

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.

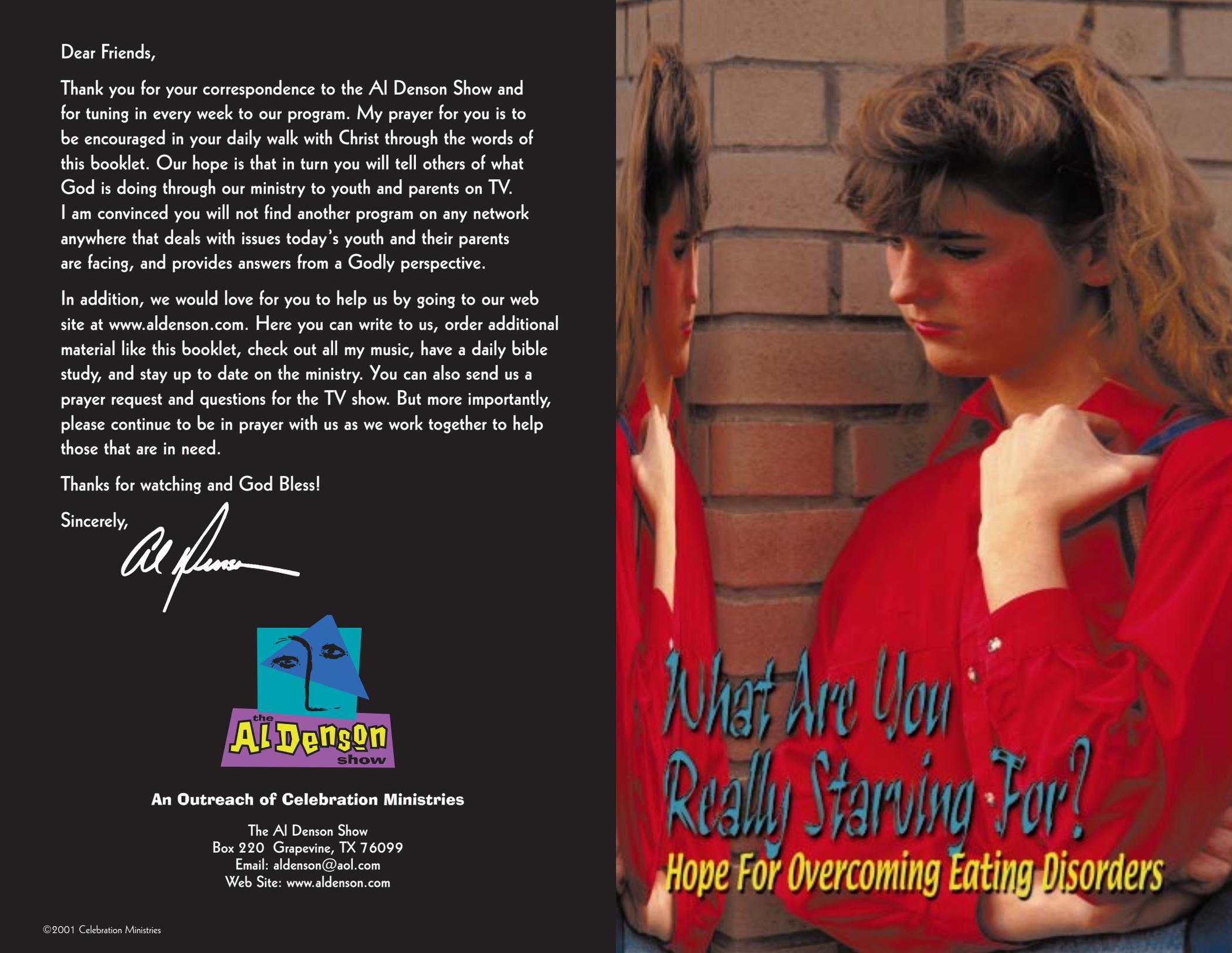
Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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**What Are You
Really Starving For?
Hope For Overcoming Eating Disorders**



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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What Are You Really Starving For? Hope For Overcoming Eating Disorders

"You can never be too thin or too rich. Thin is beautiful, sexy, desirable, the way to be accepted, to get ahead. Thin means you are disciplined and in control." These are the messages that are screaming out at you every day from movie and television screens, magazines, and billboards. At the same time, society is telling you that good food is the ultimate reward in life. It is presented as a substitute for love, it is a friend when you are lonely, a comfort when you are sad or upset, and a gift for being good.

