

12 Foundation Stones—Class 12A

What Are the Standards?

Going God's Way, Part 1

Introduction

➤ **The Story of Tommy**

Tommy was a little crippled boy. He lived in poverty with his aunt in a small third-story apartment of a rundown tenement on a busy city street. He was so severely handicapped that all he could do was lie helplessly in bed.

One day he asked a newsboy friend of his to bring him the book about "the Man who went about everywhere doing good." The little lad searched and searched for this unnamed book, until one book dealer finally recognized that he must have been talking about the Bible, and the story of Jesus. The newsboy scraped together what little money he had, and the kindly bookseller gave him a copy of the New Testament, which he took back to Tom on his third-floor pallet.

They began to read it together, until Tommy was wonderfully converted by the words he read, and he decided that he, too, wanted to do good, like the wonderful Man in the book. But Tommy was crippled and could not even leave the little one-room apartment. So he prayed and asked God to help him, and the Lord gave him an idea.

He began to laboriously copy helpful verses from the Bible onto tiny scraps of paper, which he would then drop from his window to flutter to the busy street below. Passers-by would see them drifting down and curiously pick them up to see what they were, only to read the words of the Man who went around everywhere doing good—Jesus Christ! Many were helped, encouraged, comforted, and even saved through the simple ministry of this little lad and his Bible.

One day a wealthy businessman was wonderfully converted through reading one of these little verses. He later returned to the spot where he had found the tiny scrap of paper that had led him to the Lord, seeking some key as to how it got there. Suddenly he noticed another little bit of paper floating down to the sidewalk from above. He watched as a poor, tired old woman stooped painfully to pick it up, and noticed her countenance brighten as she read it—and there seemed to be new strength in her step as she journeyed on.

The businessman, now transfixed to the spot, kept his eyes glued upward, determined to find the source. He had to wait a long time, for it took poor Tommy many painful minutes to scrawl even one verse on one of those pieces of paper. Suddenly the businessman's eyes were drawn to a certain window, as he saw a scrawny little hand reaching out to drop a tiny piece of paper, like the one that had brought a whole new life to him. He carefully noted the location of the window, dashed up the stairs of the dirty tenement, and finally found the humble dwelling of tiny Tom, the sidewalk missionary.

The businessman soon became a close friend of Tom. He brought Tom all the help and medical attention that he could. One day he asked Tom if he would like to come and live with him in his palatial mansion outside the city.

Much to his new friend's surprise, Tommy answered, "I'll have to ask my Friend about it"—meaning Jesus!

The next day the businessman returned, eagerly seeking Tom's reply. Oddly enough, Tom asked him some strange questions: "Where did you say your home is?"

"Oh," said the businessman, "it's in the country, on a luxurious estate. You'll have a beautiful room all your own, servants to care for you, delicious meals, a good bed, every comfort and attention, anything your heart desires. And my wife and I will love you dearly, and care for you as our own son."

Hesitantly, Tommy queried again, "Are there any people that would pass under my window?" Surprised and somewhat baffled, the businessman replied, "Why, no, only an occasional servant, and perhaps the gardener. You don't understand, Tommy, this is a gorgeous country estate, far from the tumult of the city. You'll have quiet there and be able to rest and read, and do all you want—away from all this filth and pollution and noise and the busy throngs."

After a long and thoughtful silence, Tom's face looked very sad, for he hated to hurt his newfound friend. Finally he said quietly, but firmly, with tears in his eyes, "I'm sorry, but you see, I could never live anywhere where people don't pass under my window."

Here's the story of someone so simple, so helpless, and so isolated, you might have thought he could never have had any ministry at all. He would seemingly have had every excuse for not helping others, but rather expecting to be helped himself. But love found a way!

Section 1: God's Ways vs. Man's Ways

➤ Lifestyle

The purpose of this class is to help you evaluate your lifestyle according to God's standards. Let's start by looking at something that Jesus said on this subject:

Matthew 6:19–21—Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; (20) but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:25–34—Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?(27) Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?(28) So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; (29) and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (34) Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

➤ The ways of the Lord

God's ways are often different from those of the world.

Isaiah 55:8–9—For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

1 John 2:15–17—Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. (17) And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Jesus' message was not conventional!

The greatest sermon ever preached, the "Sermon on the Mount," was given to a handful of disciples by Jesus.—The disciples changed the world because they heard the voice of God teaching them things that were completely contrary to what was being said in the "valley" of mainstream society!

