

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.

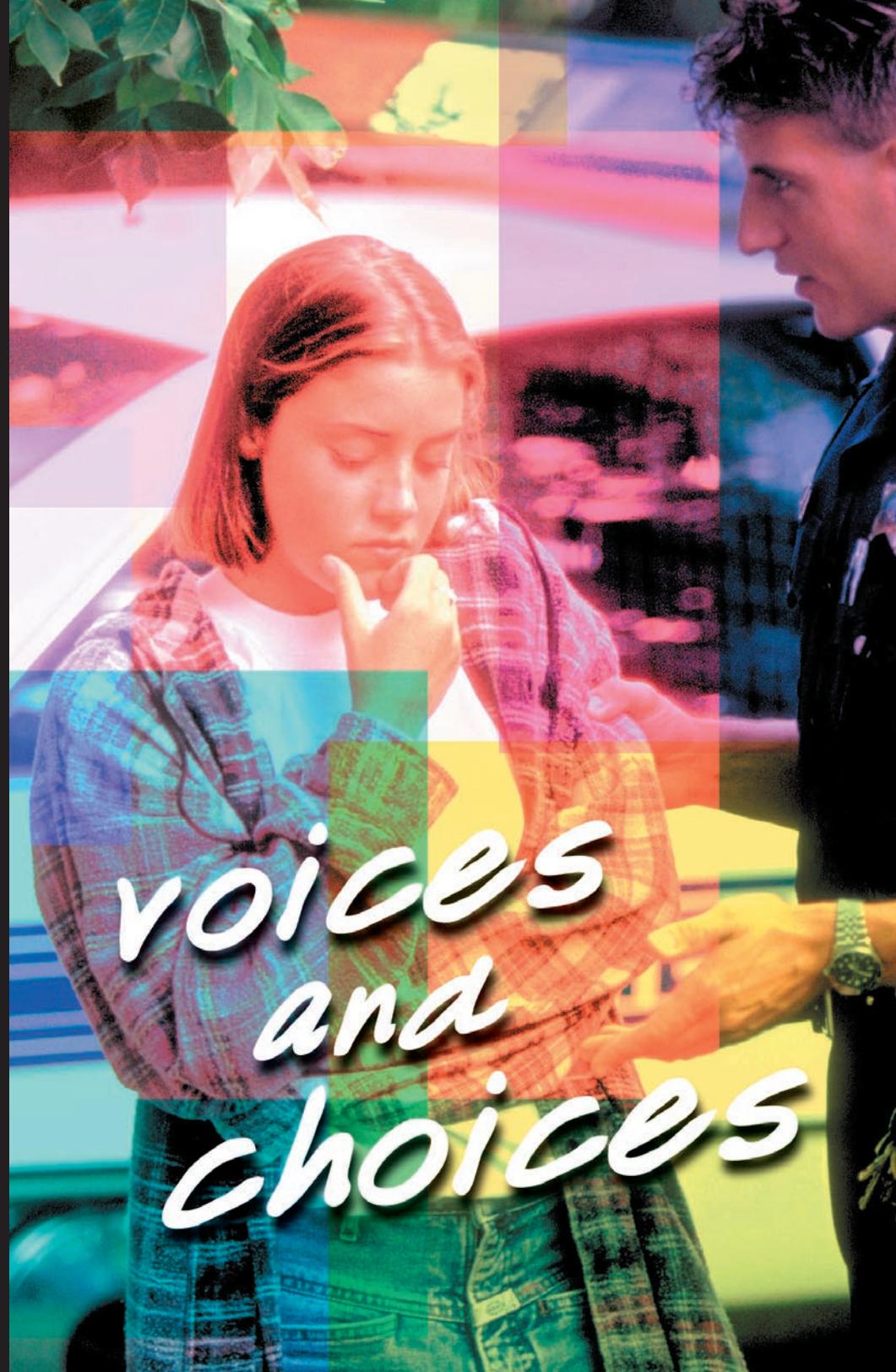
Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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*voices
and
choices*



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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voices and choices

If you have a pulse, like it or not, you are making choices, hundreds and hundreds of choices. Never in human history have there been so many choices to make, and never have there been so many voices competing for your attention. These choices will be especially difficult for you if you are a Christian because you are trying to make moral decisions in a culture that is headed in a completely different direction. It is easy for the voice of God to be drowned out in a society where there are so many influences and such unbelievable pressure to conform.