Out of a culture that sends such mixed-messages have come two eating disorders which are afflicting more than five million Americans starting as young as nine years old. While The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) maintains that as many as ten percent of young women suffer from an eating disorder; a growing number of young men are being afflicted, as well. These two disorders are anorexia nervosa, which is deliberate starvation, and bulimia nervosa, which involves bingeing on food and then purging through vomiting, laxatives, and diuretics.

These two eating disorders are especially prevalent among young women who have been taught to be dependent, unassertive, passive, and not to express anger. They look to others to

meet their needs and they define themselves externally—by their appearance, their achievements, or what other people think about them. The biggest misconception about anorexia and bulimia is that even though they are called eating disorders, food isn't the root problem. Food is the thing that is wrestled with outwardly, but emotional and spiritual emptiness is the real problem. The starving, bingeing, and purging must be treated; but, unless the deeper issues are dealt with, the food symptoms will return.

An anorexic is commonly defined as a person whose body weight is 25 percent

lower than normal for her height and age. Even so, her distorted body image causes her to see herself as "not perfect," with more weight still to lose. Anorexics cease to menstruate, have thinning hair, and unhealthy teeth, and are likely to have kidney problems, cardiac arrest, muscle spasms, and urinary difficulties. About ten percent of all anorexics die either from suicide or from health-related complications.

At the onset, anorexia is an attempt to take control of feelings that seem out of control and a way to hide the feelings of fear and insecurity. It gives these girls a feeling of power and control. Later it becomes a way of developing an identity and a false way to return to the dependency of childhood.

...even though they are called eating disorders, food isn't the root problem.

These girls think being anorexic—being “sick” means someone will have to take care of them. Anorexics don’t know how they feel because they starve their emotions. If a negative emotion should come to the surface in their lives, they don’t know what to do with it. They are compliant, perfectionists, and over achievers, pushing for perfection and control on the outside, yet struggling with inadequacy and helplessness on the inside.

Bulimics aren’t always as easy to spot because their weight may be normal. There can be outward signs like swollen glands, dizziness, fainting, fatigue, burns on fingers, or enamel erosion on the teeth. But other problems, not as visible, are dehydration, perforations in the esophagus, gastric rupture, dry skin, pulmonary symptoms, menstrual abnormalities, and pancreatitis. Studies have shown that bulimia affects three percent of American women between the ages of 14 and 40. It is thought that as many as 35 percent of all women on



college campuses have engaged in some form of bingeing and purging. Today in this country, an estimated 7.6 million women claim to have binged and purged at some point in their lives.

Bulimics tend to feel inadequate, lonely, helpless, impulsive, and moody. They have low self-esteem and very high expectations placed on them, both personally and by others. These people are so overly concerned about what others think that they live their lives to please people. They have difficulty saying no because they are afraid that if they do say no, others won’t like them. Bulimics have to be the best and outwardly appear to be very much in control, but secretly they rebel by being out of control with food.

In both anorexia and bulimia, families play a part, but this is not to say families are always to blame. Of course, there are no perfect families, but families are an influence; and if there are problems in the home, this can create an environment where an eating disorder can flourish. If a family emphasizes looking good to the world but pays little attention to emotional needs and personal struggles, then children can become vulnerable to eating disorders. If a family overemphasizes achievement, gives love and acceptance that are conditional, or provides an environment that has little structure where children don’t feel safe, this can definitely be a contributing factor. This kind of family is emotionally empty and lonely, and leaves children feeling the same.

When a child has no self-confidence, fears the loss of childhood because adolescence looks too demanding, or doesn’t feel confident enough to handle the normal challenges that come with independence, it may seem easier to starve or binge and purge rather than face growing up. If a child feels she can’t measure up—that she has to be perfect, or if she has emotions like hurt, anger, disappointment, and frustration that feel out of control and frighten her, it becomes easier to pretend those emotions aren’t there. In her own mind, it is better to deal with negative feelings by starving or feeding them, instead of confronting them.