In society they were saying, "Blessed are the Romans—the proud, and haughty and powerful. Look what they've done! They've conquered the whole world. It pays to be a Roman!" But on the Mount, Jesus was saying just the opposite:

Matthew 5:3–9—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. (4) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (5) Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (7) Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (8) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (9) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

➤ The Lord wants us to discern between what is of Him and what is not

Romans 12:9b—Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

Job 34:4—Let us choose justice for ourselves; let us know among ourselves what is good.

Isaiah 7:15—Know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

1 Peter 3:11—Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

The most important thing to gain from this class is the principle of discerning or identifying which are God's ways and which are the world's so that you can make the right choices in your day-to-day life. There are many examples of contrasting values and we're going to look at just a few that illustrate this important principle.

Section 2: Spiritual Riches vs. Material Wealth

Is money the most important thing?

Does having enough money to obtain the latest gadgets, the fastest car, the most fashionable clothes, the biggest house, the most advanced computer, or the widest-screen TV bring happiness?

Ecclesiastes 5:10—He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 5:12—The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

What money buys

Money will buy:

A bed but not sleep.

Books but not brains.

Food but not appetite.

A house but not a home.

Medicine but not health.

Luxuries but not culture.

Amusement but not happiness.

■ What are you seeking?

John 6:27—Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.

Matthew 6:31–32—Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Society at large generally promotes the acquisition of wealth as being most important. Is that really so?

The Lord knows we do have physical needs. "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." It's not that there's something wrong with money, riches, or wealth. It is as the Bible says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). It depends on whether you own things, or the things own you! What matters is your attitude toward them and the priority you allow material things to have in your life.

Bigger barns

Luke 12:16–21—Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. (17) And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ (18) So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’" (20) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (21) So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The rich man in this parable wanted to build bigger buildings, which was not so bad in itself if he had wanted to do it for the right reasons, but his purpose was to increase his goods for himself, not to share with others. The reason his heart was in the barns was because the barns were in his heart.

■ Money: Good or evil?

1 Timothy 6:10—For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Money in itself is not intrinsically evil. Having money isn't bad! It is a matter of your attitude towards it and how you use it. For example, someone may use their wealth to help others by opening a business that provides jobs or using the profits that it generates to give generously to worthy causes.

Ecclesiastes 5:19—As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.

Proverbs 28:16b—He who hates covetousness will prolong his days.

1 Timothy 6:17–19—Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. (18) Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, (19) storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Riches can be a gift from the Lord for which we should thank Him

Deuteronomy 8:11–18—Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, (12) lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; (13) and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; (14) when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from

the house of bondage; (15) who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; (16) who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end; (17) then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' (18) And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

■ **Dangers of being overly involved in the pursuit of wealth**

Mark 4:19—The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Luke 12:15—Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.

Mark 8:36—For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

The unsatisfied rich man

A rich man sought after Jesus and asked His counsel:

Mark 10:21–22—Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (22) But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

What a sad picture! This man obviously had not found satisfaction in his wealth or he would not have come to Jesus seeking for answers to his life. But even though his riches did not satisfy him, from this brief passage it does not sound like he was willing to give them up for something better when Jesus asked it of him.

Having an eye for business! (Humor)

An orchard property owned by two brothers was devastated by the worst drought in fifty years. Desperate for funds to tide them over, they went to the nearest provincial city and walked into the largest bank in town.

Somehow they found their way unannounced into the bank president's office. He was startled when they fell to their knees in front of him and begged him to grant them a loan to save their farm, which had been in the family for more than a century. When he told them that his bank only lent to commercial clients for very large amounts, they burst into tears and implored him to make an exception.

Finally, anxious to get rid of them, he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I sometimes have a gamble and I'll take a bet on you both. As a schoolboy I lost an eye in an accident. I was fortunate that I was able to get a glass eye, which is almost the same color as my other eye. If you can tell me without guessing, which is my glass eye, I'll lend you the money."

Quick as a flash, one of the brothers replied, "I know, it's your left eye."

"You're right, but how could you tell?" asked the president.

"Because when I first looked up at you, that was the one which showed the most compassion," was the reply.

■ **God's economics: The blessings of giving**

What is God's law of economics?

Luke 6:38—Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

God blesses us when we give, rather than keeping selfishly for ourselves.

Proverbs 11:25—The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.

Acts 20:35b—It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Proverbs 11:24—There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.