Before you enter that wonderful time called "adolescence" (ugh!) there are few influences in your life. But, someone has said that reaching adolescence is like lowering the drawbridge in life and inviting in a world of other influences. Some of these can be good, some are not. How do you know to which voices to listen? Let's look at what some of the influences in our world are so that you can better recognize their voices when they call.

Secular Music. Al Menconi, president of Menconi Ministries, says that music is a "window to the soul" for teenagers. The reason popular music means so much is because it talks about the anger, fear, rebellion, depression, sexuality, confusion and frustration that all teenagers deal with at times.

Music that addresses these issues makes you feel like someone out there understands what you are going through. The problem is that most secular music brings along its own ungodly philosophy of life. Lyrics that contain

obscenities and encourage gang rape, sodomy, suicide, incest and forced oral sex have sold millions of copies in the last ten years. The music that most teens are listening to is sensual and self-absorbing. It encourages irresponsibility and rebellion. Most dangerous of all is the fact that it agrees with our basic

sin nature and makes us

feel like it is O.K. to feel that way.

Television. It is estimated that by the time you are out of high school, you'll have seen 22,000 hours of TV, 350,000 commercials, and about 18,000 televised killings. Every year you will see 9,230 sexual acts or innuendos that encourage sexual involvement on television. By the time you are 20, you will have seen more than 92,000 acts of sex or alleged sex on the small screen. Television has not only taught teenagers that premarital sex is O.K., but that it is fun, funny, normal and generally free from any consequences. Television has also created a world that is mean and dangerous. Rape, hatred, and violence are piped right into your home.

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Can you really believe that a steady diet of this kind of darkness and gloom is not going to hurt you?

Movies. Of course most movies share the same philosophy that television does, but the big screen seems to make the influence all the more powerful, and the voice even louder. Just because you don't see movies that are pornographic or R-rated doesn't mean that there isn't a negative influence there. Movies tend to portray an image that says, "Money is god." The fashion, cars, estates and trips are paraded in front of you continually. They almost always present marriage as a trap, violence as glamorous, parents as idiots to be lied to and tricked whenever necessary, filthy language to be no big deal, living together without being married as normal, affairs as acceptable, and family relationships worthless. They usually don't come right out and say that God doesn't exist, they simply depict life as if He doesn't.

Sexually Explicit Material. Josh McDowell explains it best when he says that pornography is not wrong because it is so sexy, it is wrong because it is not sexy enough. It butchers true sexual fulfillment on the block of immediate and superficial gratification. It strips sex of the sacred beauty that God created it to have in marriage. It sets you up for self-centeredness and disappointment, instead of a real loving sexual relationship. Curiosity is normal, but pornography perverts the perception of what sex, as God designed it, is all about.

Friends. When a Minnesota Student Survey of 91,175 teenagers asked the question, "What makes you happy?" the #1 answer was "My friends." Friends are a very influential voice throughout your life, but especially during adolescence this voice almost screams to be heard. "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future," a wise person once said. Friends have the ability to meet emotional needs in your life like few other influences, so the temptation to conform to the group and compromise in order to belong and be accepted is a big one.

School. Much of what goes on in the public educational system is contrary to Judeo-Christian thinking. It is impossible to educate without influencing values. Of course there are many godly teachers in public schools who impact your lives for good, but you also must be aware that there are others who totally deny God and ignore His Word. Everything about how a teacher relates to, communicates to, and educates others will be affected by what they believe to be true and important. Dr. Cliff Schimmels, Wheaton College, says "Teachers make hundreds of value judgements every day. They decide which piece of material gets three days of emphasis and which piece gets only one. They decide what to explain and what not to explain..." This is not to say that Christian teenagers shouldn't attend public school. It is to simply point out that you can't afford to underestimate the influence of this voice in your life.

These are just a few of the voices that are calling to you. Some of these you can and should avoid all together. Others you will not be able to escape. Whether or not you allow these voices to influence who you are and the choices that you make in life will be up to you. What you think of yourself will probably have more to do with how much, or how little, of what these voices are saying that you accept. You see, each of us was born with three basic emotional needs: To feel loved and accepted, to feel valuable and capable, and to feel that we are not alone.

