



Traffic Lights: When to Go, When to Stop, When to Yield

Traffic lights are supposed to manage an intersection. When cars were first created there were not that many on makeshift dirt roads. Then mass production of the cars came along and the vehicles were made for the average man and cost came down. Many more cars were purchased and thus we had a problem. How are we going to manage all these vehicles from crashing into each other when they come to an intersection? The stop sign was created. However, when more and more cars were on the road and the industrial revolution took hold, towns grew and so did massive traffic congestion, not to mention the number of accidents. A man couldn't rely on the goodness of each other to determine who has the right of way and who would yield. To keep the murder rate down traffic lights were invented. What a great idea! When the light turned red in your lane you were to stop and wait until it turned green. If it stayed green you could travel "supposedly" safely through the intersection. When it turned yellow that meant you were to be cautious, slow down and stop before you got through the intersection. Then in a matter of seconds, it would turn red and you would graciously let the cars wanting to cross the intersection coming from the other direction pass through safely while you stopped at "your" red light. Oh, how simple and completely marvelous. There would be no more accidents and no more irate drivers. Something happened along the way and the interpretation of the meaning of each color of the traffic light went from red means stop, green means go, and yellow means caution to something else.

Bill Cosby used to have a show many years ago called "Kids Say the Darndest Things". On one show he asked a child what the colors of a traffic light meant. This little boy said, "red means stop, green means go, and yellow means drive fast." I wonder who he learned that from. Perhaps he learned it as we learned it. How many times do you go "really fast" through an intersection when the light turns yellow versus slowing down and stopping? By the way, who determined that red means stop, and green means go. I like blue, why couldn't blue mean go? How about purple mean stop? I know what you're thinking; it would be silly having purple mean stop because purple means royalty and royalty hardly ever would be driving on the roads we drive. There were obvious reasons why they chose the colors they did for the traffic lights. It could have been what color makes the brain react quickly? What colors are easiest to see during the day? What colors are the easiest to replace when they burn out? Who knows? The important thing is that someone did, and it became accepted across the nation as the standard colors for stop, go, and caution. Then some bozo came along and decided that traffic lights could be horizontal, and some could be vertical. Could we please have a standard where all the traffic lights are the same?

In this section, we are going to talk about parental traffic lights for our teens. One of the greatest challenges parents face is teaching their teens about morals, values, and ethics. When and how does a teen learn when it's okay to "go" when they should "stop" and when there should be "caution". Who and what determines in society if something is a go or stop and how does a parent counter if society says something is a go when it should be a stop in their eyes?

Let me first start by asking what's the difference between morals, values, and ethics? How would you define each? Do you think your teens understand the difference? As time passes our kids are taught less and less about each and the clarity of what each means becomes more and more muddled.

I could spend easily a hundred pages discussing Christian ethics and morals versus worldly ethics and morals. We could talk about how civilizations in the past dealt with and followed certain ethics. How Christian ethics influenced societies from the Greeks until now as well as how secular non-religious societies such as communism and socialism drove ethics of the world in a different direction. I will not bore you with all that information. I do believe we need to understand some critical things about the believers' position so we as

parents can instill them in our teens. I ask that you bear with me for a couple of pages to help bring some light on a very difficult subject for parents.

Back in the '70s, a philosophy called moral relevancy was being pushed hard in college. I can remember so clearly in a class I took in psychology teaching this concept of moral relevance. The idea was to question whether there were any moral absolutes. Some of you probably remember going through a class where you were put into a group to discuss a scenario. You were all in a boat that was sinking and would only stay afloat long enough for you to get to shore if you reduced the weight of one person. In the boat were a healthy male, a healthy female, a mentally retarded person, a person who was handicapped, a blind person, and an over-weight person. Which person as a group would you decide to throw overboard and why? The idea was to get people to discuss moral decisions and how each group in the class would probably come up with different reasons as to who they would throw over. Most said something like they'd throw the healthy male or female overboard because they would have the best chance to swim ashore and survive if thrown over. However, some had no problem throwing the overweight person over or the mentally retarded person etc.... and gave reasons as to why. I was always the smart-aleck of the group and my questions had a much different viewpoint. I'd ask things like; "Why did such a weird group of people get together in the first place on a boat?" "If they knew they had some people who were challenged physically why didn't they take precautions like life jackets, two-way radios for communications, flares?" "Where is it written that the boat will sink if we don't throw one person overboard?" How do we know it will only take one person? What if it takes 3 people overboard? You probably know by now I was not the professor's pet, especially when he stated after this exercise, "Truth is relative...there are no absolutes. We can know nothing for certain." I raised my hand and asked, "Are you sure about that?" He responded, "I'm certain." Kind of defeated his argument don't you think.

