

## Character

### *The Importance of a Good Example by John MacArthur*

I was profoundly impressed by an item I saw buried inside the sports pages recently. A high school basketball team from Rockville County, Georgia, had easily won the state championship, rolling over all their opponents. A few weeks after the championship game, the coach, studying the team's grades, noticed for the first time that one of his third-string players had failed some courses. The youngster was academically ineligible for the basketball team.

The coach remembered that late in one of the semifinal matches, with his team leading by more than 20 points, he had put that player in the game. The ineligible man had played only a few minutes. His participation had in no way affected the outcome of the game. But it was technically a violation.

The coach was in a distressing predicament. If he revealed the infraction, his team would be stripped of the championship. He could keep quiet and hope no one noticed. After all, the violation was a mere technicality—the team would have won anyway. It was unlikely anyone outside the school would ever discover the offense.

Yet the coach realized the player involved surely was aware of the breach of rules. It was possible that the whole team knew and thought their coach had purposely ignored the eligibility guidelines

The coach said from the moment he discovered the violation, he knew what he had to do. He never even pondered any alternatives. His priorities had been set long before this. He realized that the championship was not as important as his team's character or his example to them.

He reported the infraction, and the school forfeited the state championship. I'm sure it was painful to give up the title, but the coach believed his first responsibility was to be a good example to his team. If he covered up the truth, his players would believe he had flaunted the rules. Winning a state championship at the expense of his integrity was not worth the price. Too many young lives could be adversely affected.

"Winning means nothing anyway unless you do it by the rules," the coach told incredulous reporters.

After the school surrendered the championship trophy, parents and team boosters chipped in to buy a new, larger trophy. This one does not say "State Championship," but in my opinion it stands for something far more important.

I wish all coaches, teachers, and parents understood that young people are our most valuable resource. *The complexion of the world a generation from now will be determined by the youth of today.*



The example they receive from those who influence them will determine whether they embrace or discard right values.

Whether you are a young person yourself or someone who influences them, you have a solemn responsibility to be a good example.

The Bible clearly emphasizes this truth. There is no question about the importance God places on being the right kind of example to children and young people. Eli, a priest in the Old Testament, was severely judged by God because he had failed to train his sons in the way of righteousness.

Being a good example is a responsibility all of us share—not just parents, coaches, and other authority figures. There is great insight in the words of the apostle Paul to a young minister—"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Note the progression, "speech, conduct, love, faith and purity." Those words envelop every conceivable sphere of influence. Paul wanted Timothy to be constantly aware of the impact of his words and actions on others.

Christians often speak of being a "good testimony." The word testimony usually makes us think of verbal witness, but being a good testimony for Christ means much more than just talking about Him. If actions speak as loudly as words, how we live is more important than what we say in influencing people for Christ. A testimony for Christ mandates that we live lives of obedience to Him.

### WARM-UP

1. When you were growing up, which coach or teacher was a good example to you? Why?

### WORKOUT

1. Explain how your words and actions can impact others.  
2. Discuss this statement: "Becoming a good example in life starts with the truth that no one is good but God alone. We've all fallen short of God's perfect mark. Apart from putting our faith in Christ alone for salvation, it is impossible to be a truly good example for others."