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If you have listened to the voice of God and have allowed Jesus Christ to meet these needs in your life, then you will have no need to look to outside influences to meet these needs for you. But if these needs are going unmet in your life, then you are vulnerable to allowing these voices to influence the choices you are making in life. It takes a very mature and honest person to be willing to ask some hard questions like, Why am I drawn to this voice? What is it deep inside me that this thing is really touching? What needs in my life am I trying to have met with this way? It may not seem so, but every decision you make in life is important, and I'm sure, deep down you know you should make wise decisions. Almost everyone knows that good choices will make life better. That isn't the issue. The real issues are:

- Why don't you make good choices?
- How do you change so you can begin to make good choices?

Let's look at the WHY question first.

The reason we fail to make good choices is because we have faulty belief systems. The choices we make are determined not by our circumstances, but by what we believe. We all have a belief system that determines what we think about. What we think about will determine how we feel, and how we feel will determine the choices that we make.

It looks like this:

**BELIEF SYSTEM=THOUGHTS=
FEELINGS=CHOICES**

When our belief system is faulty, our decision making will be faulty. It is impossible to live consistently in a way that is inconsistent with your belief system, and especially when it relates to what you think about yourself. You can tell what you believe not by what you say, but by how you live. You will always live out what you really believe, and the rest is just talk. If you are a Christian who is making poor choices and living beneath your privilege, it is either because you don't know what God says about you, or because you have forgotten who you really are in Christ and need to be reminded.

If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, God says that you are:

- totally forgiven, unconditionally loved and accepted by Him
- holy, righteous, blameless, pure and pleasing right now and
- a royal son or daughter of the King.

If you believe what God says about you, then your choices in life will reflect that. But if your belief system is faulty and you believe the lies that say:

- God's love and acceptance are conditional, based on your performance.
 - God is angry with you, or disappointed in you, and
 - you are still a guilty, dirty sinner at heart who can never change,
- then that is how you will live, and you will continue to make poor choices.

A person who builds a belief system based on the truth of the Word of God will make wise choices and will be able to live a consistent, godly life. But if that same person builds a belief system based on lies, wrong thinking will cause his or her feelings to be distorted, and bad choices will result.

O.K., you know you should make good choices, and perhaps you know now why you haven't. You don't want to stay where you are or how you are, but HOW do you change?

Romans 12:2 tells us that we are not to conform to the world's way of thinking, but that we are to have our lives transformed (changed) by the renewing (reprogramming) of our minds to God's way of thinking.

If we are really going to have our thinking changed so we can make wise choices and live a consistent, godly life, then we must rehearse what God says on a daily basis.

*You can tell what
you believe not
by what you say,
but by how you LIVE.*

Jesus said, "the truth shall make you free."

The facts on which a Christian should build his or her belief system are:

- God is perfect in His love for me
- God is infinite in His wisdom toward me
- God is completely sovereign (in control) over me
- God is always and only good to me
- Because of Jesus, I am completely forgiven of all my sin
- Because of Jesus, I am now holy, righteous, blameless, and pure
- Because of Jesus, I am now unconditionally loved and accepted by God
- Because of Jesus, I am pleasing to God right now
- Because of Jesus, God is not angry with me or disappointed in me

There are also four tools that you can also use to help make positive changes in your life:

1. CONFLICTS. No one likes them; in fact we all try to avoid them. But problems can really be a good thing in your life. The truth is, you will never change until you get fed up with the way you are living. You have no reason to change until you become uncomfortable, dissatisfied and miserable with where you are in life. Then, and only then, will you be ready to take action.

Remember, you will never change until your fear of change is exceeded only by the pain you are experiencing. So if you are having problems in your life, you need to realize that these frustrating experiences can be the spring board needed to motivate you to make the necessary changes in your life.

A mother eagle will take the nest of her young and stir it up. She'll make them uncomfortable and miserable, then she'll push them out of the nest and force them to learn to fly. Humans are just like those baby eagles. You won't leave the nest and change how and where you live as long as you are comfortable.

2. CONFESSION. In order to change you must next be willing to admit the truth about who and what you are. You will never change until you are willing to be totally honest. Jesus said, "the truth shall make you free." But the freedom to

change comes only when you are truthful and take full responsibility for where you are in life. You can't blame your friends, your parents, your mate or your environment. This is not easy, but well-worth the cost.

