

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.

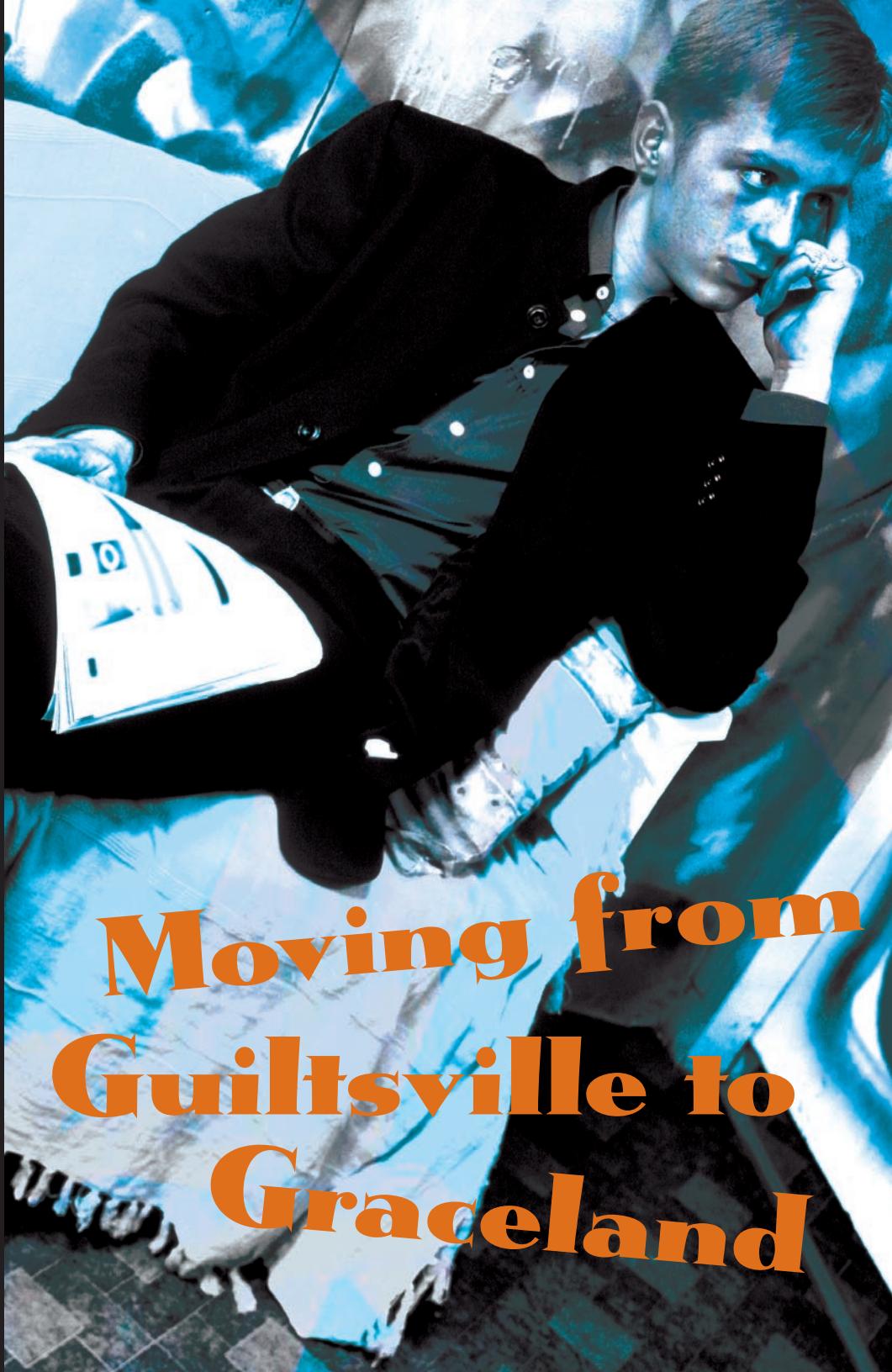
May God bless you and thank you for watching!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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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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Moving from Guiltsville to Graceland

Welcome to Guiltsville — Population "Far Too Many"

Webster defines guilt as "the fact or state of having committed an offense." Most of us are aware that God says all humans are "offenders" (sinners), and therefore guilty as charged. In Romans 3:23 it says, "For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The person who has never had his or her sin forgiven and been made right with God through faith in Christ is, and should be, a legal resident of Guiltsville.

