

## **Character Matters** *Because behavior never lies!*

During the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a twenty-year old white nationalist drove his car back and forth through a crowd of anti-white nationalists, killing one person and injuring nineteen others; after which he fled the scene.<sup>1</sup> The actions of the white nationalist driver arose out of the continual existence of racial bigotry, hatred, and violence in this country. Many of the white nationalists and right-wing activist members have felt empowered to lash out emotionally, verbally, and physically towards people of color, but particularly African Americans, since the election of Donald J. Trump as president.<sup>2</sup> The vehement hatred that ensued during the rally serves as a backdrop to the current deterioration of race relations across the country. Also, it reflects how character matters because behavior never lies!

The behavior of the white nationalist driver in Charlottesville revealed his level of hatred towards others who felt or believed differently from himself. According to the Ivey Business Journal, “Scratch the surface of a true leader, or look beneath his or her personality, and you’ll find character.” Character is the foundation of good leadership. When leaders do not possess good character they, in turn, will eventually falter in their ability to lead others, treat others with respect, and dignity as equals. However, genuine and authentic followers of Christ have a higher

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Katz, “Unrest in Virginia: Clashes Over a Show of White Nationalism in Charlottesville Turn Deadly,” Time, August 12, 2017, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://www.times.comcharlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Brian M. Rosenthal, “State of Emergency in Virginia as White Nationalists March,” New York Times, August 12, 2017, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html>.

calling to go beyond treating others with respect, dignity, and equality, but also, to do so with unconditional love (Matthew 27:37-39; 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Character matters in the life of followers of Christ because it reflects the genuineness of who He is through them to other people. In his book, *A Fish Out of Water*, George Barna provides a working definition of character:

Character matters. The word *character* is derived from the Greek term that refers to engraving, implying that character is the sum of the indelible marks imprinted on you which shape your thoughts and behavior. Character is your inner substance—the content of your heart that is manifested through your behavior and values. Character in other words, is who you are when nobody’s looking. The real you.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the white nationalist driver, his behavior reflected destructiveness towards someone who disagreed with the actions of the “Unite to Right” rally. Unfortunately, this person’s character mirrors the character of others dating back to the genesis of slaved African Americans subjugated to the systemic institution of slavery in the seventeenth century, in which these attitudes are still prevalent today.

The question that challenges genuine and authentic followers of Christ is, will we mirror the destructive behavior, similar to the white nationalist driver, which reflects a faltered character? Or, will we take a different road to replicate good character rooted in Christ and the moral authority of Scripture? Frederick Douglass chose the latter during his era in which racial hatred was a cultural norm. His transformed character, due to his consistent studying and application of the Scriptures through obedience and submission, developed him into a godly leader of courage, humility, and strength in bringing about societal change as a biblical reformer.

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<sup>3</sup> George Barna, *A Fish Out of Water* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 95.

Character matters in the lives of genuine and authentic followers of Christ because to *not* be like the white nationalist driver requires the same godly leadership qualities of Douglass. As a biblical reformer, his core values was based on the moral authority of the Scripture, which developed his biblically astute and theologically motivated core beliefs to become a biblical reformer, which impacted his culture in his era.<sup>4</sup>

Q: What challenges prevent you from **not** mirroring racial hatred when confronted with it?

Q: What will it take for you to allow the Scriptures to transform your attitudes and behavior in dealing with racial hatred?

Q: What next steps do you need to take to have courage, humility, and strength when dealing with racial hatred towards you?

Q: Who can you invite to help you grow in the Scriptures to respond as Frederick Douglass towards racial hatred?

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<sup>4</sup> Aida Besancon Spencer, William David Spencer, and Mimi Haddad, eds., *Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Ministering Together in the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 10.