3. COMMITMENT. You may be in a situation that you don't like and it may be getting you down. But if you are going to change you must make a commitment to persistence. You must be 100% committed to staying with the situation, no matter how frustrating. Most people miss the best in life because they get discouraged and give up right before God moves in. They bail out on school, jobs and marriages all because they have no commitment to see the situation through.

Remember, you didn't get in the difficult situation overnight. The attitudes, actions, habits, fears and weaknesses that are a result of your bad choices in life took years to develop, and sometimes these must be dealt with slowly, one by one.

4. COOPERATION. In order to see change take place in your decision-making processes, you must be willing to cooperate with those who can help you. This means being willing to accept the fact that you don't have all the answers, (if you did you wouldn't need to change!) and listening to others who can give you the guidance and direction you need.

One last question. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong in life? Sometimes it's difficult to know whether a particular thing is right or wrong, so you need to build into your life a system of fundamental principles on which you can base your decisions. Every decision you make today, regardless of how large or how small will determine what is on the other side of tomorrow for you. When you really begin to realize that your entire future will be affected by the choices you make, then you begin to realize how important it is to be a wise decision-maker.



To help ensure a successful future, you must decide now on which level you are going to live and make decisions. There are four levels from which you must choose:

- 1. The Instinctive Level.** This is the level on which animals live and operate. “If it feels good, do it” is the motto here. This is the level that has destroyed every civilization that has ever fallen.
- 2. The Customary Level.** The person who lives on this level lives according to the customs set down by society. “Everybody is doing it” is the motto on this level. Customary standards may be right, but shouldn’t be blindly accepted simply because they are customary. It has been said that what one generation tolerates, the next generation will laugh at, and what that generation laughs at, the next generation will embrace as acceptable.

- 3. The Conscience Level.** This is where a thinking person chooses to live. One who is usually not influenced by the crowd. This person will always let his “conscience be his guide.” It is usually a good thing to follow your own convictions; however, this can be dangerous if your conscience has been dulled or if you have set yourself up as the “ultimate authority” in your own life.
- 4. The Christian Level.** This is the highest level of living. The person who chooses to live on this level is one who is aware that human beings are stewards of the gifts that have been given them. We all have been entrusted by God with life: our bodies; our personalities; our relationships; the influence we have; our time; and material resources, however great or small. Living on the Christian level means having an “attitude of gratitude” and treating these gifts with the care and respect they deserve.

Here are two questions that will help you decide on which level you are making your decisions.

- 1. How Will It Affect Me?** If I choose to do this thing, will it make me better physically, mentally, spiritually or emotionally? Will it make me more or less of what I want to be?
- 2. How Will It Affect Others?** Will this decision bring harm or good to others?

Here are two tests that will help you decide whether something is right or wrong.

- 1. The Test of Secrecy.** Is there someone you would want to keep this activity a secret from? This should automatically let you know it is wrong.
- 2. The Test of Universality.** Would it be O.K. for everyone to do this? What kind of a family, community, school, government, or world would we have if everyone did what I’m thinking about doing?

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You have probably discovered by now that to live is to make decisions. All of us long for the time when we are free to make our own decisions and that time for you is fast approaching. There are many serious issues you must consider that will have life-long consequences or benefits.

One of the most important things you can ever learn about decision making is this: Instead of always asking what is wrong with this choice, ask yourself “what is right with this choice”? It will be a real sign of maturity if you will develop the habit of starting each day by thinking about the decisions you will make that day and how they might affect your life. As you are trying to decide where the boundary lines are going to be drawn in every area of your life, you will show a great deal of maturity if you will seek the counsel and advice from other people you respect and who care about you and your welfare. Never seek counsel from someone who agrees with everything you do. Make sure these are people who are older, wiser and more experienced than yourself. Also look to people who have long, solid track records in the areas where you are trying to make your decision. We all need counselors who can be advisors, fact-givers, and emotional balancers for us.

When people refuse to be taught by others, they are basically saying that they have learned all they are going to learn, they know all they're going to ever know, and they are stuck for life. As long as you continue to seek counsel and ask for help, you will continue to grow and develop as a person of character.

