

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!

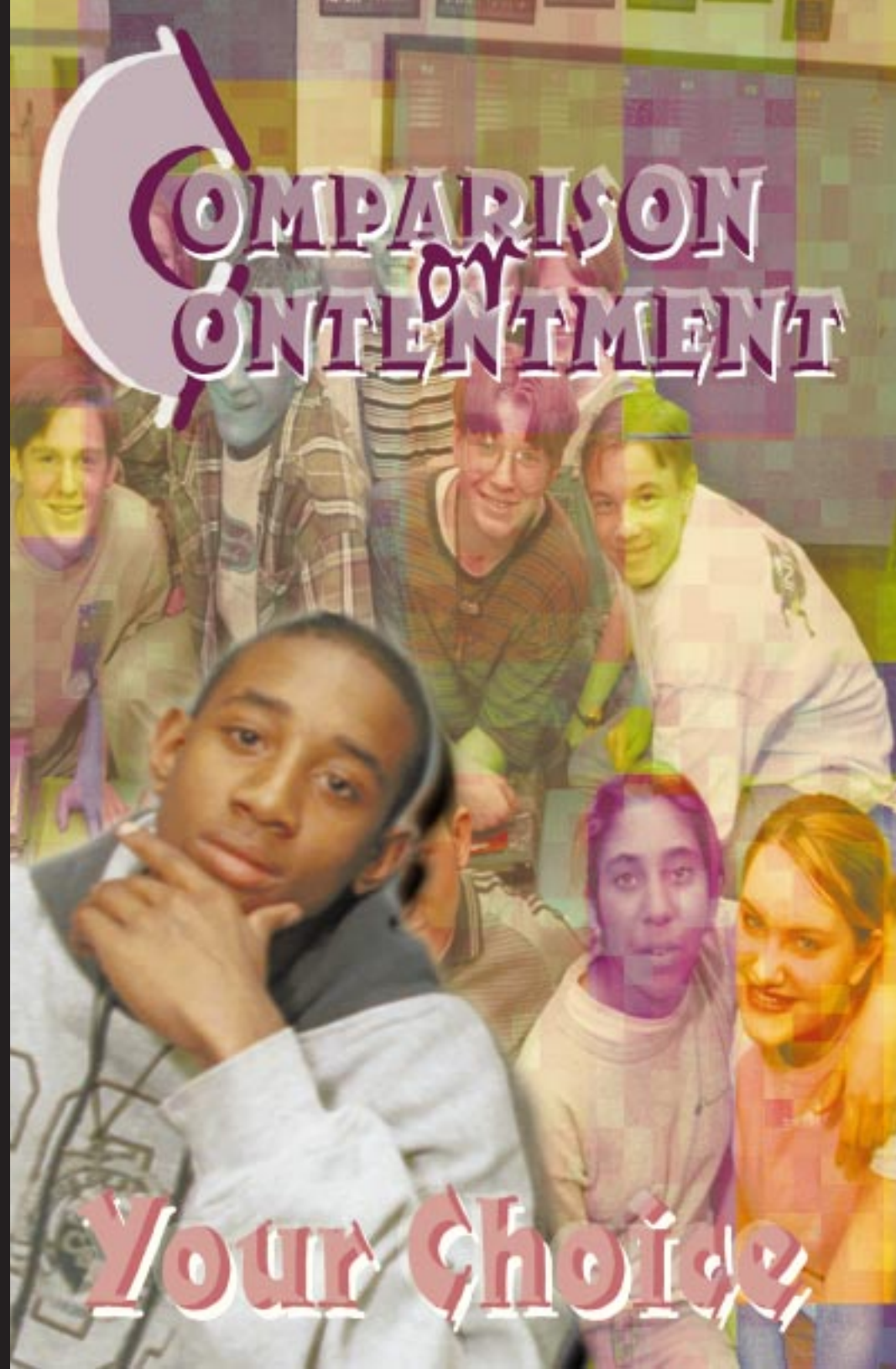
Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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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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Comparison ^{OR} Contentment

Your Choice

The Miss America Pageant is an evening which starts with fifty or so beautiful, talented, intelligent “winners.” Within a matter of minutes, there are only ten “winners” and forty “losers.” A short time later there are five “winners” and forty-five “losers.” By the end of the evening there is only one “winner” and the other forty-nine beautiful, talented, intelligent, young women have been reduced to the status of “losers” in the eyes of America. Do they leave that place any less beautiful, talented or intelligent than when they arrived? Of course not. They simply become victims of “comparison.”

