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1st Place Essay: A New Weapon

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A New Weapon

by Jenny Cox

The enemy to leadership has a new weapon. Evil has camouflaged itself with digital screens, giving bullies anonymity. Never before has it been easier to tear someone down. Never before has it been easier to “share” hatred. Never before has a generation been addicted to technology that serves only to increase bold judgements without really seeing the people targeted.

This world re-posts pictures of a meek-looking Jesus commanding people, “Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Share if you believe Jesus is LORD.” The same world then turns around and advertises articles that label liberals as uneducated or the conservatives as tyrants, acknowledging Christ with their words while simultaneously denying His existence with stereotyping and prejudice. People are more divided and digital than ever, and one has to wonder if this cyber-Jesus is the only way to reach people now. Does leadership in 2017 mean posting Bible verses before your political opinion? Or is it about being brave enough to comment on Planned Parenthood’s post that they’re murderers and that you’ll “pray for them”?

As Christian leaders living in a diverse world, it is crucial that we represent Christ accurately. I’ve been called to bring this to the attention of my generation, many of whom are increasingly engaging in destructive behaviors online. Jesus came to set people of all races and political beliefs free, so the things we post online need to adhere to that standard as well.

The call to leadership is threatened by the ever-increasing ease in which potential leaders condemn strangers for believing something different. Some of the most damaging wars are being fought on social media, and the repercussions are displayed in the division of America’s streets.

While certainly effective in terms of getting a reaction, the destructive one-sided posts do nothing to inspire the opposing side to change. In a world wrought with discord and hypocrisy, it's no wonder people have turned to violence. The challenge for leaders is centered around the growing mistrust between people who differ in opinion and the pressure to conform to a narrow-minded ideology.

Mediocrity does nothing to bridge the gap between mistrust and conformity. Leaders will have to find a voice that speaks nothing less than selflessness and truth into the fusillade of online banter. And where our cities are torn apart by injustice, our leaders need to speak love and grace into situations riddled with hatred and bitterness. Arguably, there have been patterns of social and economic abuse; but in order to move forward, both the abused and the abusers need leaders who can model HOW we move forward — not simply state suggestions where both sides have their own truths.

In a time when there is so much controversy about what is “true,” emerging Christian leaders might want to look at Timothy as he worked to embrace his own calling: “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Leaders around the world are being called to set a new standard — one where the temptation of hypocrisy must be defeated. Our nation is blessed with diversity. Now, we must come together and cross the divide, not trailblaze another while leaving scathing remarks.

The world doesn't need more shouting on websites or fraudulent religion. It needs leaders who are on their knees, washing the feet of the marginalized. We are all privileged to know

Christ; therefore, we must stop screaming “I have a right to” long enough to start asking “How can I help you?”

The leaders of this generation aren't being called to a reign of power, but to a life of servanthood and compassion. Truly great leaders aren't necessarily those who get their name next to the title “CEO,” but who are more commonly ordinary people choosing to love those with whom they disagree. They're both the oppressed and the privileged coming together under the name of Christ to declare God's peace and grace, regardless of social status or race. They are those who don't just post a blog about Jesus, but also refuse to engage in hurtful gossip. They are those who look up from their phones long enough to look into the eyes of the people who have been targeted and extend empathy. Leaders are those who admit they're not always right.

The call to leadership has a new weapon. And its name is humility.