WARNING: If you feel strongly about a decision you are about to make, but refuse to seek counsel on that decision because you are afraid you won't like what you hear, then you are making a big mistake and being a fool.

Pat McGee lists five situations where wrong is always wrong, in spite of our excuses:

1. Wrong is always wrong, even if you don't get caught.
2. Wrong is always wrong, even if done for a good cause.
3. Wrong is always wrong, even if others are doing worse things.
4. Wrong is always wrong, even if it doesn't bother the conscience.
5. Wrong is always wrong, even if it is commonly accepted.

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You must start today to become the person you want to be tomorrow. Are you willing to make important, sometimes hard choices or changes today to ensure that you have the best that tomorrow has to offer you? The disaster that can come when there is an unwillingness to make necessary course corrections is nowhere more graphically illustrated than by the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. The Titanic was designed to be the safest ship afloat and was believed to be unsinkable. Because of this attitude, there were only lifeboats sufficient for one-third of her passengers on that maiden voyage, and no emergency drills were ever held.

Three days out of Queenstown, she received her first wireless warning of icebergs. A few hours later she received another message about icebergs, but the wireless operator was busy and besides, the Titanic was unsinkable. The next afternoon another warning was received and sent to the Captain, who also disregarded it. By 9:20 p.m. that evening, at least five warnings to slow down and change course had been issued to the ship, but no precautions were taken. At 11:30 p.m. a message was received from a nearby ship saying that they were surrounded by ice. Ten minutes later the lookout spotted the giant iceberg dead ahead.

The necessary course corrections had not been made, and the great, “unsinkable” ship was doomed. 1,513 lives were lost that night. There is a great lesson to be learned from this tragedy. You and I are like that ship and life is like the ocean. There are icebergs out there waiting to destroy us if we, too, believe that we are “unsinkable” and have no need to change course when we are not making good choices in life. Remember, every decision you make today, regardless of how large or how small, will determine what is on the other side of tomorrow for you. When you begin to realize that your entire future will be affected by the choices you make, then you will also begin to realize how important it is to make whatever changes are necessary to become a wise decision-maker. You must start today to become the person you want to be tomorrow. Maybe you're at a crossroads in your life. You can keep walking down the road you are presently traveling, or you can make the decision to take a better road. No one can make this decision for you. No one can force you to take the better road, and no one can keep you off of that road. **IT IS A CHOICE AND THE CHOICE IS UP TO YOU.**

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Which way will you go? Though many would like to take the road of wise choices, few have the courage to do so. Will you choose to walk the better way, even if no one goes with you?

You have probably heard a million sermons (at least!) from pulpits and parents alike on this principle: "A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). I would venture to say that most all of them have been in a negative context. Of course it is true that if you make bad decisions you will reap the consequences of those choices in your life. Maybe right at this moment you've been listening to the wrong voices and you're feeling the effects of some wrong decisions you have already made. As a result, the future looks bleak.

Well, do I have good news for you! This sowing and reaping principle also has a positive side which we hear little about, and it is this: The same process that worked against you when you made wrong choices will work for you when you begin making right choices.

Every good thing you do, every right choice you make, will show up at some point down the road to bless and benefit your life and the lives of others.

The Bible teaches that the most important decision a person can ever make is to have a personal relationship with the God who created them. But there is only room in each of our lives for one god, and from the beginning of time until now, we humans have all chosen to be our own god (our own boss). As a result, we have had no room in our lives for the God who knows us best and loves us the most. The Bible calls that sin, and we are all guilty. Sin carries with it a death penalty. God says that sin has to be paid for, so His only Son, Jesus Christ, chose to come to earth and die on a cross in your place and mine that we might have our sin paid for and be forgiven. Dying for you and me, and offering forgiveness to us so that we might have a personal relationship with Him, is a free gift of love that you can either choose to accept or reject.

Acept His free gift of salvation and He will come into your life and never leave you.

There are many voices calling out to you today trying to influence the choices that you make. Those choices will determine what you do, and who and what you become. I pray that you will listen to the one voice that will never lie to you and will always have your best interest at heart. That is the voice of the One who created you and loves you unconditionally. How loud, large, and influential you choose to let the voice of God be in your life, will determine how loud, large and influential the other voices in your life will be.

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