Comparison is a very dangerous thing because it has the ability to take everything which is good in our lives and destroy it. This is the oldest and most deadly trick in Satan’s bag. It was the thing he used in the Garden of Eden to get Adam and Eve to take their eyes off of all they had and put them on the one thing they didn’t have. Comparison was what led them to doubt God’s Word and not trust Him and as a result to forfeit His perfect purpose and will for their lives. Satan still uses comparison today to rip apart lives, marriages, families, careers, and futures by tempting us to use a measuring stick or a standard for success God never intended for us to use.

Dave Edwards gives us a great illustration of

the “sin of comparison” out of the Old Testament. In Numbers 13 and 14 we find the children of Israel one day away from entering the Promise Land after having been slaves in Egypt for four hundred fifty years. In Numbers 13:1 it

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says, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites...’” God tells Moses to have some men go check out the land “which I am giving” —He makes it very clear that as far as He is concerned, the land is theirs and it is a “done deal.” God wanted to encourage these former slaves by giving them a preview of

the great things He had in store for them in their new homeland.

So Moses did what God told him to do and when the twelve men returned they gave this report in verse 26-27: “...they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: ‘We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.’ You would think a bunch of guys who have been in the desert for a long time would be overjoyed with anticipation, but look at verse 28 and 31: “But, the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We can’t attack those people, they are stronger than we are.”

When we are constantly distracted by where we aren't, we can't enjoy where we are.

What happened? Comparison—that's what happened. The Israelites had the great Jehovah God who had miraculously delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, the God who had parted the Red Sea, on their side telling them the land was theirs for the taking and they said, "we can't do it." They compared themselves to their enemies and said, "They're so big, and we're so small—it can't be done!" They forgot about the bigness of their God and allowed comparison to cause them to miss the will of God for their lives.

There is a great lesson for Christians in this story. Anytime in Scripture we see a reference to the Promise Land, it is symbolic of God's will for our lives, and comparison can cause us to miss what God has for us, too. In most of our lives, comparison goes largely undetected, so it must be identified and dealt with. Dave Edwards gives us three things about comparison we need to know:

1. Be Alert to the Symptoms of Comparison.

When we start to play the comparison game two things always happen.

- A. We distort the success of others. We automatically think those we are comparing ourselves to have it so good—that everything is wonderful and perfect for them. We all tend to compare ourselves to others who have more of what we want and not less. So, as a result, we always lose the comparison game.
- B. We discount ourselves. When we take the attitude that "they have it all and I have nothing," we discount all the good in our lives. We get a warped perspective of our lives and of all the blessings God has given us. In our own estimation we become "K-Mart Blue Light Specials!"

Comparison causes us to buy into the lie which says life is a race where we are all running the same course and speed matters. This simply is not true. The Christian life is a race, but in Hebrews 12:1 it says, "...and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." God says life for a Christian is not about "competing;" it's about "completing." How fast we run doesn't matter; it is our "perseverance," our consistency that counts with God.

This verse also points out that we are to run "the race marked out for us." We are not to be like anyone else or try to run another person's race. What God is doing in one life, He doesn't duplicate in another. Each of us was born at a

certain time in history and in a certain place to fulfill a destiny. God has a unique purpose and plan for each of us. Comparison is a thief—it robs us of peace, joy, and contentment. All our insecurities are rooted in comparison.

2. Be Aware of the Strategy of Comparison.

Satan loves to use comparison in our lives for two reasons because it will:

- A. Cause us to distrust God. Satan knows most Christians won't walk completely away from God so that isn't a temptation worth his time. He does know, however, that comparison will eventually cause us to be hurt or angry enough with God that we won't trust Him, and when we aren't willing to trust God, we will miss the will of God for our lives.
- B. Cause us to be disappointed with the opportunities God gives us.

In Numbers 14:2-3 it says, "All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt! Or in the desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it have been better for us to go back to Egypt?'" Here they are after four hundred fifty years of slavery and only one day away from what they had prayed for and waited for, and now they want to go back? Comparison caused them to be disappointed with the opportunity God was giving them and where they were in life, and it will do the same

thing in our lives, too.

When we are constantly distracted by where we aren't, we can't enjoy where we are. Comparison will cause us to miss the blessings of today.

3. Apply the Safeguards.

God has provided a way that we can safeguard ourselves against comparison. These five safeguards are found in Psalm 37:4-7: "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."

- A. Defer the role of God to God. In verse 4 it says, "Delight yourself in the Lord." This literally means God must be the most influential thing or person in our lives. No other person or thing can occupy the throne of our hearts and that includes us.
- B. Direct your heart to find the will of God. Verse 4 also says, "...and He will give you the desires of your heart." When God is the most influential person in our lives, then His desires become our desires and what He wants becomes the most important thing in our lives.
- C. Delight in your uniqueness. Verse 5 says, "Commit your way to the Lord."