Proverbs 28:27—He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

Ecclesiastes 11:1—Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

2 Corinthians 9:6—But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

The Lord repays

The old German shoemaker had just sent his boy with a basket of garden vegetables to a poor widow. He worked hard at his trade and cultivated his little garden patch, yet nothing was more common in his life than some such deed as this. "How can you afford to give so much away?" someone asked him.

"I give nothing away," he said. "I lend it to the Lord, and He repays me many times. I am ashamed that people think I am generous when I am paid so much. A long time ago, when I was very poor, I saw someone in want, and I wondered if I could give, but I could not see how. I did give, and the Lord helped me. I have had some work, my garden grows well, and never since have I stopped to think twice when I

have heard of some needy one. No, if I gave away all, the Lord would not let me starve. It is like money in the bank, only this time the bank never breaks, and the interest comes back every day."

■ **Seek first the kingdom**

Matthew 6:33—But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Love for God and others should motivate our lives, rather than a purely personal pursuit for our own well-being. This verse puts priorities into perspective. What is the "kingdom of God" that it refers to? Jesus said to His disciples that "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), so it's referring to His people, the saved. How do you "seek first" His kingdom? You're going to be mostly interested in doing God's will and furthering His kingdom which means leading other people into it, by witnessing yourself and/or helping those who are witnessing.

The Lord promises that if you do this, if you'll put Him and others first in your life, then "all these things shall be added unto you!"—The material things that you need.

■ **Putting giving into action!**

We all have responsibilities to pay our bills and take care of the material needs of our household. If our financial resources are limited, how can we then find enough to give to others?

Examples of giving

Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity help countless thousands of deprived and needy people throughout the globe. Following are some examples as told by Mother Teresa of those who have contributed to her work:

The other day, two friends of mine came to see me. They brought a large amount of money to use for feeding the poor. I asked them, "Where did you get all that money?" They answered, "We were married two days ago, but before that we decided not to have a large wedding banquet. As a witness of our love for each other, we wanted to bring this money to Mother Teresa."

Not so long ago a very wealthy lady came to see me. She sat down and told me, "I would like to share in your work." I said, "That is fine." The poor woman had a weakness that she confessed to me. "I love elegant saris." (A sari is the usual garment worn by women in India.) Indeed, she had on a very expensive sari that probably cost around eight hundred rupees. Mine cost only eight rupees. Hers cost one hundred times more. It occurred to me to say to her, "I would start with the saris. The next time you go buy one, instead of paying eight hundred rupees, buy one that costs five hundred. Then with the extra three hundred rupees, buy saris for the poor." The woman now wears 100-rupee saris, and she would wear even cheaper ones except I asked her not to buy them. She has confessed to me that this has changed her life. She now knows what it means to share.

The other day I received fifteen dollars from a man who has been paralyzed for twenty years. The paralysis only allows him the use of his right hand. The only company he tolerates is tobacco. He told me, "I have stopped smoking for a week. I'm sending you the money I've saved from cigarettes."

■ **Points to consider**

What are examples of how money can be used to help others?

The Lord promises to bless us when we give to others. Have you seen examples of this in your own life?

How do you think God's economic standard ("give and it shall be given to you") compares with the worldly commercial system?

Can you think of practical ways to adjust your budgeting so that you can give more to others?

Section 3: Trends and Fads

■ **Whose influence?**

Romans 12:2—And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

1 Corinthians 7:31b—The form of this world is passing away.

Colossians W:8—Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Worldly influences are all around in many forms, surrounding us in ways we don't often think about—through advertising, fashion magazines, newspapers, the people you see in the movies or on TV. They're all constantly trying to influence us and to mold our thought patterns—movie stars, sports heroes, musicians and rock stars, that beautiful girl on the billboard or that hunk of a man you see in a commercial. Some are genuinely beautiful—God's creations, the way He made them—but many are false images, unreal, synthetic, not natural.

These images motivate people to act or think or strive for a certain thing, or a certain look, a certain thrill, most of which they can never attain. It's all very subtle, but a very real thing.

The "ideal" figure: An example of a common trend

The media can distort a girl's concept of beauty. The desire to be as slim as models, pop stars, and actresses can result in eating disorders—anorexia and bulimia—that damage the lives of tens of thousands of young people every year, some fatally. Much blame for this has been laid at the door of the media and fashion industry.

What is a beautiful figure?

