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2nd Place Essay: On Becoming a True Leader

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What is the first picture that comes to mind when you hear the words “good leader?” Maybe you picture William Wallace, leading his band of Scottish rebels in a war where they are heavily outnumbered against the numbers and tyranny of England. Maybe you picture Michael Jordan, pumping his fist right after he knocks down the shot against Craig Ehlo in the 1989 playoffs. Or you might even possibly see Adolf Hitler, although what he stood for will always be atrocious, he did do an incredible job of getting others to follow him. So the question is: What makes a good leader? Susie Shellenberger, the 2010 recipient of the Reed Leadership Lifetime Achievement Award, would say, “A good leader is one who doesn’t compromise integrity or character when no one is looking. A good leader maintains the same high standards in private as seen in public.” Let’s unpack what she meant when she said this.

First, a good leader doesn’t compromise integrity or character *no matter what*. Webster gives such definitions for character as “moral excellence and firmness,” and integrity as “the quality or state of being complete or undivided.” When you put these two together, the sum is a person who is firm in his convictions and who lives under those convictions no matter what the circumstances are. A good leader does not live a two-faced lie. As its definition states, to be a person of integrity means that you are complete or undivided. You are unwavering. You do not act differently around different people groups, but remain the same no matter what others might think of you. So many non-Christians today complain that people in the church are hypocritical, and then they allow that to be their excuse for not looking into Christianity. If we as believers would step up and choose to be a people who live out what we preach, live to be complete and undivided, and choose not to compromise, it would turn a lot of heads. Non-Christians would do a double-take and have to re-evaluate their thoughts about Jesus and the Bible. People who are

firm in their convictions, and who live by them consistently, are people worth following. They are the ones who make good leaders.

Second, a good leader maintains the same high standards in private, as seen in public. This means that our lives are to be living examples. Leaders do not take “a day off.” Every moment, every situation, every relationship is a new opportunity to solidify in the minds of others that we do indeed practice what we preach. No one is too lost for us to love; no one is too low for us to serve. Romans 12:16 exhorts us to “be willing to associate with people of low position.” A good leader considers others better than himself (Philippians 2:3), and seeks the good of those following him over his own good. Just as during his life Jesus gave us the perfect example of true servant leadership by washing his disciple’s feet, so we too are to humble ourselves and meet the needs of others no matter how inconvenient, uncomfortable, or difficult that may be to do.

In conclusion, the world is looking for true leaders. Non-Christians are longing for people who talk about setting the bar high to go out and actually live it. We are called by God to be influencers, leaders, lights in this dark world. And to be true leaders, we must never compromise integrity or character, but must always maintain the same high standards in private, as seen in public.