Here are some alarming statistics about what people think and what teens think about moral absolutes. In 1992 the Barna Research Group survey on moral absolutes asked, "Is there absolute truth?" Amazingly, 66 percent of American adults responded that they believe that "there is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct", they said. 74% of those same people stated that they believe in God and He rules the universe. That was in 1992; today the percentages are even higher. For example, that same survey in 2008 found 75% of Americans reject the idea that there are absolute moral truths compared to 66% in 1992. Most believe truth is relative to the situation. 80% of teenagers surveyed believed that there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. We have a problem!!

Dennis Prager did research on teens for 15 years and was quoted in Christianity Today saying, "It is no wonder that in 15 years of asking high school students throughout America whether, in an emergency, they would save their dog or a stranger first, most students have answered that they would not save the stranger. "I love my dog, I don't love the stranger," they always say. The feeling of love has supplanted God or religious principles as the moral guide for young people. What is right has been redefined in terms of what individuals feel."

Guess who said the following; "I think it's fairly obvious why I was married. As strange as it may sound, I am a very moral woman. I was taught by my parents that if you fall in love and you want to have a love affair, you get married. I guess I'm very old-fashioned." You guessed it correctly; it was Elizabeth Taylor in an article in the San Francisco Chronicle after 7 marriages and 5 divorces. Does anyone see a problem with this relative moral value?

Here's something that will make you scratch your head. Over 20 years ago Senator Dan Coates from Indiana was quoted in an article from the *Imprimis*, "I recently saw the story of a high school values clarification class conducted by a teacher in Teaneck, New Jersey. A girl in the class had found a purse containing \$1000 and returned it to its owner. The teacher asked for the class's reaction. Every single one of her fellow students concluded the girl had been "foolish." Most of the students contended that if someone is careless, they should be punished. When the teacher was asked what he said to the students, he responded, "Well, of course, I didn't say anything. If I come from the position of what is right and what is wrong, then I'm

not their counselor. I can't impose my views." If that was the attitude over 20 years ago can you imagine what it is today?

Moral relevancy has been creeping inside the minds of our society for over 50 years. The reason why so many have a hard time understanding the difference between morals, values, and ethics is that it has slowly been removed from the home and the requirement of the parent to teach and transferred to the schools and businesses. Those who come from a background that teaches there are no moral absolutes have overseen developing curriculum and the latest emphasis has been called "character development". Sounds good but what are they basing it on and what is the standard that they compare it to? So, let's start first with the definitions of morals, values, and ethics. We will then apply what God's Word teaches in these areas and compare them to what the world teaches. We as parents must help our teens understand how important it is to have a foundation of truth that they can count on. If you want to see how moral relativism has crept into our society just look at the definition of these words and see how they can be interpreted differently depending on what you base your foundation.

Webster Dictionary:

Moral: concerning or relating to what is right and wrong in human behavior; based on what you think is right and good; considered right and good by most people; agreeing with a standard of right behavior

The above definition sounds good until you look closely. It starts okay by stating that a moral is something that "**relates to what is right and wrong in human behavior.**" Then it starts getting a little fuzzy when it says that it's "**based on WHAT YOU THINK is right and good.**" So, what one person thinks is right could be different from what another thinks. Does that mean there can be no absolute truth to what is right and wrong? Then it goes on to say that what is "**considered right and good by most people.**" Obviously, according to this definition, there is a group of people who would not consider something right and good even if it has absolute truth. Finally, the definition closes with "**agreeing with a standard of right behavior.**" What is that standard? Who sets the standard? What do you base that standard on? These questions will have to be addressed if we want to move through the intersection of life knowing for a fact that there are times when it's always right to stop, always right to go, and always right to slow down and be cautious.