"I stopped buying fashion magazines completely when I was about 24," wrote one woman. "Comparing myself to the models had a very strong and negative impact." Indeed, one mother of a girl with an eating disorder speaks of the "unrelenting publicity in our newspapers and magazines and television advertising to be thin, thin, thin." She says: "Both my daughter and I like being slender, but we feel the constant barrage turns it into the most important thing in life, ahead of everything." Clearly, recovering from an eating disorder may require adopting new beliefs about what constitutes genuine beauty.

According to an article in the British Daily Telegraph newspaper, anorexic models will be banished from the pages of women's magazines in the United Kingdom under a voluntary code agreed by editors. The announcement was made at a Body Image Summit organized by the government, following a damning report by the British Medical Association that claimed the media obsession with thin women was one of the main causes of eating disorders reaching a record level. Concerns have been raised about the thinness of models, actresses and singers who are seen as role models by young women. Research shows that there are 60,000 people with eating disorders in Britain. One in 10 sufferers are male, but the majority are young women.

Following the dictates of fashion can be harmful to health, plus a waste of money and time

There's nothing wrong with looking nice, but today things are getting out of hand. Some people go to extremes to adjust their looks, just so they can be what they think is more beautiful. It's gotten so far out of hand these days that in some places it's even fashionable to use plastic surgery or dyes to snip it, tuck it, inflate it, deflate it, color it—you name it!

When someone gets so immersed and obsessed with fashion and fads, it can grow and grow until that's all they can think about.

Psalm 1:1—Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.

■ **In contrast, God's beauty is simplicity**

Real beauty is more than skin deep:

1 Peter 3:4—Rather let it [beauty] be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

Psalm 90:17a—And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.

Proverbs 31:30—Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

■ **The balance: Taking care of the temple**

The Lord does expect you to take good care of yourself, for you are His temple:

1 Corinthians 6:19–20—Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (20) For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

The requirements of good health are proper exercise, cleanliness, food, sleep, and right living. Do take good care of yourself. Endeavor to stay fit and you'll feel better for it and be a better witness.

For instance, someone who is truly overweight can be liable to health problems, so it is good to find a way to get to the correct weight. If you have a weight problem, you're not going to shed those pounds overnight, just like you didn't put them on overnight. You'll lose them gradually, and the best ways to do so are the old tried-and-proven methods that have worked for thousands of years: Eat less fattening foods and exercise more.

A normal amount of body care and staying in good health and good shape is good, but tampering with your body and trying to change things that don't need changing is another story.

■ **Points to consider**

What do you think is taken to an extreme as far as diets, clothing, etc'?

How can you make the right choices as far as clothing and style? Some questions you may want to ask yourself include: Is this style appropriate in my culture? Can I afford this? Are advertisements sweeping me up or do I genuinely need this item? Can you think of other guidelines?

Section 4: God's Guidance vs. Media Manipulation

Music, TV, films, books—how does the Lord see them? Let's look first at music.

■ The wonders of music

The Lord loves music. He created it for our listening pleasure as well as a vehicle for His message. He also created certain kinds of music for fun and enjoyment—tunes that strike a chord in our hearts to thrill us and energize us to dance and jump for joy. David of old "danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14a).—And then there are melodies that comfort us in time of trial, Heavenly notes that float into our hearts to heal and soothe, just as David played music:

1 Samuel 16:23— [He] would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well.

Music plays an important role in our lives. It touches emotions that sometimes even words cannot express. It's a beautiful expression of the heart and has a special communication with the precious inner feelings the Lord has placed within each one of us. It can be a very emotional experience, both good and bad.

Some music can bring warmth and calmness, clarity of thought and inspiration.—Other music can bring on confusion, aggression and depression.

■ Choosing the music you listen to

Music is spiritual. Therefore, it is advisable to use wisdom in deciding what music you listen to. Whether it is contemporary or classical, it takes discernment to judge what is edifying and what is not.

If a piece of music makes you feel depressed, moody, confused or aggressive, then it's probably not inspired by the Lord! But if it makes you feel love, joy, happiness, peace, excitement, or compassion, then chances are that He inspired it.

There are many contemporary musicians and composers who play some nice tunes. However, some of the music performed and composed by these musicians can be sad and melancholic and can cause emotional grief. The Bible admonishes us to "discern between good and evil":

Hebrews 5:14b—...Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Psalms 34:14a—Depart from evil and do good.

Listening indiscriminately to ungodly music by ungodly artists—or even a particular piece of music that induces negative emotions in you even though you normally enjoy this artist—can bring you spiritual problems, whatever the genre of the music. Uninspiring music will take a toll on you!