Starving and purging become ways to deal with trauma or to relieve feelings of fear, guilt, shame, or rage. A young woman who feels “out of control” in her life may use food as a way to take back some control over her own life. The

physical starvation or purging is a symptom—the emotional and spiritual starvation is the real problem.

If you have an eating disorder you must understand that your problem is more about starving or bingeing emotionally and spiritually than it is about starving or bingeing physically. Food is simply a tool you use to express your deep, unmet emotional needs. Obsession with your appearance is the way Satan wants to distract you from the real issues in your life. Weight is superficial—there is more to you than how you look. You were born hungry—hungry for physical food, but even more than that, hungry for God. There is a longing in your heart only He can fill. God never created you to be fulfilled by anything other than Himself. True meaning in life comes only from being right with God, yourself, and others.

You were born hungry...
...but even more than that,
hungry for God.

The void you have in your life must be filled,

There is hope for overcoming your eating disorder, but first you must be willing to stop denying you have a problem, face the truth, and identify what you are “really starving for.” Secondly, you must realize that anorexia and bulimia are very serious problems and will require the help of a professional Christian therapist who specializes in treating eating disorders. It will take courage to get the help you need, but this is a problem that will only get more serious without professional help. Thirdly, you must be willing to accept the fact that to change your life, you must change your thinking. The Bible calls this having your “mind renewed.” Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” In other words, God says if you are a Christian, you are not to think like the world does, but you are to have your life transformed by learning to think God’s thoughts. Your faulty way of thinking is what got you in trouble to begin with, so you must be willing to exchange your thoughts for God’s thoughts.

There are three basic issues within your belief system where your thinking must be changed. This is imperative if you are going to overcome your eating disorder. Without renewing your mind, you may get better with the right help, but you won’t get healed. Only a person who knows Jesus Christ as her personal Savior and has had her mind renewed by the truth of God’s

Word will be able to actually overcome her disorder. Otherwise, the best you can hope for is “recovery” and a lifelong struggle.

Here are the three issues where your thinking must lineup with what God says:

1. Who am I?

The void you have in your life must be filled, not with food, but with a new sense of identity. If you are a Christian, it is imperative that you know who you are in Christ. The Bible says when God created you, He set eternity in your heart. This is an intense longing that drives you to seek true fulfillment, meaning, and purpose in life. As a Christian, anytime you forget these things are found only in Christ and start looking for fulfillment in people, places, things, or experiences, you will be defeated, frustrated and empty. Your true identity as a Christian is not based on what you do, what you have, or how you look, but on who you are in Christ.

If you have experienced rejection from those you love, you need to know that Jesus understands rejection because He experienced it from His own family, as well. John 1:11 says, “He came to His own and His own received Him not.” Jesus understands the hurt that comes with rejection; that’s why He went to the cross, so as it says in Ephesians 1:6, you, as a child of God, could be “accepted in the Beloved.”

God’s acceptance is unconditional and unending. He never says

I accept you because

I accept you since

I will accept you if

I will accept you when

I will accept you after,

I will accept you provided

I will accept you presuming

Any of these statements would make God’s acceptance of you conditional. God’s acceptance does not depend on what you are, or what you do or don’t do, but on the finished work of Christ on the cross. You are accepted because you are “in Christ” (the Beloved). Once you are saved, God can NEVER reject you because He can never reject His Son. Here is an illustration of what it means to be “in Christ” and have Christ in you:

Take a cup of boiling water and put a tea bag inside. Instantly the tea becomes one with the water and the water becomes one with the tea. The longer the tea bag stays in the cup the stronger the tea becomes. But from the first

...not with food,
but with a new
sense of identity.

second the bag hits the water, the two are one and can never be separated again. It would be impossible to accept the tea and reject the water or to accept the water and reject the tea. If you have been saved, your life is like the tea bag and Jesus is like the boiling water. You were placed in Him and He is in you for eternity. God can not reject you because He can’t reject His Son. You are “accepted in the Beloved!”

