resources and can help you a great deal. But, I believe that whether or not we are able to stand strong as a witness for Christ will be more dependent on who and what we are, than what we do. So, let's examine some things that perhaps you've not thought about before.

Standing strong is about having a consistent, unwavering witness for Christ that also starts with an attitude of confidence and commitment

In a court of law the character and credibility of a witness are as important as the testimony that witness gives. Before we can share effectively, we must have a foundation of character and credibility on which to build our witness. This is a very important component to witnessing that many Christians overlook. Here is what Jesus said:

John 13:35 says, "By this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Jesus said that the

way the world will first know who we are and who we represent is by the way we treat each other.

In other words, the unsaved world will either be attracted to Jesus or turned off to Jesus, largely based on our actions and attitudes toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. The way we treat each other in the body of Christ and our attitude toward the body, will either give the world an accurate or an inaccurate

The choices I make affect you, and the choices you make affect me.

picture of God, and may determine whether or not they will be receptive to the Gospel.

If you are saved you're a card-carrying member of the body, the community of Christ. It is true that membership has its privileges, but it also has its responsibilities and this is not optional. So, like it or not, if you are a part of the body of Christ, you have responsibilities such as:

1. **To serve one another**
(John 13:1-17)
2. **To correct and encourage one another.**
(Galatians 6:1-3)
3. **To warn and encourage one another**
(Hebrews 10:25)
4. **To love and help one another**
(1 John 3:14-16)

Sound like a lot to ask? Maybe so, but the great thing about the body of Christ is that it operates just like your physical body. As one part of the body gives to the other parts, the part that is giving is helped in return. When your hand gives food to the mouth, that same hand is nourished by that food. When one arm helps the other lift a heavy object the muscles in both arms are strengthened and

become healthier.

The Christian life is a paradox because Jesus said the way to have is to give. Luke 6:38 says, "Give and it will be given to you... for with the measure you use to give, it will be measured to you." What do you need in your life today? Love, friendship, help, kindness or encouragement? Then begin to give away whatever it is that you need, and God will meet your needs.

Just as you have one physical body with many different parts, there is one collective body of Christ which also has many different parts. Just as the human body must function in unity and harmony with itself in order to be healthy, so must the body of Christ function in unity and harmony. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 25-27, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, each part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

You must understand that your first witness to a lost world is going to be how you treat your brothers and sisters in Christ, and how seriously you take being a member of the family of God. There are two things that you must protect if your witness is to be effective:

1. You Must Protect The Unity Of The Body Of Christ.

You must protect the body of Christ, not just from those who would want to destroy it from the outside, but you must also guard very carefully what happens on the inside. Unity in the body of Christ is an important part of our collective witness to the lost. Unity just doesn't happen, you must work at it.

There are always going to be people whose actions or personality annoy or irritate you. But, Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." In other words, "GET OVER IT, GROW UP." The truth is that there is probably someone you irritate or annoy, too.

When siblings fight and call each other names in public, it gives others a distorted idea of what the family that they come from is like. The same is true when Christians treat each other unkindly. Nothing is as important as the health and unity of the body of Christ. More physical bodies are destroyed by what is allowed on the inside than anything that happens to them on the outside. Take seriously your part in protecting the unity and the health of the body of Christ.

2. You Must Protect God's Reputation And The Reputation Of The Body.

God stakes His reputation on His kids. Every time we chose willfully to sin, it makes the lost world think that our God is weak and powerless. And if that were not bad enough, none of us ever sin without hurting others in the body of Christ.

We are all so supernaturally connected that what we do affects every member of the body. Sin is not a physical act limited to the time and place where it is committed. It is something that happens in the spiritual realm and transcends time and space. Sin cannot be confined and you cannot put a lid on it. Every time we sin, it spills out all over the whole body. The choices I make affect you, and the choices you make affect me.

We may not like to hear it, but what people think of God and what people think of the church will be determined by the choices you and I make everyday. The Bible refers to the Christian life as a race. If you are going to be successful in your personal race for Christ, there are some things that you must be aware of and guard against on a daily basis.

Compromise is not only doing what you shouldn't but it is also not doing what you should.

No one ever starts out a race with the idea of quitting. The thing that will hinder you in your race more than anything is **COMPROMISE**. These usually don't start out as big things. You don't just wake up one day and say, "I think I'll rebel against God, commit horrible sins and destroy my life and my witness." No, you simply allow little compromises that look fairly innocent and harmless to creep into your life.