Ethics: rules of behavior based on ideas about what is morally good and bad; an area of study that deals with ideas about what is good and bad behavior; a branch of philosophy dealing with what is morally right or wrong

Once again, the definition sounds alright until you look much closer. It says, "Rules of behavior based on ideas about what is MORALLY good and bad". That means the rules of behavior could be adjusted depending on what one thinks is morally good and bad. If you don't have an absolute truth about what is morally bad, then your ethics will be distorted.

Values: Something (as a principle or quality) that is intrinsically valuable or desirable. Concerning family values-especially of a traditional or conservative kind which is held to promote the sound functioning of the family and to strengthen the fabric of society.

So, a value is something that has great importance and is desirable. I'm on board with that depending on what you place importance on. When Webster defines "family values" I notice that they emphasize family values are of a "traditional" or "conservative" kind which promotes the sound functioning of the family to strengthen the fabric of society. Per that definition then if the value does not have a typical traditional or conservative value and the value does not support the traditional family and the way it functions; does that mean it could not strengthen the fabric of society? I'm not talking in political realms here, but the liberal mindset today has redefined what the family should be. It is no longer a mother and a father but it "takes a village to raise a family". How the world "values" the importance of family and the role it plays in the life of a child can determine how that child looks at what is right and wrong.

We as believers must determine if we are going to live by absolutes, specifically moral absolutes so we can know when the traffic light changes what we are supposed to do. Morality must always be based on moral absolute truth. **So, what is a moral absolute and what is the standard that we should base that moral absolute on?** *An absolute is a universal norm or moral law that applies to all men and women,*

everywhere, under all circumstances. The best example of absolutes is found in the Ten Commandments. If just the absolutes delineated in the Ten Commandments were applied to our world, most of the societal problems would cease to exist.

You see, morals and ethics are dependent on authoritative truth. We as Christians believe No God=No Absolutes. In our view, the bases of morality are dependent on God's existence and the standard He set to measure morality in His Word known as the Bible. That is why when we decided to eradicate religion, specifically the Bible from schools and government that's when morals started becoming unclear. It's no coincidence when God was taken out of our schools and a forced misinterpretation of separation of Church and State that the family unit started being destroyed. Morality is now being legislated from the benches and halls of our governments.

We all know when a society loses its way and does not live according to absolute truth then anarchy will soon follow. The movie Mad Max with Mel Gibson is one of literally hundreds that Hollywood has made showing what happens to society (how ironic) when "every way seemed right to a man but the end thereof leads to death". Prov. 16:25. Hollywood is mimicking what has already been done. In the book of Judges in chapter 21:25 it says, "In those days Israel had no King, and everyone did what he felt was right in his own eyes." Chaos gripped the nation of Israel. The King represented God and His standards. What the book of Judges is telling us is that when there is no God in the equation then a man will figure out on His own to develop what he FEELS is right and wrong even if what he FEELS is wrong by God's absolute truth. Let me give you an example from Dr. Joyce Brothers of how easily man (or in this case woman) can let an absolute truth from God's standard, the Bible, contradict what "every man feels".

Exodus 20:16 says, *"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."* Paul reiterates this absolute and fleshes it out for us. Ephesians 4:25, *"Therefore, putting away lying, each one speaks truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."* But Dr. Joyce Brothers has a different "moral" to the story. In an article entitled *"Lies Men Tell Women,"* she said, *"Men lie to women. Women lie to men. And most people agree that some lying is even necessary—to avoid petty squabbles and to grease the wheels of a relationship."* God says that lying is wrong and it's a sin! *So which ethic do you live under?*

All of us lie from time to time. The difference is, do we view it as sin, confess it and repent of it, or is it instead acceptable behavior...depending upon the circumstances? If we lie to our mates or our children or our neighbors or on the job, how are we then going to lead lost individuals to the One who said, *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"*? If we're going to be the salt and light we're commanded to be (Matt. 5:13-16), we must first ourselves function from absolutes.

What's the driving manual say about God's traffic lights?

To clearly understand when to stop, go, and yield we need to accept the following rules found in God's manual. We start our premise of moral absolutes with "the study of the principles and practices of right and wrong in light of what the Scripture teaches. We must translate the doctrines into deeds and practical application. When studying Christian ethics and morals the following is helpful.