There is another verse that explains this truth and it is Colossians 2:14. It says, “having canceled the certificate of debt with its regulations that were against us and that stood opposed to us, He took it away, nailing it to the Cross.” Today the term, “certificate of debt,” is not one we are familiar with, but if we had lived in Paul’s day, this verse would have painted a powerful word picture. Back then, whenever a person was convicted in a Roman Court of Law, the scribe of the court would make a written list of all the crimes for which that person had been convicted. That list was called a certificate of debt. This certificate would be taken, along with the criminal, to the place of imprisonment and nailed to the large wooden door of his cell. When the sentence had been completed, the scribe would take down the certificate of debt and write across it the word that meant “it is finished.” Next the scribe would roll it up, give it to the prisoner, and he could never be convicted of those crimes again.

You'll never be able to look to the future if you are focused on the rejection, anger, and hurt of the past.

Do you understand what Paul was saying in this verse? Two thousand years ago a certificate of debt was prepared for you. A list was made of ALL your sins and that list was nailed to an old, rugged cross. The words Jesus spoke from the cross were not a cry of defeat, but a shout of victory. "It Is Finished" meant "Paid In Full!" All your sins, past, present, and future, have been paid for, and you can never be found guilty of them again. God accepts and approves of Jesus, so He must completely accept and approve of you because you are "in Christ." You don't have to perform or meet certain standards to win God's love and acceptance or to prove that you have value and worth. If you are saved, who you are is a new creature in Christ!

II. What is God like?

You may have a very distorted, unscriptural idea of what God is really like. If your earthly parents are harsh, demanding, or unloving, then you will tend to view God the same way. If you are going to overcome your eating disorder, you must understand your Heavenly Father is nothing like your earthly parents. Even the best earthly parent can't be perfect but God is. He loves and accepts you unconditionally; He will never break a promise; He forgives you of all your faults; and He refuses to keep a record of your failures. If you have been hurt by your parents there are three things you must do:

A. You must be willing to forgive your parents and let go of the past. Past events will hold you

captive, and unless you are willing to be free from the bondage of the past, you will never be able to experience the healing God has for you. You'll never be able to look to the future if you are focused on the rejection, anger, and hurt of the past.

B. You must stop rehearsing the pain your earthly parents have caused you, and instead, rehearse on a daily basis how your perfect Heavenly Father loves and accepts you. The Bible promises that your Heavenly Father will fill all the emptiness in your life caused by neglectful earthly parents. Psalm 27:10 says, "Though my mother and father forsake me, the Lord will receive me."

C. You must accept the fact that even though your earthly parents have disappointed, ignored, abused, or even abandoned you, your Heavenly Father never has, and never will. He has a perfect track record!

What you believe about God is very important, especially if you are going to overcome your eating disorder. Jesus knew this before you were ever born, so in the entire 15th chapter of the book of Luke, He tries to show you what God is like through His stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy. Jesus wants you to know that God is a perfect Father

- who grieves over and with His children;
- who receives you just as you are;
- who doesn't rebuke you;
- who doesn't say, "I told you so;"

- who doesn't put you on probation;
- who isn't disappointed or angry with you;
- whose attitude of love, mercy and grace toward you can never change.

Does this describe the Heavenly Father you know? There is nothing in this life more essential to your spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health than knowing and trusting God. The only way you will ever know freedom, contentment, and peace, regardless of your circumstances, is to really know your Heavenly Father and to understand He is completely trustworthy. Trusting God is like having a boat into which you can climb during the storms of life. God has four anchors that will keep you secure no matter what happens:

A. The anchor of God's sovereignty.

When you hear people say God is sovereign, it simply means He is in charge of the final outcome. Nothing touches you that does not come through Him and without His permission. He is completely in control at all times. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

B. The anchor of God's goodness.

Psalms 73:28 literally says "this is my good, that He is ever with me." In other words, the goodness of God is the nearness of God. The goodness of God is not an immunity from suffering. It simply means that no matter what you are going through, He promises to be right there to go through it with you. God is always near and always and only good.