But, many Christians have taken up residence in Guiltsville, too. Some are just visiting, some move in and out, some camp-out on the city limits, while others have settled deep in the heart of Guiltsville in a neighborhood called Shame. Once you live in that neighborhood for very long you will move into a house on

Hopeless Street. Guiltsville is a place where no Christian should ever live but sadly many do, not because they are guilty, but because they "feel" guilty.

Do you realize that even the most spiritually mature and wise people, you know those who seem to have it all together, struggle with feelings of guilt? Much of this is the result of our culture. In his book, Emotions: Can You Trust Them?,

Dr. James Dobson said: "...we are living in a day when people are being encouraged to release their emotions, to grant them even greater power in ruling their destinies... We live and breathe by the vicissitudes (irregular changes) of our feelings... Reason is now dominated by feelings, rather than the reverse (feelings being controlled by facts) as God intended."

Feelings are often a lousy barometer of reality.

You see, society says if you feel a certain way then it must be true. About twenty years ago a song called, You Light Up My Life was very popular. Even though it is a very sweet song, it contains a phrase that is a very dangerous lie. It says, "it can't be wrong, when it feels so right." What that song is trying to sell us is that if something "feels" good, then it must be good. We have used that same faulty reasoning to determine that if something "feels" bad, then it must be bad. Or in this case, "I feel guilty, therefore I am guilty." We judge how guilty we are by how guilty we feel.

Feelings are often a lousy barometer of reality. Too many times we feel guilty, when based on what the Bible says, we aren't guilty at all. In any given week, and sometimes even on any given day all of us will experience a wide variety of emotions.

false guilt comes not because we have violated God's standard, but because we have violated our own.

When things are going well we can experience great happiness and contentment. But when things take a turn for the worse, our emotions can plunge into doubt, frustration, fear and anger.

As our feelings change, the way we feel about our relationship with God often changes, too. This is no way to determine our guilt or innocence before a holy God. Feeling guilty when we aren't guilty at all is called "false guilt." This false guilt comes not because we have



violated God's standard, but because we have violated our own. Here are examples of several things that will produce false guilt:

- Not living up to cultural or family expectations
- When we unintentionally cause others harm
- Not be able to "fix" the suffering of others
- Habitual sin (having to confess the same sin to God over and over again)

Even though the scripture promises if we are saved that 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, it still

seems more natural to feel condemned and unworthy, instead of forgiven and loved by God. As a result, many of us live our lives

everyday feeling guilty, afraid, and condemned. This is a very serious issue, because when our sense of guilt becomes overwhelming, it will turn to shame. In other words, in your own mind, you move from being a person who DOES bad things, to person who IS bad.

Shame is the painful sense that you lack

value as a person. It is the belief that you are defective, worthless, and unlovable. It is not simply that something is wrong with your behavior, it is that something is wrong with you as a person. Shame is often used by people as a means of placing themselves over others.

When I give you the message that you are bad or defective, I am placing myself in the position of being more valuable, or more powerful, and the judge of your value as a person. Shame is also used in an attempt to control the behavior of others. You play on a person's sense of defectiveness so they will change their behavior to escape the feelings of worthlessness.

Unfortunately, our first experience with shame usually begins at home. In families where shame is the weapon of choice,

- love is conditional, based on performance
- acceptance is earned
- behavior matters more than people
- the measuring sticks are "what will people think" and "how will this look"
- feelings are wrong, selfish or unnecessary
- blaming is elevated to an art form
- the one being shamed becomes an expert at rationalizing, minimizing and denial to try and protect whatever fragile sense of self-worth they have left

Shame is a terrible, terrible thing because it says that you are what you are and you cannot change. Shame causes us to believe that our past failures have permanently scarred us, and that we will have to always live life as it is at this very moment. Whenever we feel guilty about what we consider to be too many failures or disappointments in our life (even if many of these were out of our control) we begin to expect only failure in the future. This then becomes a deep sense of shame and hopelessness.