Some mistakenly use the terms "ethics" and "morals" interchangeably, but they are not the same. The term "morals" comes from the Latin meaning "custom" or "habit." Morals are what people do. The word "ethics" is from the Greek meaning a standard or rule; a norm. In contrast to morals, ethics communicates the idea of what one ought to do, whereas morals are what they do.

What is the standard that we should measure our conduct? We already read examples of how the world often believes that standard is left to every man's conscience and how he "feels". What does God's Word say about Him being the standard for right and wrong?

"The Lord reigns; let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thickness surround Him: righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. [Ps. 97:1-2]

God is the source of all that's right, the source of righteousness. Righteousness is not just one of His attributes (something that He possesses), but He is righteousness.

“The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.” [Ps. 19:8-9]

“For the word of the Lord is right and true, and He is faithful in all He does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice: the earth is full of His unfailing love.” [Ps. 33:4-5]

“I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me. Therefore I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way. Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright are your judgments. Your testimonies that you have commanded are righteous and very faithful.” [Ps. 119: 75, 128, 137-138]

What does God say about those who refuse to accept that He and His Word is the standard that we base our lives on?

“The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” 1 Cor. 2:14

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” Eph. 4:17

“Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. The images he makes are a fraud; they have no breath in them. They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.” Jer. 10:14-15

“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; no one does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; no one does good, not even one. Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on the LORD.” Psalm 14:1-4

Do you think a person who does not believe in moral absolutes would have a problem with any of the verses above?

Let's play “red light/green light”!

Did you ever play the game growing up called “red light/green light”? If you were the red light/green light person you were about 30 yards away from your friends. Everyone else had to line up across the yard and not show any movement and wait for you to turn your back to them and yell “green light”. If you had your back to them, they could move as fast as they could to get to you and be the first to touch you. There was a challenge in moving too fast though because at any moment you could turn around and yell “red light”. If you saw anyone moving when you turned around yelling red light, they had to go back to the starting point. Then you would turn back around and yell "green light so your friends could start moving again toward you. Sometimes it was best if they went slow and steady so when they heard the command to stop their momentum didn't cause them to move when they turned around. They became as still as a statue. If you played the game right, then after numerous red light/green light episodes someone was able to touch you before you could turn around and yell “red light”. The person who touched you became the “red light/green light person and you and all your friends went back to line up and do it all over again. So, we're going to play

a red light/green light game with some scripture. There are times when we travel down the road of life we hear the command “green light” and we are to take a step of faith and continue to move “Trust in the Lord... (Prov. 3:5). There are other times when we hear the command “red light” and we are to be still and listen to God, “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10)

Let’s start with some easy “red light/green light commands found in Exodus 20.

- You shall have no other gods before me (red light)
- You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below (red light)
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (red light)
- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (green light)
- Honor your father and mother (green light)
- You shall not murder (red light)
- You shall not commit adultery (red light)
- You shall not steal (red light)
- You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (red light)
- You shall not covet (red light)

In this passage, the first 4 commands deal with your relationship with God. There are 3 red lights and 1 green light. The next 6 commands in this passage deal with our relationship with our fellow man. Once again there are more red lights 5 to green light 1. Here's a question for you. Why do you think out of the first major opportunity in scripture for God to communicate His standards for living He lists 10 things of which 8 of them are red lights? My answer would be not to look at red lights as negative but as positives. We automatically think that red light is negative because it makes us stop. However, making us stop is probably what we needed most to protect us and allow us the freedom to continue to travel down the road. If you keep running red lights and refusing to stop then sooner or later you're going to get hit from a car that had a green light and you'll not only get hurt but won't be able to continue down the road without damage. So, don't look at the red lights as negative but positives. **God has given us these red lights for freedom in our life.** Another way of putting it could be supposing you come to a big lake that is frozen and you want to ice skate. You don't know for sure what areas of the lake are safe with thick ice verse areas of the lake where it's thin and not safe to skate. You look everywhere only to find one sign on that big lake that says, “Skate here”. You don't know where else on the lake it's safe to skate, so you limit your freedom by only skating close to the sign. What if you saw numerous signs all over the big lake that said, “Thin ice don't skate here”. Now even though the sign seems negative it's quite positive and gives you the freedom to skate everywhere you don't see a thin ice warning.