Something you hear doesn't have to make much sense or have much meaning, but it can still take hold and be repeated over and over and over countless times. And once it gets stuck in your head, it's hard to get rid of it. Have you ever noticed how the soundtrack of a certain commercial will stick in your mind? Hasn't it ever happened to you that you've heard a song and then the melody and words just kept running through your mind over and over? Then months or even years later, when you thought you'd long forgotten that song, suddenly it pops back into your mind. You need to be careful about what you're feeding your spirit, which means trying to avoid listening to uninspiring music.

■ The darker side

Much modern music is a powerful vehicle for the Devil's message and propaganda of hate, destruction, hopelessness, and even downright Satan worship. The horrific message of some modern music seeps into the hearts and minds of the listeners and poisons their very souls, drowning out the voice of God's Spirit and the good and encouraging thoughts He's trying to give them. Those who are constantly bombarded with the devilish lyrics and hellish sounds, find themselves depressed, confused, and completely void of any positive goals or inspiration for living.—Or worse yet, some of that devilish music even leads its adherents to drugs, hatred of other races or the opposite sex, violence or suicide! It's so sad!

■ Other forms of media manipulation

2 Kings 17:15—[In this verse, talking about the children of Israel, it says:] And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them.

The same applies to other forms of modern media besides music, such as television, movies, newspapers, radio, the Internet, etc. Does what you watch, read, or listen to motivate you to be loving and helpful to others? Does it encourage you and leave you with positive, happy feelings? Or does it bring you down the slippery slopes of depression or provoke you to aggression?

TV Violence and Values

The simplicity of the experiment at the day-care center and the starkness of the results stunned the parents.

When a class of two- to five-year-olds watched public television's big-hearted purple dinosaur, "Barney," they sang along, marched along, held one another's hands, and laughed together.

The next day, the same class watched the aggressive teenage avengers, "Power Rangers." Within minutes, they were karate-chopping and high-kicking the air—and one another.

"Even though the goal of these programs isn't to teach, our kids are learning because they're always learning," says David Walsh of the National Institute on Media and the Family, who conducted the experiment.

According to the National Television Violence Study, prime-time violence, on both broadcast and cable networks, has increased since 1994. The study also concluded that the way violence is portrayed in most instances—glamorized, sanitized, and without negative consequences—poses a serious risk to children.

"These patterns teach children that violence is desirable, necessary, and painless," says Dale Kunkel of the University of California at Santa Barbara, where the study was done.

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Addressing a United Nations-sponsored conference on education in Melbourne, Ms. Diane Tilmann, an American educational psychologist, cited recent United States statistics on television viewing habits which found that the average 11-year-old had watched 10,000 murders on television.

■ Avoid the negative!

The Lord counsels us to avoid negative influence:

Psalm 101:3—I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

Psalm 119:37—Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.

Although magazines and newspapers might seem to be neutral vehicles for conveying the news or other items of public interest, you must also realize that aside from providing a service they also have an agenda. The management and editorial staff have views which they want to convey to their readership. Those views may not necessarily be wrong or opposed to God's view on things but God's people ought to have discernment about what they read and not swallow everything hook, line and sinker.

Romans 12:2—And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Proverbs 15:21—Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly.

■ Points to consider

What influences you more: Television programs, music, the Internet, or magazines and newspapers?

Give examples of when you noticed a positive or negative change in your mood after watching a movie.

Which music do you like to listen to because it influences you in a good way and cheers you up when you're down?

Section 5: Conflict Resolution

When people are having a disagreement, the solutions that God offers contrast sharply with the world's!

■ God's answer: Love, humility, and prayer solve all problems

Matthew 18:15—Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

Galatians 6:1—Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

2 Timothy 2:24—And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.

Ephesians 4:32—And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Abraham's good example

Genesis 13:7–11—And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I

will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other.

➤ **The way of the world: Violence, lying, aggression**

Proverbs 10:12—Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Proverbs 13:10—By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Proverbs 16:29—A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good.

Proverbs 29:22—An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.

James 3:16—For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

The two goats—a sample of humility

A man walking in the mountains observed this scene:

Two goats were making their way over a narrow path on the mountains. One was ascending the trail, the other descending. He also noticed that they must pass at a point where the trail was so narrow that there was room for only one goat. He watched to see what would happen.

The animals rounded a turn in the path which brought them in full view of each other. They backed up, as though ready for a lunge, and then the most amazing thing happened. The goat on the trail below laid down in the path, while the goat above him walked over his back. The first animal then arose and continued his journey up the trail.