The only way to cope with that dreadful, emotional pain is to lower our expectations. We make decisions that will avoid risks, and keep us from further failure and the rejection that brings. We then get locked into the feeling that we can never change. At that point, we

usually begin to look around and compare ourselves to others that we feel are more successful. As a result, we begin to feel more ashamed that we have not measured up, and we believe that the way we are has kept us from being successful.

God has a solution for all of us that live on Hopeless Street in the neighborhood of Shame in the town of Guiltsville. That solution is called "Regeneration." Regeneration is a supernatural work of God that literally makes a person brand new the split second that he or she trusts Christ as Savior.

II Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Regeneration is not something that we can do for ourselves to "clean-up our acts or improve our lives". Regeneration is something that only God can do and is the beginning of a completely new life in Christ. It simply means that who we were and what we did in the past are gone forever.

Titus 3:4-7 says, "...but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things that we have done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth, and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs, having the HOPE of eternal life."

Real repentance doesn't focus on our performance. It focuses on our relationship with God.

You see, our regeneration in Christ is complete and perfect and if we have been saved, God has made us new. He accepts us totally based on our new life in Christ.

Because God has made us new people, it is no longer accurate to see ourselves as failures or losers. We don't have to live life the way we always have. If God says that we are new creatures, perfect and acceptable in His sight, then we are NOT doomed to be the way we have always been. We can change and begin to live like who God says that we are – WINNERS. Chuck Swindoll says, "most folks, it seems, are better acquainted with their guilt and shame than with their God." Every opportunity we have to get to know our Father better, will help us begin to think His thoughts and see ourselves as He sees us.

But there is one who wants us to believe that our past failures and bad habits make us permanent residents on Hopeless Street. The same one that the Bible calls, "the accuser of the brethren", Satan. He is the one who wants you to believe that this is as good as life will ever get for you. God says that is a LIE.

Regeneration means that God has made you a brand new person and when He looks at you that is all He sees. God sees you as completely forgiven, unconditionally loved, totally accepted, fully pleasing and complete in Christ. When you begin to understand and believe these truths, you can pack your bags

and move off of Hopeless Street, right out of Shame and Guiltsville forever.

Your new residence will be in Graceland on Mercy Avenue. People in Graceland GET what they DON'T deserve, and on Mercy Avenue they DON'T GET what they DO deserve. Both are gifts of God. Jesus purchased your house on Mercy Street and paid for your citizenship in Graceland with His life. For you to choose not to live there would be to take lightly His sacrifice, and to trample under your feet His precious blood (Hebrews 10:29).

If we are not careful, it will be easy to find ourselves stuck in Guiltsville for a couple of reasons:

I. LEGITIMATE GUILT

The reason you may feel guilty is because YOU ARE GUILTY. Yes, you are a Christian, but there is willful, unconfessed, specific sin in your life. Your sin may be in the early stages of neglecting spiritual things and taking your relationship with the Lord for granted, or you may have regressed to the stage of compromise or even total rebellion. Whatever it is, you need to understand that it is all sin, and all sin is dealt with in the same way. That way is I John 1:9: "If we will confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There are some fundamental things that you must understand about this restoration process if you are going to move out of Guiltsville.

1. CONFESSION. This is not just agreeing with God that we have sinned or made a mess of things. It is seeing sin in all of its awfulness. It is realizing the evil and the destructiveness of sin, and how it has broken the heart of the Father. We need to understand what sin cost God and hate it the way He does. Genuine confession makes the next step of real repentance possible.

2. REPENTANCE. Most teenagers mistakenly think that repentance is either about starting to do the things they should, or stopping what they shouldn't be doing. But, if that were true, then repentance would only be about our good works. Real repentance doesn't focus on our performance. It focuses on our relationship with God. Repentance is laying down the control of our life that we took from God when we chose to sin, and yielding our life back to Him again.