C. The anchor of God's love.

You can know for sure God's love is unconditional and unending because Jesus demonstrated that love to you. I John 4:9,14,18 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. God is Love. And Perfect Love drives out fear." God's love does not depend on what you are but on who He is. God loves unconditionally because He is love. God's love is an action toward you, not a reaction to something good in you.

D. The anchor of God's wisdom.

Psalms 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 is concerned. He always instinctively knows what is best for you.

This is the nature and the character of your Heavenly Father. He is loving, good, wise, and in control. When you know Him, know who He really is and what He is really like; you can trust Him completely, even with all the pain and problems that have caused your eating disorder.



III. What Does God Say About Me?

If you have an eating disorder you are probably overly concerned about what other people say about you. The only opinion that should matter to you is God's. In Galatians 1:10 it says, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." You can either be a "people-pleaser" or a "God-pleaser," but you can't be both.

If you are a Christian, you need to be reminded that God says you have experienced "Regeneration." Regeneration is the supernatural work of God that literally made you a new person the split second you trusted 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 something only God could have done for you. It was not something you could do for yourself to "clean-up your act" or improve your life.

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." If you have been saved, your regeneration in Christ is complete and perfect. God loved and accepted you unconditionally the moment you were saved because you were "in Christ."

You will eternally be "in Christ," so God still loves and accepts you unconditionally today, regardless of what you have done since you were saved. He gave, and continues to give you, His grace, which is getting what you don't deserve, and His mercy, which is not getting what you do deserve. Both are gifts of God that Jesus purchased with His life. For you not to apply His grace and mercy to your life today would be to take lightly His sacrifice and to trample His precious blood under your feet (Hebrews 10:29).

Many times Christians, especially those who are carrying deep emotional wounds, make the big mistake of believing that even though they have asked God to forgive them, they are still guilty because they "feel" guilty. 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. This song contains a phrase that is a very

dangerous lie. It says, "it can't be wrong, when it feels so right." What this song is trying to sell you is that if something "feels" good, then it must be good. Society has used this 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." You may be judging how guilty you are by how guilty you feel.

Feelings are never an accurate measuring stick of reality. Feelings are important but are highly unreliable and not to be trusted. In any given

week, and sometimes even on any given day, you will experience a wide variety of emotions. When things are going well you can experience great happiness and contentment. But when things take a turn for the worse, your emotions can plunge you into doubt, frustration, fear, and anger. Too many times you will feel guilty, when based on what the Bible says, you aren't guilty at all.

As your feelings change, the way you feel about your relationship with God often changes, too. This is no way to determine your guilt or innocence before a holy God. Your relationship with God has nothing to do with feelings. That relationship is based on the facts of God's Word and His unchanging faithfulness to you. If, after you have confessed your sin to God, you still feel guilty then what you are experiencing is "false guilt." False guilt is from the pit of hell and is a device Satan uses to rob you of peace, joy, and any usefulness you could otherwise have to God.

The only opinion that should matter to you is God's.

The Scriptures promise if you are saved, God's acceptance of you is not based on what you do, or don't do, but on God's unconditional love for you and the price Jesus paid on the cross to redeem you. Even though these are the facts, it still seems more natural to feel condemned and unworthy, instead of forgiven and loved, by God. As a result, you can go through life everyday feeling guilty, afraid, and condemned. This is a very serious issue because when your 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 a person who is bad.

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

False guilt and shame have no place in the life

of a Christian. If you have been saved, but you are genuinely guilty because there is unconfessed sin in your life, then listen to 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." If you really grasp what God is saying here about this restoration process, there will never be any reason for you to hold on to guilt or shame. Here are three words you must make sure you understand:

A. Confession. This verse says that you must "confess" your sin. This verse isn't talking about confessing to another human. Confession is agreeing with God that what you have done was sin, and it is also a willingness to see your sin in all of its awfulness. Confession is realizing the evil and the destructiveness of sin and how it has broken the heart of your Heavenly Father. You need to understand what sin costs God and hate sin the way He does. Genuine confession makes the next step of real repentance possible.

B. Repentance. You may mistakenly think repentance is either starting to do the things you should or stopping what you shouldn't be doing. But, if that were true, repentance would be only be about your good works. Real repentance doesn't focus on your performance—it focuses on your relationship with God. Genuine repentance is laying down the control of your life that you took from God when you chose to sin and yielding your life back to Him again.