You think "no big deal, this won't affect me, just this once...". But, before you realize it, those little compromises begin to slow you down and give way to even bigger compromises. Next fatigue and disillusionment set in, and before you know it, you have dropped out of the race. Of course you can't lose your salvation, but you can lose your peace, your joy, and your effectiveness for Christ.

Remember, Satan is patient. He will destroy you one compromise at a time; whether it takes five, ten, fifteen or twenty years, he'll wait. Compromise is not only doing what you shouldn't but it is also not doing what you should, and all compromise is deadly for a Christian.

The only thing that matters in this race for Christ and in our witness is consistency and finishing. To keep on keeping on over the long haul, to go the distance. To be able to come to the end of the race, whether it is tomorrow, next year, or one-hundred years from now and be able to say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." I stood strong for Christ.

We need to also remember that anytime we share the gospel with another person that we are representing Christ. What a lost world thinks of God and of the church will be determined by the **CHARACTER** and **COMMITMENT** of those who call themselves Christians.

When Peter answered the call to follow Jesus, the Bible says in Matthew 3:20 that he laid down his nets. When he did that, he was laying down everything: what he had been, who he was, how he earned his living, where he was headed. He gave it all up in response to the call of Christ.

But, he came to a place where he took those nets back up again and went back to his old life. Now we know that Peter did have his ministry restored, but do we ever stop and think about how many people were hurt, confused, or totally turned away from the Lord even for a short while because of Peter's lack of firmness in his commitment?

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. Remember, what Jesus said in I John 13:35: "by your love will they know." It will be your love that first points the lost to Him.

You see, witnessing must be ministry in action:

- Helping when it isn't convenient
- Giving when it hurts
- Thinking of the welfare of others before your own
- Taking hurt without hurting back
- Loving those who are unlovable or unlovely

This isn't always easy to do, but these are the kind of actions and attitudes that will cause unsaved people to take notice and be attracted to the Gospel. Sadly though, if we are not careful the same people can be driven away by our petty gossiping, arguing, jealousy, coldness, unconcern and division. The only way you can Stand Strong and be consistent in your witness is by being totally dependent on the Holy Spirit for His power. Remember, witnessing is not so much about what you do or how you do it, as it is about who you are. Ministry is being the eyes and ears, hands and feet, heart and soul of the Savior here on this earth.

We must see what a special responsibility and privilege that is ours!

This is not to say that our verbal witness is not important. I Peter 3:15 says, "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have." This verse isn't a suggestion, it's a commandment and one that Christians must take seriously. Whether or not we do will affect our world for eternity. What people choose to do with the message we present will be between them and God, but it is our responsibility to make the message as clear as possible.

That message has become largely distorted because we live in a world that has for the most part been confused and turned off by organized religion. Religion is spelled **DO** because religion is about people trying to **DO** things to somehow gain God's forgiveness and approval. In Mark 10:17 a rich, young man came to Jesus and said, "Master, what must I **DO** to inherit eternal life?" The Bible teaches that there is **NOTHING** any of us can do to save ourselves. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." And Galatians 2:21 says, "If salvation could come by works of the law, then Jesus Christ has died in vain (for no reason)."

If you begin to see yourself as God sees you, it will change the way you live.

The “hope that we are to share with everyone who ask” is that Christianity is just not another religion because it is not spelled DO, it is spelled DONE. It means that which we could never DO for ourselves, Christ has DONE for us. He willingly died on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sin.

Sin is like a Grand Canyon that separates unholy people from holy God. There is no way for us to get from where we are to where He is. But, Jesus provided a bridge over which we can cross to find our way to God. We cross that bridge when we admit that we are helpless and hopeless and have no way of getting to God on our own.

That simple act of faith, trust and obedience results in our sins being forgiven and our debt being paid. The message is one of such good news and hope! But, Romans 10:14 says, “How shall they ask Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?”

If I were to ask you why you got saved, the majority of you would say, “so I can go to Heaven when I die.” Good answer, but if getting right with God was only about going to Heaven when you die, you would have dropped dead the minute you got saved! No, God left you here for a reason and that is to show the world what He is like and what real love is all about.