We quit using the measuring stick the world uses to gauge success. We need to find out what we are good at, and embrace it, commit it to God for His blessing, and celebrate our uniqueness.

D. Determine to live out your full potential. Verse 6 says, “He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn.” There is nothing more beautiful in this world than to see Christians living out the destiny for which they were created. It is like the beauty of the light that breaks upon the darkness at dawn.

E. Deny your right to compare. Verse 7 says, “...do not fret when men succeed in their ways...” We must make the choice not to play the comparison game, but instead choose to “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.” To be “still” means “rest,” “ceasing from striving.” So, the choice is ours—fretting or resting—which will it be?

It will be impossible to rest in the Lord unless we can trust Him. There are some truths from God’s Word about his nature and character we must believe in order to trust Him:

1. *God loves us and He has our best interest at heart.*

The Bible affirms the love of God again and again. We know this love is unconditional and unending because Jesus demonstrated God’s love to us. I John 4:9 and 16 says, “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent

His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” Psalm 145 speaks of God’s abundant goodness and of His being loving toward all He has made. Jeremiah 32:41 tells us that because God loves us, He rejoices in doing good for us. The Bible says God is love, and He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, so we can depend on God’s love and goodness being unconditional and unchanging. The Bible tells us in Psalm 84:11 that, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Because God loves us, He promises not to withhold anything good from us. If He ever denies us anything, it is because He knows that it wouldn’t be good for us at this time in our lives, or to protect us, or to provide something better for us.

2. *God is too wise to make a mistake.* Psalm 147:5 says, “His wisdom has no limit.” Unlike a human parent, God is too wise to make a mistake where one of His children are concerned. He always knows what’s best for us and the best way to bring about that result in our lives. Our Heavenly Father has the “big picture” for our lives and therefore is the only One who can know what is best for us. God is so wise that He automatically knows what we need, when we need it. He can separate our needs from our wants and knows whether what we want would be good for us to have or whether it would harm us. God’s wisdom and ways are so far beyond our limited under-

standing that we can always trust Him even when we don’t understand.

3. *God is in control of everything in our world.*

Being in control means God is sovereign and is in charge of the final outcome. The wise, good God who loves and understands us, is a sovereign God. God is in complete control of everything at all times. There is not one single event in all the universe can occur outside of God’s sovereign control. Not even willful, malicious acts, or the mistakes of other people can change God’s purpose for us. No detail of our lives is too insignificant for our Heavenly Father’s attention. No circumstance is so big He cannot control it. Nothing happens in our life without a reason, and if we will allow Him, God will use everything that happens for good in our lives.

Making the choice to trust God will give us steadfast hearts that will allow us rest in Him. Trusting God will also free us from the temptation to build up our egos or to maintain a special status in the world’s eyes by comparing ourselves to those around us.

So what is our alternative to playing the comparison game? There is only one. In Psalm 73, the Psalmist gives us a clear picture of the two choices we have in life. One is comparison, the other is CONTENTMENT.

“No doubt about it! God is good—good to people, good to the good-hearted. But I nearly missed it, missed seeing His goodness. I was looking the other way, looking up to the people at the top, envying the wicked who have it made, who have nothing to worry about, not a care in the world.

Because God loves us, He promises not to withhold anything good from us.

...we were never created by God to be fulfilled by

anything but **Him**

Preentious with arrogance, they wear the latest fashions in violence, pampered and overfed, decked out in silk bows of silliness. They use jeer, using words to kill; they bully their way with words. They're full of hot air, loudmouths disturbing the peace. People actually listen to them—can you believe it? Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words.

What's going on here? Is God out to lunch? Nobody's tending the store. The wicked get by with everything; they have it made, piling up riches. I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me? A long run of bad luck, that's what—a slap in the face every time I walk out the door. If I'd have given in and talked like this, I would have betrayed you dear children. Still, when I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache...

Until I entered the sanctuary of God. then I saw the whole picture. The slippery road you've put them on, with a final crash in a ditch of delusions. In the blink of an eye, disaster! A blind curve in the dark, and—nightmare! We wake up and rub our eyes...nothing. There's nothing to them. And there never was. When I was beleaguered and bitter, totally

consumed by envy, I was totally ignorant, a dumb ox in Your very presence. I'm still in Your presence, but You've taken my hand. You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then You bless me.

You're all I want in heaven! You're all I want on earth! When my skin sags and my bones get brittle, God is rock-firm and faithful. Look! Those who left You are falling apart! Deserters, they'll never be heard from again. But I'm in the very presence of God—Oh, how refreshing it is! I've made God my home. God,

I'm telling the world what You do!" (The Message)

As in most all of the Psalms, this writer starts out by giving us his conclusion and then tells us how he arrived at that conclusion. Next, the Psalmist begins to lay out his problem for us.