The whole purpose of the Christian life is to live totally dependent on God. God's purpose in allowing all of your pain and problems is that these might bring you to the end of your self-sufficiency and into a dependent relationship with Him. Too often, Christians will "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 you truly confess your sin (which is always self-control, regardless of how that has expressed itself in your life) and repent of your sin (which can only mean once again relinquishing the control of your life to Christ) that your fellowship with God can be restored.

C. Forgiveness. When you got saved, Jesus paid for and forgave all your sins, past, present and future. There is no sin that God can't, or won't, forgive. No sin is powerful enough to keep you from the cleansing, healing power of God's grace. Forgiveness is like a box of laundry detergent Jesus purchased just for you. It has your name on it, it belongs to you, and what Jesus purchased with His blood, nothing, or no one, can ever take from you. Repentance and confession are like the water that activates the detergent (forgiveness) each time you need it, cleansing you, and restoring your

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God hates sin but he loves sinners, and He loves to forgive sinners. If you are saved, no matter what your sin, God can never be angry with you. He can hate what you have done but He can never stop

loving you or being loving toward you. Grace means that God offers to release you from the consequences of your sin, but grace doesn't mean God overlooks your sin. God is holy, and, because of His holiness, He can't just ignore sin. Someone had to be accountable; someone had to pay the sin debt. Jesus Christ chose to assume the obligation for your sin.

When you became a Christian, not only did God place your sins upon Christ, but He took the righteousness of Christ and credited it to your spiritual bank account. That transaction is like having a bank account in your name which is seriously overdrawn. Jesus has an account in the same bank, but His account has a million dollars in it. When you got saved, God took your name off the overdrawn account and put Jesus' name on that account. At the same time, He put your name on Jesus' account! Now the resources of Jesus belong to you and Jesus is totally responsible for the debt you owe the bank! This is a picture of God's grace, and this is the only way God can ever see you.

Renewing your mind won't happen overnight. It is a process you must work on every day. As you read the truth of God's Word, you are going to have to do three things:

1. Accept that God's Word, was written for YOU. When you read all the promises in the Bible, you may feel like they are for everyone else, but they were written for you.

2. Digest the word. Jeremiah 15:16 says, "When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." It isn't enough to just hear or read the Word of God. You must be willing to digest it and allow it to become a part of all you are.

3. When you hear or read something from God's Word that is contrary to the way you feel, you must make a commitment to go with what God says.

Corrie ten Boom once said: "Jesus Christ is able to untangle all the snarls in my soul, to banish all my complexes, and to transform even my fixed habit patterns, no matter how deeply

they are etched in my subconscious." God can heal you from the inside out. He can wipe away your anxieties and fears, your resentments and hostilities, your guilt and regrets. In His great love and sovereignty, God can use your failures, mistakes, tensions, stresses, trips into shame and self-blame, and all the things that trigger these, to work for good in your life. God can also produce the fruit of the spirit in you: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He does all of this with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

God gives His power to help you overcome your problem but His power is not given as a "shortcut to perfection." God will do His part but you have to do yours, too. He won't do your work for you, but He will provide the tools you need—it is up to you to use them. Phillipians 2:13 says, "For God is at work within you, helping you WANT to obey Him, and then helping you DO what He wants." Your tools will be, among others, God's Word,

professional Christian counselors, support groups, and others who will pray with you and hold you accountable. But never forget it is Christ Himself who is the ultimate solution to your eating disorder and the only One who can meet your deepest needs.

If you have been reading this booklet but have never had the joy of inviting Christ to come into your heart, you, too, can be forgiven and given a new life. You can do that right now by praying a prayer something like this: "Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and that my sin has separated me

from holy God. I accept your death on the cross as payment for my sin. Please forgive me of my sin and come into my heart right now and save me. I give you the control of my life. Please help me to live the rest of my life here on earth for You, until You take me to heaven when I die to live with You forever. Thank You for saving me. Amen." Remember, the words aren't magic, it's what is in your heart that matters to God. The moment you do your part, God does His, and your new life and your journey toward healing begins.

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