The whole purpose of the Christian life is to live a life totally dependent on God. God's purpose in all of our pain and problems, is that these bring us to the end of our self-sufficiency and into that dependent relationship with Him. Teenagers will often "repent" because they are miserable, or because they have made a mess of things and are looking for a "quick fix." But, it is only when a

person has truly confessed their sin (which is always self-control, regardless of how that has expressed itself in their life), and repented of that sin (which can only mean once again relinquishing the control of their life to Christ), can the fellowship with God be restored.

3. FORGIVENESS. When you got saved Jesus paid for and forgave ALL your sins, past, present and future. Forgiveness is like a box of laundry detergent that Jesus purchased just for you. It has your name on it, it is yours, it belongs to you and no one can take it from you. Repentance and confession are like the water that activates that detergent (forgiveness) each time you need it, restoring your fellowship with God.



truth can only set you free when you are willing to be truthful

What about the people that seem to be unable to live consistently in the same place for any length of time? You know always moving in and out of Guiltsville, continually "re dedicating" their lives? Here are four basic issues that could be causing this problem. They could have:

1. A "SPIRITUAL" ISSUE.

These people have never really been saved. Perhaps they have grown up in a Christian home and have been in church all their lives. They know all the right answers to all the questions, but have never really had a personal experience with Christ. They have assumed that having Christian parents, or going to church, or being baptized was all they needed and they have been trying to live the Christian life without the benefit of a power source.

2. A "MENTAL" ISSUE.

These are people who were never well-grounded in the fundamentals of who they are in Christ and what really happened to them when they got saved. Their belief system is faulty so their walk is faulty. It is impossible to live consistently in a way that is inconsistent with what you think about yourself, and what you think about yourself as a Christian is determined by what you think God thinks about you.

You can always tell what they believe, not by what they say, but by how they live. When people live beneath their privilege as Christians it is either because

they have forgotten who they really are, or because they have never known who they are in Christ and what God says about them. God says that if we have been saved that we are totally forgiven, unconditionally loved and accepted by Him, that we are NOW holy, righteous, blameless, and pure, and pleasing to Him, that He isn't angry with us and that we are sons and daughters of the King. If we believe this, then our lives will reflect it.

But, if we believe that our relationship with God is conditional, based on our performance, that God is angry with or disappointed in us, or that we are still guilty, dirty sinners at heart, then that is how we will live. You see, it isn't the person who simply knows the Word of God that is able to live a consistent, godly life. It is the person who has allowed God to conform their thoughts to His thoughts who becomes spiritually strong. Our feelings are always going to follow our thoughts, so wrong thinking causes our feelings to be distorted.

3. AN "EMOTIONAL" ISSUE.

These are people who live by their feelings and because their feelings lie to them they can't live consistently for very long. Many teens are trying to run this race called the Christian life weighed down with so much emotional baggage that they find themselves constantly fatigued, discouraged and

falling away. Salvation is instantaneous and complete, but when a teenager has been wounded emotionally, freedom for them will be a process, like peeling off the layers of an onion one layer at a time.

Sometimes teenagers have the mistaken idea that "good" Christians don't have problems, so they just try to sweep the guilt, shame and fear that they still carry under the rug of their lives. They need to understand that the way to get started on the road to healing and freedom is to be honest. Honest with themselves and honest with God. Jesus said that the truth will set us free, but remember the truth can only set you free when you are willing to be truthful.

4. THE ISSUE OF UNFORGIVENESS.

One of the reasons that some Christians are unable to live consistently is because they have unforgiveness in their lives. When a Christian chooses not to be obedient to God and accept the grace to forgive another person, then a root of bitterness begins to grow in his life. That root produces many ugly and deadly fruit. An unforgiving, bitter spirit will always:

- keep you from being able to love and be loved unconditionally
- cause you to doubt your salvation
- keep you from being able to pray effectively
- make it impossible for you to live consistently

- lead to depression, anger, rage and violence, as well as mental and physical problems.