Our teens sometimes look at God's “red lights” in scripture as a means of limiting their freedom when He wants to give them freedom. Let's take a New Testament “red light” to show you what I mean.

Sexuality is a big one for teenagers so let's take a look at a couple of verses.

“It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality” 1 Thess. 4:3 (red light)

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.” 1 Cor. 6:18 (red light)

Many teens would look at the two verses above and think God wants to rob them of fun. After all, didn't God create sex to be enjoyed? After all, doesn't just about everyone do it so it can't be that bad? Look at all the movies and television shows showing not only how much fun and exciting sex is, but it seems to be evidence of how much you care about someone. Here's where God's principles dealing with His morals and ethics found in scripture seem to directly conflict with what the world says. Remember the passage we've already mentioned?- *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of*

God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. 1 Cor. 2:14. **If your teen has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ then they will be guided by the Spirit of Christ (The Holy Spirit) that lives in them and thus SHOULD see things differently from the world.**

Some teens would say the verses we just mentioned about staying pure and staying away from sexual immorality limits their freedom from fun and enjoyment. Boy teens might think, "Why in the world then would God make girl teens so cute and cuddly. Doesn't God know how hard it is to keep my hands off her?" Girls might think, "Doesn't God know how much I want to be loved? My boyfriend says if I love him, I will have sex with him." Here's a couple of interesting statistics to show where we are in the world today with the morality of sex and the teen. According to a study done by the Guttmacher Institute about teen sexuality, they discovered that by 12 years of age 2% of children had experienced sex. The number dramatically increases as age increases. By age 15, 16% of teens said they had experienced sex, by age 16 it climbed to 33%, by age 17 it climbed to 48%, by age 18 it rose to 61% and finally by age 19 it was at 71% who claimed they had sexual relations. What does that say about society's position on sexual morality? What standard do we use to determine what is right and wrong when it comes to sex before marriage? That same study found that the average age of a teen experiencing sex was 17 years old but that those teens didn't experience marriage on average until around 26. That leaves 9-10 years on average for young people to experience sexual activity with potentially multiple partners before they decide to commit to someone in marriage. Does that play into the values and morals of our society? Since data clearly shows that over 50% of all marriages fail could the lack of moral purity before marriage affects the success ratio of staying together in marriage. If a person doesn't have the conviction that sexual purity is a moral issue before marriage, why would they feel it's a moral issue after marriage? Sexual purity to the person you love has a lot to do with the type of commitment you are willing to make to that person. If you feel like you can break certain commitments in sex why not other areas of your life with that person such as marriage?

1 Thess. 4:3 clearly states that God's will for your teen is to be "sanctified" which is a fancy way of saying He wants them to be set apart or to be different than the world. God's main motivation for your teen to be different is not to be condemning and a holier than thou person. No, He wants them to be "set apart" so they can impact other teens for God and lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. If they act like everyone else who doesn't believe in Christ, then it will be hard to tell them apart. By not having a strong personal walk that makes a difference could lead someone who is searching for meaning in life to be confused and disillusioned as to what a believer in Christ is all about. 1 Cor. 6:8 tells our teens to flee immorality or in other words to run from it. Not because God is mean and doesn't want them to enjoy sex because we know that's not true. In the confines of marriage sex is the most exciting and beautiful thing there is. But God knows your teen very well and He knows that when they have immoral sex they sin against their own body. How can they do that? Well for example if they are a true believer in Christ, they will not have a clear conscience. How do I know they won't have a clear conscience? The Holy Spirit that lives in them will convict them of sin. **When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin...**John 16:13. They can get all sorts of communicable diseases and perhaps pregnancy will develop out of the relationship. By having a red-light God, wants your teen to experience true freedom. He wants them to not be burdened down with guilt and sorrow for what they did. He wants them to be free to make choices for their future that is for the best. If they have an unexpected pregnancy, then life choices will be affected. It doesn't mean they can't recover from a poor decision, but it does mean they will now be burdened with issues God would have wanted them to be free from. You see, in simplest of terms God uses red lights to help us experience what it means to be free in Christ.