How do wars begin?

A boy once asked, "Dad, how do wars begin?"

"Well, take the First World War," said his father. "That got started when Germany invaded Belgium."

Immediately his wife interrupted him. "Tell the boy the truth. It began because somebody was assassinated."

The husband drew himself up with an air of superiority and snapped back, "Are you answering the question or am I?"

Turning her back upon him in a huff, the wife walked out of the room and slammed the door as hard as she could. When the dishes stopped rattling in the cupboard, an uneasy silence followed, broken at length by the son. "Daddy, you don't have to tell me how wars begin. I know now!"

Some chilling stats

In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war. The twentieth century came to a close with a third of the world's 193 nations embroiled in conflict. When the twentieth century began, the ratio of military to civilian casualties was 8:1. By the end of the century the ratio was 1:8.

■ **Points to consider**

Consider the principle, "love, humility, and prayer solve all problems." How could that be applied to solve the conflicts that are currently raging?

Section 6: To Serve or Be Served

Leadership takes many forms: The employer, teacher, foreman, politician and parent are some examples of leaders in society today. A quick look at God's guidelines for leadership shows that humility is high on His list:

■ **The godly leader serves**

Luke 22:24–27—Now there was also a dispute among them [Jesus' disciples], as to which of them should be considered the greatest. (25) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' (26) But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. (27) For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves."

Matthew 23:11–12—But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (12) And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Only in the folly of this world do men fight each other for fickle fame and fortune. Only in the transient world do men struggle for power, position, riches, and glory—only to find that it doesn't satisfy! Take for example Alexander the Great, who, having conquered all the known world, died drunken and weeping that there were no more worlds to conquer! Or Napoleon, who made all Europe to tremble at his feet, but died in exile, begging to

have his boots pulled on, that he might die like a soldier! Or Caesar, whose friends stabbed him in the back at the pinnacle of fame! They all were weighed in the balances and found wanting.

In contrast, a godly leader will desire to serve those he leads. He will not try to be proudly self-sufficient but will humbly accept their counsel and assistance.

The story of Nebuchadnezzar: "Those who walk in pride He is able to put down."

See Daniel chapter 4.

Small in our own sight

Have you ever thought of it, that only the smaller birds sing? You never heard a musical note from the eagle in all your life, nor from the turkey, nor from the ostrich. But you have heard from the canary, the wren, and the lark. The sweetest music comes from those who are small in their own estimation and before the Lord.

Big heads

A proud man asked a farmer: "Why don't you hold up your head in the world? I bow my head before neither God nor man!"

Answered the wise farmer: "Do you see that field of grain? Only the heads of grain which are empty stand upright. The well-filled ones bow their heads!"

God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him (Martin Luther).

■ **Points to consider**

Consider the differences in Jesus' example of leadership compared with many world leaders today.

Consider how these principles might apply on a more everyday level such as in the workplace, in the schoolroom, in the home.

Section 7: The Wisdom from Above

■ **The right wisdom**

The wisdom that is "from above" brings good results, including peace.

James 3:17—But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

James 3:13—Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

That which is portrayed as "wisdom" but results in violence, war and confusion is the "world's wisdom" that God describes as foolishness.

1 Corinthians 3:19–20—For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; (20) and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

■ **"Foolishness to God"**

Turning to foolishness can be a result of rejecting the Lord.

Jeremiah 8:9—The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; so what wisdom do they have?

Psalms 14:1—The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.

■ **In time we will see clearly what was God's wisdom and what was not!**

Ecclesiastes 12:10–14—The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth. (11) The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. (12) And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. (13) Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. (14) For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil

The folly of science without wisdom

We have too many men of science, too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom, and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The World has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience.—Gen. Omar Bradley (1893–1981)

Some kind of wisdom! (Humor)

One day, a mechanical engineer, electrical engineer, chemical engineer, and computer engineer were driving down the street in the same car when it broke down.

The mechanical engineer said, "I think a rod broke."

The chemical engineer said, "The way it sputtered at the end, I think it's not getting enough gas."

The electrical engineer said, "I think there was a spark and something's wrong with the electrical system."

All three turned to the computer engineer and said, "What do you think?"

The computer engineer said, "I think we should all get out and then get back in."

(Computer users often turn off and re-start their computer to try to overcome a problem.)

New technologies imperil humanity

By John Markoff, NY Times News Service; Reuters (1999)

The co-founder of one of Silicon Valley's top technology companies believes scientific advances may be ushering humanity into a nightmare world where super—smart machines force mankind into extinction.