You see, for thousands of years God tried to tell the world how great His love is and what He is really like, but we just didn't get it. Finally God said, “O.K., I can't make them understand, so I'll show them how much I love them and what I am really like.” He did that by sending Jesus to earth. For thirty-three years in every situation, every circumstance of life, Jesus modeled to the world the love and character of God. When Jesus went back to heaven, He left us here to take up where He left off.

It is now our responsibility to show the world the love and character of God, so that others can come to know Him, too. As Christians we all know we should share our faith and the hope we have in Christ, so why don't we do that? I'd like to give you a couple of reasons why I believe that we don't witness more.

1. We Don't Witness Because We Feel That We Have Nothing To Share.

For too many of us this Christianity thing doesn't seem to be working. If all life in Christ represents to us is guilt and failure, why advertise it to our friends? We hurt, struggle, stumble and live inconsistently for the most part, because we don't know who we are in Christ and what God did when He saved us.

Do you really understand what happen in your life when Jesus saved you? The Bible says that the moment you asked Him to forgive you and come into your heart that something supernatural took place. The “old” you died and a “new” you was born. The new you has Jesus living inside, and the new you is “in Christ” as well. (II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3) This new you may look like the old you on the outside, but inside everything is different.

All your sin — past, present and future are gone, as if they never happened. The Bible says that you are now holy, pure, righteous and blameless because of Jesus. Because God totally accepts and approves of Jesus, He totally accepts and approves of you because you are “in Christ.” God is pleased with you and there is NOTHING you need to do to win God's love, acceptance or approval.

Too many times Christians will say they believe that salvation is about grace and faith when they accept Jesus as their Savior, then they will spend the rest of their lives trying to get Jesus to accept them. We need to understand that God put His stamp of approval on us the minute we got saved, before we ever had a chance to do anything for Him. (I Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:6)

If you begin to see yourself as God sees you, it will change the way you live. Remember, you are holy, pure, righteous and blameless before God, unconditionally loved and accepted by God, completely pleasing to God just as you are because of Christ.

You do not have to witness to win His approval. That fact is what actually sets you free to want to share! When you begin to experience victory, consistency and joy in your journey with Christ, then witnessing will be a natural overflow of that relationship. Not something you have to do to be a “good” Christian, but something you have a passion to do.

2. We Don't Witness Because We Have No Sense Of Urgency.

There is a story told of a rookie demon who was sent to earth on his first assignment. His mission was to try and keep Christians from witnessing. He decided to discuss his plans for carrying out his assignment with Satan. The demon said, "I'll try and convince Christians that there is no such thing as sin. Then they will stop sharing the Good News since it will seem irrelevant to them."

Satan replied, "That can't be your main objective because most of them realize the reality of sin." "Then I'll try and convince them that there is no hell," the demon said.

"That is only good to a point," said Satan. "The idea of judgment is so ingrained in most people, that they will see through your deception."

The rookie thought for a moment and then shouted, "I know, I'll convince Christians that there is no hurry! I'll whisper things like, 'You know you are going to share with him, but you're so busy today and there is always tomorrow.' But for the majority of self-centered Christians that tomorrow will never come."

Satan smiled, "That will work," he said.

We have no urgency about us because we all tend to think that there will always be another opportunity to share. We foolishly forget that the Bible warns that none of us are promised tomorrow. But, we also have no sense of urgency because we lose sight of what God can do in the lives of our unsaved family and friends.

We selfishly forget how empty our lives were before we met Christ, and before we became a part of the family of God. We forget what it was like to live with a fear of the future and a dread of death. We forget what it must feel like to live without a sense of purpose and peace, to be without hope or joy. We forget what it is like to face our problems alone. Not to have the wisdom, comfort or encouragement that only the Holy Spirit can give.

We need to pray that God will remind us daily of what He saved us from, and that He will impress on us a realistic picture of the desperate situation people are in without Christ. What must it be like to stand before God having never understood the Good News about Jesus?

Someone put it this way:

My friend, I stand in judgment now,
And feel that you're to blame somehow.
On earth I walked with you day by day,
And never did you point the way.
Yes, I called you "friend" in life
And trusted you through fun and strife;
And yet, on coming to this dreadful end
I cannot, now, call you "my friend".

There really is a
heaven to gain and
a hell to shun, and
the reality of eternity
should be enough
to motivate us to
STAND STRONG.

For your sake and for the sake of a lost and dying world, I pray you will.