Let's look at an example of scripture that has both red lights and green lights and how after the red light is obeyed, we have a green light to move forward.

Phil. 2:3 says, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves"*. Now think about that for a moment. Selfish ambition is a personal desire to achieve something for yourself regardless of how it affects others. Vain means to have a high opinion of yourself or

think you are worth more than others while conceit means to have excessive pride in yourself. God's red light says don't think so highly of yourself that you walk all over people because you think you're worth more to the world than you are. I know a lot of teens that walk all over other teens to make that teen feel insecure. There is a thing called teen peer pressure that forces a lot of good kids to make fun of less fortunate, less talented, less popular, and less attractive teens. Why? To be accepted by the popular crowd. Doing that doesn't make you sanctified. That's following the crowd rather than being set apart.

Instead, if they'd obey the red light and stop being selfish and thinking so highly of themselves and putting less fortunate teens down then they'd be given a green light to move forward. What's the green light? Notice the word "rather" or "but" depending on your translation, which is a contrast to what was stated before. The teen is to have humility. How do they show humility? They show humility by valuing others above themselves. Treating others as more important than yourself is a great contrasting moral value to the world. It's a hard thing to do and doesn't come naturally. Your teen will struggle with this because it's a lot more fun to be accepted as part of the crowd and does as they do. However, who is to say that your teen can't be popular while still treating others better than they think they should be treated. In those situations, your teen needs to realize they are not alone. They are given a Helper (The Holy Spirit) who will stand alongside them and help them develop a humble spirit of treating people with dignity. ***I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.... John 14:16-17.***

Do you think your teen ever wants to get married and have children? They better learn how to live with humility and treat others as more important than themselves. In my opinion, there is no more humbling experience in life than being a parent. Nothing like have a party at the house with your business associates only to be interrupted by little Johnnie coming up to you and yelling, "Daddy I've got poo in my pants." Putting the needs of your children before your own needs are so important to being a successful parent. That's why we have so many bad parents in the world today. There are too many proud parents who haven't learned how to serve. Instead, they want to be served and treated as if they are more important than they are. Look around at your teenager's friends. Do they display selfish attitudes and are they prideful? Chances are if they are then I'll bet you their parents are also in many ways displaying tremendous selfishness.

I think some of the clearest positions God through His son Jesus Christ took on what He values ethically and morally can be found in Matthew chapter 5-7 in the Sermon on the Mount. A book could be devoted to discussing the attributes of the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus. From this great passage of scripture however, we can attain at least 5 major red lights and 5 major green lights. Wise is the parent that spends a good deal of time in these three chapters learning how to get across to their teen God's important teaching on morality ethics and how His position conflicts with the worlds.

Let me preface these 5 with the beatitudes in verses 1-10 of Matthew Chapter 5. Jesus sets the foundation for how we are to ethically treat people and morally make decisions per God's standard. He says blessed those who "poor in spirit" or show humility. He wants us to be able to have a heart that repents of our sinful nature. He wants us to be meek or under control with a gentle spirit. He wants us to have a hunger for doing right and wrong according to God's Word. He wants us to show mercy when needed. He wants us to be pure in our relationship to Him and not hold onto bad things in our lives, He wants us to be peacemakers and always try to be peaceful rather than holding grudges with anger. When we allow him to help us with all these things then it will influence how we treat people and it will determine what we value in our morals. Find me a teen (or a parent for that matter) with these foundational things in their lives and I'll show you a teen that has strong Godly morals and treats people with sound ethical behavior.

5 Red Light/Green Lights from God's Word that teach morals and ethics (in no particular order)

1. Red Light-Treating people in anger and thinking wrongly of them, holding grudges against those who mistreat you, and refusing to forgive is **wrong**.
Green Light-Learning to forgive and heal hurtful relationships, doing more than what is required of you in conflict, and loving the unlovable is **right**.

