I have learned much this year regarding the soul, enough to know that I understand nothing and may suffer this plight for the remainder of my days on earth. I am not bothered by this realization; rather, I am comforted; humbled. For if I am to grasp the potential of my life, the possibilities for my soul’s engagement with my community and those within it, I must start with the awareness of my own limitations as they exist at present. At the very moment I begin to gain an understanding of what my soul is donning, and the load it is able to carry, I have reached the place where I can promptly turn around and demand more of myself. I may wear some form of knowledge now, humility perhaps, or discernment. However, in a matter of years these terms will likely mean something extremely new and different to me, and it will again befall me to look within and determine how to advance and grow and change for the betterment of not only myself, but more importantly for others. This is what a leader does.

I have wrestled with this idea of limitation throughout the past year. It’s often hard for me to become so acutely aware of my own shortcomings and the traits I wear that inhibit capable and powerful leadership. Yet having engaged with the Cal Turner Program over the course of these months, I have come to see that all true leaders have these internal conflicts and grapple with personal imperfections. It is not about removing weakness, but overcoming it. Managing it. Even utilizing it. If there is some attribute within your individual capacity that is impeding progress, there is going to be a way to work around or through it. And you must work though it. One cannot lead others out of the dense fog if they have no idea where or who they are.

Having spent this year working with the concept of “Women in Leadership”, it occurs to me that what is true for a woman is true for all leaders. Leadership is a matter of internal capacity and external action, and has little if nothing to do with our gender, race, ethnicity, past experience, or a host of other characteristics. These attributes fuel the unique composition of our character, and are entwined within the foundation of our souls, but they do not define us. I had the good fortune of learning from an incredibly wide spectrum of women leaders set in an array of contexts, and observed how each woman has found a way to employ her unique gifts. Their illustrations of leadership have empowered me less as explicit examples to be directly replicated, but more so in the understanding that the composition of my own character holds the potential to produce incredible things if channeled down the avenue in which it is most needed.

Leadership emerges everywhere, and is needed time and again when we least expect it. The recent flooding in Nashville has demonstrated the remarkable capacity for leadership of every kind, amongst men and women, young and old, wealthy and impoverished, neighbor and stranger. We have seen a community emerge where there appeared to be just a city, and have been amazed as individuals
everywhere have shown us how to truly love your neighbor freely and readily. It reminds us that we each hold the power within to cloak ourselves in compassion and kindness, and to show others a way out of the fog through deliberate and purposeful direction. We can humbly say now that the noble character of our city has materialized from the quiet, honorable leadership of its citizens.

I ask then, what does it mean to be a moral woman in leadership? Having studied this question and grappled with it for a year now, I can only respond by clarifying that the answer is found in many answers. We are each called to spend time in quiet reflection to prepare our minds and our souls for that moment when the floods pour in, for the next moment when the need for leadership arises, the moment our internal capacity meets external opportunity. It is in these moments that leadership is defined, and how we conduct ourselves and the choices we make at each turn will reveal the fabric of our character. It is my sincere hope that as I continue on my own journey, I will spend enough time in silence to hear and understand what I am wearing, for it was Mother Teresa who said, "We need silence to be able to touch souls."

-Amanda Taylor