In a heartfelt appeal published in the April 1999 issue of Wired magazine, Sun Microsystems, Inc., chief scientist Bill Joy urges technologists to reconsider the ethics of the drive toward constant scientific innovation.

"We are being propelled into this new century with no plan, no control, no brakes," Joy writes. "The last chance to assert control—the fail-safe point—is rapidly approaching."

Joy's fears focus on three areas of technology undergoing incredibly rapid change.

The first, robotics, involves the development of "thinking" computers that within three short decades could be as much as a million times more powerful than those now available. Joy sees this as setting the groundwork for a "robot species" of intelligent robots that create evolved copies of themselves. Another computer scientist, Vernor Vinge, says machine intelligence will awaken sometime between 2005 and 2030, a date he calls "the singularity." Dr. Vinge argues that this evolutionary watershed might accelerate progress well beyond human control.

The second, genetics, deals with scientific breakthroughs in manipulating the very structure of biological life. While Joy says this has led to benefits such as pest-resistant crops, it also has set the stage for new, man-made plagues that could literally wipe out the natural world.

The third, nanotechnology, involves the creation of objects on an atom-by-atom basis, which before long could be harnessed to create smart machines that are microscopically small. Or it might be possible to create tough omnivorous bacteria that could out-compete real bacteria. Spread by the wind, like blowing pollen, they could be designed to replicate swiftly and reduce life on earth to dust in a matter of days, according to Eric Drexler, one of the nation's principal advocates for nanotechnology.

All three of these technologies share one characteristic absent in earlier dangerous human inventions such as the atomic bomb. They could replicate themselves, creating a cascade effect that could sweep through the physical world in much the same way a virus spreads through the computer world.

"It is no exaggeration to say we are on the cusp of the further perfection of extreme evil," Joy writes. "An evil whose possibility spreads well beyond that which weapons of mass destruction bequeathed to nation states on to surprising and terrible empowerment of extreme individuals."

Charles warns scientists of disaster

John Vidal and James Meek, The Guardian, 1999

(England) Prince Charles's simmering anger with the direction of some modern science will blow into a philosophical storm as he argues that the only way to avoid environmental catastrophe is for humankind to rediscover an urgent "sense of the sacred."

In a lecture to be broadcast on Radio 4, he will confront scientific materialism, politicians, and business leaders to argue that it is because of humanity's "inability or refusal to accept the existence of a guiding hand that nature has come to be regarded as a system that can be engineered for our own convenience and in which anything that happens can be fixed by technology and human ingenuity."

He will add: "We need to rediscover a reverence for the natural world, ... to become more aware of the relationship between God, man, and creation."

He asks: "If literally nothing is held sacred anymore, what is there to prevent us treating our entire world as some 'great laboratory of life' with potentially disastrous long-term consequences?"

■ **In contrast: God's wonderful wisdom created the world!**

Can you explain the watermelon seed?

"I am not so much of a farmer as some people claim," said Hon. W.J. Bryan in his lecture on "The Price of Peace," "but I have observed the watermelon seed. It has the power of drawing from the ground and through itself 200,000 times its weight, and when you can tell me how it takes this material and out of it colors an outside surface beyond the imitation of art, and then forms inside of it a white rind and within again a red heart, thickly inlaid with black seeds, each one of which in turn is capable of drawing through itself 200,000 times its weight—when you can explain to me the mystery of a watermelon, you can ask me to explain the mystery of God."

Nobel laureates testify of their faith

Surveys show that about 40 percent of scientists believe in God. Amongst the top scientists who have won the Nobel Prize, we find these opinions:

German physicist Max Born, who pioneered quantum mechanics, said, "Those who say that the study of science makes a man an atheist, must be rather silly people."

American physicist Arno Penzias shared the 1978 Nobel Prize for discovering microwaves in space—patterns that physicists have interpreted as showing that the universe was created from nothing. Penzias said, "If I had no other data than the early chapters of Genesis, some of the Psalms and other passages of Scripture, I would have arrived at essentially the same picture of the origin of the universe, as is indicated by the scientific data."

German-British researcher Ernst Boris Chain was awarded a Nobel Prize in medicine for his work with penicillin. Chain says, "The principle of [divine] purpose ... stares the biologist in the face wherever he looks ... The probability for such an event as the origin of DNA molecules to have occurred by sheer chance is just too small to be seriously considered ..."