Main ethical values: Treat people with respect, keep anger under control, forgive when people wrong you, use Godly love in ungodly situations.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you; you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. Matt. 5:21-25

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Matt 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matt. 5: 43-48

2. Red light-Giving expecting something in return, doing nice things only to be noticed is hypocritical and **wrong**.
Green light-Giving expecting nothing in return, and doing nice things without wanting people to notice is **right**

Main ethical values: Trustworthiness, genuine, uprightness, humility, sincere considerate

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matt. 6:1-4

3. Red light-Living for this world, gathering as much materialism and putting more emphasis on money rather than God is **wrong**
Green light-Living for God and realizing that money is only temporal but investing in God's Kingdom has eternal value is **right**.

Main ethical values: Selflessness, integrity, commitment, principled,

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy—your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Matt. 6:19-24

4. Red light-Worrying about the everyday things in life and what will happen to you and trusting that the world has a way to take care of all your troubles is **wrong**
Green light-Believing and trusting that God knows what’s best for you and will take care of you and accepting that your needs are met by God and not the world is **right**.

Main ethical value: Contentment, confidence in God, calmness, peaceful

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matt. 6:25-34

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matt. 7: 7-11

5. Red light- Believing you have the right to judge others and their actions because you are superior is **wrong**.
Green light-Believing that God is the only one who can judge and that you will leave that up to Him is **right**.

Main ethical value: Non-judgmental or pre-judge, honest with self, discernment, non-critical yet honest and holds others accountable in love when they sin

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matt. 7:1-5

What about the yellow light?

The yellow light is intended to slow us down and make sure two things. First, should we stop, or have we proceeded cautiously enough that we can continue to go. Yellow lights are tough. Sometimes it's a judgment call as to whether we should continue. There are a few things that we can do to help us in this area.

- Ask yourself what Jesus would do in this situation from what you know He has taught
- Ask will this glorify God?
- Ask will it edify me and uplift me?
- Does this cause me to even take on the appearance of evil?
- Could this cause me to make someone stumble?
- Is this activity a positive seeking of God's righteousness?

As stated earlier in this section there are hundreds of pages that could be devoted to the subject of morals and Christian ethics. I have tried to only cover some basics that I felt would benefit you as a parent. Your teens have some tough decisions they have to make. Are you helping them understand that God's standards are the only thing in this world that they can trust? His truths are something that will be the same now and when they are 50 years old with teenagers themselves. That cannot be said of what the world says it relevant today. Man's viewpoints are ever-changing but the Lord is constant. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Hebrews 13:8*

I want to close with an example of how a teen must face many challenges and how to apply morals, values, and ethics by using a current event that is going on in America today.

Coming to the intersection and you see God's traffic light

While God's Word does not cover every situation we will face in our lives by clearly stating what to do, it is all-sufficient for living a Christian life. For most things, we can simply see what the Bible says and follow the proper course based on that. In ethical questions where Scripture does not give explicit instructions, we need to look for principles that can be applied to the situation. We must pray over His Word and open ourselves to His Spirit. The Spirit will teach us and guide us through the Bible to find the principles on which we need to stand so we may live as a Christian should.

For example, marijuana is a hot topic in the news today and many states are now legalizing pot. What should be the Christians' ethical response to this? The Bible does not say anything explicitly about the use of illegal drugs, yet based on the principles we learn through Scripture, we can know that it is wrong. For one thing, the Bible tells us that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that we should honor God with it ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)). Knowing what drugs do to our bodies—the harm they cause to various organs—we know that by using them we would be destroying the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is certainly not honoring to God. The Bible also tells us that we are to follow the authorities that God Himself has put into place ([Romans 13:1](#)). Given the illegal nature of the drugs, by using them we are not submitting to the authorities but are rebelling against them. Does this mean if illegal drugs were legalized it would be ok? Not without violating the first principle. Whether it's currently illegal marijuana or legal alcohol there are other underlying factors to God's word that encourage me not to use either. I don't drink alcohol not because I believe having a beer is a sin. First, I don't like the taste and would prefer a soft drink. My main reason for not drinking alcohol is for those who can't handle it. If they see me drinking and think they can handle it as well but they really can't then I might make my brother stumble (1 Cor. 8:13). I would feel horrible if my friend had a problem with alcohol and lost his family or developed kidney issues or worse, he accidentally killed someone while driving under the influence of alcohol. *"Do not get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit."* [Eph. 5:18](#). The Bible doesn't say you can't drink wine, it says don't get drunk with it. That's a risk I prefer not to take for others.