It started when he began to compare himself to those around him whom he considered better off than himself. Comparison reduced him to sarcasm, anger, bitterness, despair, and even made him physically ill. But then, something happened and his whole perspective changes. Life is suddenly good and wonderful again. What happened? The Psalmist simply got with God, began to see things through God's eyes,

and then made the choice to move from comparison to contentment.

By his own admission, comparison caused the Psalmist to become illogical, ignorant, and totally lacking in compassion. It also caused him to be anxious about what he may or may not have tomorrow and discontented about what he had today. Discontentment is just as much a problem for us today as it was when this Psalm was written. We are still a covetous (intensely desiring something belonging to someone else) generation, discontented with our lives, and always hoping to find satisfaction somewhere over the next rainbow.

Christians should be the most contented of all people but too many times we fall into the same trap the rest of the world does. We want "things" because we think they bring us satisfaction and comfort. Material things will entertain us and help us forget our real problems—but only for a short time because we were never created by God to be fulfilled by anything but Him. After the new wears off, we find instead of being content with what we have, we are even more discontented and empty. The simple reason is, if we aren't enough without it, we'll never be enough with it. Too many times we aren't willing to accept this truth and deal with the real issues in our lives, so we decide that the solution to our discontent is to have more and that happiness is only one purchase away. Once we buy into this lie, we set a very vicious and destructive

cycle of comparison and discontent in place in our lives that is hard to break.

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 he knows something we need to know about being content. If we skip down to verse 19, we will discover 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 learned that God could be trusted to keep His promises. In Psalm 9:10 it says, "Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You Lord have never forsaken those who seek You." Paul found God to be trustworthy because He knew three things about his Heavenly Father that we must know, as well. (1) He knew God in His love always wills what is best for us. (2) In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and (3) in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about. We can trust this kind of Father to meet our needs and do what is best for us. The peace that comes in our lives when we choose to trust Him will give us contentment, regardless of our circumstances, and regardless of what we have or don't have.



This kind of contentment doesn't mean we are passive, lazy, or don't care.

It simply means that we do our part by making a choice not to compare ourselves to anyone else, then to trust the sovereignty, the wisdom, and the love of God to provide what He knows we need when we need it. We must remember contentment is a choice. If we choose not to trust God and be contented, then the alternative is to believe the lie which says "things" bring happiness and meaning to life. When we do this, we will waste our lives away struggling and wishing for what we don't have, all the while, missing what is really important and worthwhile in life. Contentment is not the fulfillment of getting what we want, but the realization of what we already have.

In our modern, twenty-first century world burnout is a huge problem. More burnout is probably caused by comparison and discontent than by anything else. We totally exhaust ourselves trying to reach the unreal expectations which are imposed on us, not just personally, but by the shifting values of our society. Discontent is a national disease which has become epidemic and it is leaving millions of

victims in its path. The more we choose to measure our own worth and significance by the accomplishments of others; the more discontented we will become. Proverbs 14:30 says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." Envy is resenting someone else for what they have and envy is a choice. Contentment is only possible when we choose not to allow envy a place in our lives.

Sometimes our discontent is caused more by what we expect should happen, then by what actually does happen. Expectations are a powerful force in our lives and they influence how we react to reality. There is no way to ever arrange all the circumstances in our lives in such a way to meet all our expectations. When we expect happiness and contentment to come from having all the circumstances in our lives go the way we would like for them to go, we are setting ourselves up for comparison and discontent. We must remember God never created us to be fulfilled by anything or anyone other than Himself, so anytime we try to fill that God-shaped void in our lives with something or someone else, we will be very disappointed.

God wants us to have a life filled with peace and contentment. Satan wants us to believe the secret to happiness is having everything we want, when we want it, exactly the way we want it to be. God says that is a lie. In 1 Timothy 6:6 it says, "...godliness with contentment is great gain." A godly, contented life is the most valuable thing we can possess.

There are some important truths about contentment we need to know.

- Contentment doesn't come easily—learning to be content is a lifelong process.
- Contentment is possible in any situation, regardless of the circumstances.
- Contentment is a choice we make with our wills.
- When we make the choice to be content, God meets us there with the power we need to be contented.

So, which will it be—comparison or contentment? When we come to the end of our race, the only thing that is going to matter is did we fulfill the purpose for which we were created? Did we fulfill our own, unique destiny? We must decide today to say "no" to comparison, "no" to the regrets of yesterday, and "no" to our expectations for tomorrow.

Contentment is not the fulfillment of getting what we want, but the realization of what we already have.