American physicist Arthur Compton discovered what we call the Compton Effect, relating to X-rays. He said, "For me, faith begins with the realization that a supreme intelligence brought the universe into being and created man. It is not difficult for me to have this faith, for an orderly, intelligent universe testifies to the greatest statement ever uttered: 'In the beginning, God...'"

William D. Phillips won the 1997 Nobel Prize in chemistry for using lasers to produce temperatures only a fraction of a degree above absolute zero. Phillips once quipped that so many of his colleagues were Christians he couldn't walk across his church's fellowship hall without "tripping over a dozen physicists."

Among Nobel laureates, there are a number who recognize the hand of God in the universe. In studying God's handiwork—His creation, which testifies of Him every day—these men and women have come to the conclusion that there must be a Creator.

Just six numbers...

In his newest book, *Just Six Numbers*, Martin Rees, Britain's Astronomer Royal, argues that six numbers underlie the fundamental physical properties of the universe, and that each is the precise value needed to permit life to flourish. "These six numbers constitute a recipe for the universe." He adds that if any one of the numbers were different "even to the tiniest degree, there would be no stars, no complex elements, no life."

The six numbers lurk in the universe's smallest and largest structures. To select one from the small end: The nucleus of a helium atom weighs 99.3 percent as much as the two protons and the two neutrons that fuse to make it. The remaining .7 percent is released mainly as heat. So the fuel that powers the sun—the hydrogen gas at its core—converts .007 of its mass into energy when it fuses into helium.

So what? Consider this: If the number were only a mite smaller—.006 instead of .007—a proton could not bond to a neutron, and the universe would consist only of hydrogen. No chemistry, no life. And if it were slightly larger, just .008, fusion would be so ready and rapid that there'd be no solar systems, no life.

The requisite number perches, precariously, precisely, between .006 and .008. And that's just one of Rees' six numbers. If you toss in the other five, life and the structure of the universe as we know it become unlikely to an absurd degree. Astronomer Hugh Ross has compared the state of affairs to "the possibility of a Boeing 747 aircraft being completely assembled as a result of a tornado striking a junkyard."

The numbers' uncanny precision has driven some scientists, humbled, into the arms of the theologians. "The exquisite order displayed by our scientific understanding of the physical world calls for the divine," contends Vera Kistiakowsky, a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

If each of the six numbers Rees has identified were dependent upon the others—in the same sense that, say, the number of arms and fingers in a family depends upon the number of family members—the fact that they allow for the existence of life would seem less of a shock. "At the moment, however," says Rees, "we cannot predict any of them from the value of the others." So each number compounds the unlikeliness of each of the other numbers.

The amazing Earth

If Earth were as small as the moon, the power of gravity would be too weak to retain sufficient atmosphere for man's needs; but if it were as large as Jupiter, Saturn, or Uranus, extreme gravitation would make human movement almost impossible.

If we were as near to the sun as Venus, the heat would be unbearable; if we were as far away as Mars, we would experience snow and ice every night even in the warmest regions. If the oceans were half their present dimensions, we would receive only one-fourth the rainfall we do now. If they were one-eighth larger, our annual precipitation would increase fourfold, and this earth would become a vast, uninhabitable swamp!

Water solidifies at 32 degrees above zero. It would be disastrous if the oceans were subject to that law, however, for then the amount of thawing in the polar regions would not balance out, and ice would accumulate throughout the centuries! To prevent such a catastrophe, the Lord put salt in the sea to alter its freezing point! (Psalm 104:24).

■ **Points to consider**

Disillusioned by the uses men made of science, Albert Einstein said not long before his death that if he could live again, he would choose to be a plumber rather than a physicist!

Which aspects of technology do you consider having benefited mankind?

Which aspects do you think have hindered more than they have helped?

Technological advances and scientific discoveries can be used for good or for evil. Sometimes it is not the discovery itself that can be judged as good or not, but the use that has been made of it. Can you think of examples of something that has been used both for good and bad?

Ending note

➤ **Evaluation**

We've looked briefly at a variety of subjects. You can see that God's ways of looking at things around us are often different from the viewpoints held by much of society. If we are prayerful and consider the guidelines given in the Word, we can learn to discern between that which pleases God and is therefore good for us, and that which isn't.

How do you apply this principle in your life? Take a little time over the coming week to pray about and evaluate some area of your life—perhaps what you do for recreation, what music you listen to, what budget you have for clothing, and so on. On the basis of what you've seen in His Word, how do you measure up? Is there anything you need to change?