Unforgiveness in the life of a Christian is serious business and carries with it a high price tag. You must know three things about forgiveness:

A. Forgiveness is not a feeling.

This is not something you do when you "feel" like it. It is an act of your will, an act of obedience to God and has nothing to do with the person who has offended you.

B. Forgiveness is undeserved pardon and an undeserved release.

If you wait until a person asks for forgiveness or until you think that they deserve it, then it is too late because it isn't really forgiveness at all.

C. Remember, no matter how horribly

someone has treated you, it could never compare with how horrible you were to God. Your sin drove the nails through the hands and feet of His only Son, and yet He forgave you completely while you were still in your sin. Don't let unforgiveness keep you from being in fellowship with God, and from being able to live a consistent, godly life.

II. FEAR OF CHANGE

Suppose a certain man has lived in a very bad neighborhood in a large city up north for his entire life. His neighborhood is run-down and overrun with crime. He has three locks on his door and bars on his windows. Every night he hears yelling, gun shots or sirens. If I were to move that man to a beautiful retirement community in southern Florida where there was warm weather, no crime and only peaceful nights, what do you think he would do? You think that moving from a bad, depressing, scary place was a good thing, right?

Believe it or not, depending on how long he had lived the other way, in just a short time he would want to be moving back up north. Why? Because we find comfort, security and a measure of control in the familiar, even if the familiar is lousy. Stupid, you say? Maybe, but it is still true and you may find that it is true in your life, too, if you are having trouble moving from Guiltsville to Graceland. Do you have the courage to move and leave the fear, hopelessness and depression behind? Or are you holding on to your old address simply because it is familiar? Fear of change is sometimes really just an excuse not to have to "do life."

Let me give you an illustration.

In John 5:1-9 tells the story of a crippled man. Imagine this scene for a moment with me. Picture a beautiful pool with large marble columns. There are sick people with every kind

of illness sitting and lying around beside the pool. Some have been there for years because they all believe that periodically an angel comes and stirs the waters, and when that happens the first person in the pool gets healed.

The crippled man had been an invalid for 38 years. For some reason Jesus picked him out of the crowd that day and walked straight over to him. Jesus asked the man a strange but important question, "Do you want to get well?" Instead of saying yes, the man made an excuse. Jesus ignores the excuse and said, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was healed and did just that.

You may wonder why the man didn't immediately say "yes, I don't want to live this way any longer, I want to be different." The truth is that he probably had become very comfortable settling for what he had. After all, the pool was familiar territory. All the other sick people that went to the pool everyday were his friends. He probably liked being around them because then he didn't feel so bad about himself. Being crippled also gave him an excuse not to do life like other people.

We can be a lot like that man. We can become comfortable with where we live and how we live. Jesus is saying the same thing to us that he said to that man by the pool, "Do you want to be different?" Get up! Don't stay where you are or how you are. Move away from that pool of guilt and shame, hopelessness

and depression. Do it, not just for yourself, but for all the other residents of Guiltsville. There is an epidemic of hopelessness raging today, unparalleled by any other time in history. People the world over are desperate for hope. They are looking for those who can not only help them find it, but show them how to hold on to it.

What kind of excuses are you making? Now is the time to respond to His invitation for a new way of living. The decision you make today will determine what is on the other side of tomorrow for you. You can decide today to begin to live life the way God intended for it to be lived.

God does not want you to live in guilt, shame, hopelessness, depression or confusion. If you are a Christian He has put a new heart and a new spirit within you (Ezekiel 36:26). You can make the choice to change. The crippled man was healed whether he felt like it or not, whether he believed it or not. He had a choice to make: accept what Jesus said and act on it, or allow his unbelief to cause him to continue to live as a cripple even though in reality he was healed.

Will you accept the victorious life that Jesus has graciously provided you as fact, even though your feelings or old belief system may tell you differently? Will you trust Him to move you off Hopeless Street and out of Shame and Guiltsville to Graceland and Mercy Avenue?



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