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Through The Esses - Terry Borcheller's Faith Is His Strength

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Terry Borcheller is a professional racer with a strength he carries within him based on his faith in GOD. The man lives his life confident that his faith will continue to bring him to where he is supposed to be. And he is equally confident that wherever that may be, it is because his faith has led him to it for a reason. Borcheller is willing to share the experience of his relationship with GOD with anyone who asks him about it. But you have to ask him, for he has learned that preaching aloud about GOD is only of value if the audience is receptive.

Running with a fast and older crowd in high school, Borcheller found himself on the wrong end of the law, living on the dead end street known as drugs, and walking steadily into a life of pure hell. But one fateful day in the fall of 1987 he found a road map that would take him off the dead end path and onto a lifetime journey defined by purpose and inner peace.

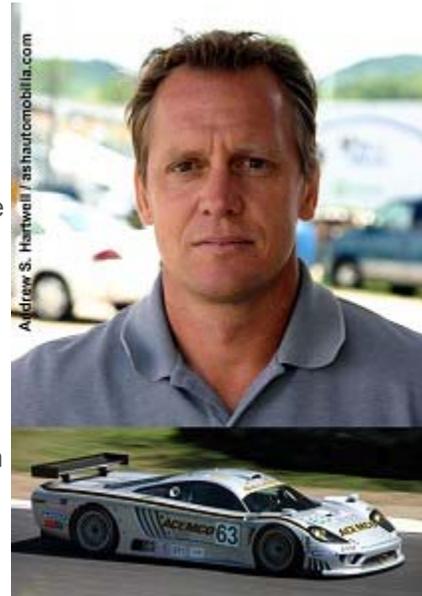
We caught up with Terry recently and asked him to clarify for us what his relationship with GOD is about, and how it came about at all. We learned that he is an earnest believer in a supreme being and in eternity. We also learned that he feels his faith in GOD has given him many opportunities to explore in and out of the world of motor racing. Opportunities he could not see as open to him before that day in 1987 that changed his life forever.

Sitting relaxed and comfortably in the ACEMCO Saleen lounge, in the front of their race trailer, we spent some time talking. We simply turned on our tape recorder and just let Terry tell us about his faith. And tell us he did.

"I actually was not raised with a knowledge of GOD. In other words, my parents really didn't take me to church. They dragged me there a few times but it wasn't a common practice in our home. My parents are good people but going to church on a regular basis was just not part of our routine.

"As I was growing up going into high school, I started running with an older crowd, I soon got into some things I shouldn't have at a younger age- Sex, drugs, rock and roll, and all that good stuff.

"I started racing karts with my dad when I was 12. I really had aspirations to be a professional racer and go into Formula One. In the process of going through high school, getting involved a little bit in Motorsports through the go karting, I realized what an obstacle it was - if not an impossibility - for me to pursue that dream. I did not have any money, and I did not have a racing name. I had nothing. My dad could barely scrape up enough for us to go karting. And I am very grateful to him for that because it gave me a good foundation in regards to seat time. And a lot of my race craft today I credit to my karting days.



My dad invested a lot of time in me and my racing, often spending long hours setting up or maintaining the kart. I will always be grateful to him for all that he did to support me.

"But in high school I kind of got diverted in terms of a purpose. I wanted to be a professional racer but I saw that as impossible. And once I saw it that way, I started making some choices that - normally, if I had thought I could have done it I might have stayed focused - but once you feel kind of hopeless towards reaching your goal or accomplishing what you want to accomplish, it is very difficult to make the right choices to get you there.

"As I was racing karts, somewhere along the line I just lost my focus on becoming a professional racer. I was in karts because I loved it but a lot of the decisions that I was making in regards to my lifestyle were definitely in the negative direction with regards to racing."

Several years of troubled youth were to come for this fast living young man who was rapidly going down for the count. Then one day, amidst a backdrop of uncertainty and confusion, his life suddenly stopped falling.

"People don't have to go to the bottom to begin their search for GOD. But when I was 21, I came to the bottom of my barrel. The date was October 17, 1987. I think people get to that point for any number of reasons. For some people it is alcohol, or drugs, or money, or marriage issues. For me, I was away from home in college, and away from my buddies. It was a very trying time for me personally, as I was just trying to find a purpose for my life. I always loved my parents and they always thought of me as a good kid. But behind the scenes I was having run-ins with the law and doing drugs and just going crazy. But on October 17, 1987 I came to realize that I wanted to know if GOD was real. That was a question I had been asking myself for several months.

"On that day, I prayed for the first time and I asked GOD to show me that he was real. I asked him to show me a sign. Show me something. Over that next week I would look up and see a billboard that said "Jesus Loves You". I would see a bumper sticker that said "No Jesus - No Peace, Know Jesus - Know Peace". It was like one after the other for the whole week. It was almost like GOD spoke to me and said, 'There's your sign!' He definitely has a sense of humor!

"But it was more than seeing signs. It was what I was beginning to feel inside. I had this sense that he was real. There was someone trying to communicate something to me. It was finding something that was real and finding what I was created for. Years later, it is very simple for me. I now believe the only way that people can live in peace in today's world and in today's society is to have a fellowship with, and be in communication with their creator."

"From October 1987, there was a life change taking place within me. At the time I was living in an apartment with a girl I had met. I moved out of the apartment and started focusing on living a life that glorified GOD. It became a craving for me to do that. I wanted to do it. I guess you would call it being born again.

"Soon after I had asked Christ into my life I called my mom. I told her all that I was dealing with and involved with. She was shocked. She had been praying for me since she had become a Christian in 1982 and I had done nothing but get worse. I think it was a relief for her but at the same time very much a shock.

"I think part of the shock came from my just being honest with her. I mean, I had hidden so much of what I was doing for so long. It was a huge relief for me to talk to her that way. And she did all she could to help me. She got me hooked up with a local church and I talked with some counselors there. They basically introduced me to Jesus Christ through the form of the scriptures. They led me through the pages of the scriptures and the life of GOD and what he was about. It was an amazing journey for me. It was unbelievable.

"My whole life was transformed. When I went back for my senior high school reunion, in 1994, I got the award for the graduate who had changed the most. It was weird because I was exactly the same person in a lot of ways. I have always been very physical and I enjoyed sports and was still interested in racing and I still had a bad temper. There were a lot of things that were still the same but the spiritual side of me that was totally dead in high school was now a burning passion. And it was cool because, I didn't go into my reunion preaching but they asked me to share my testimony because of the award!"

When GOD came into his life, racing went out of it, at least temporarily.

"At the time I began this new found relationship with GOD, I didn't want anything to stand in the way so I completely gave up racing. I ended up going on a mission field for three months, in Ecuador. The experience changed my life again, even as a believer. When I came back I thought I was going to go into the ministry full time. But through a series of events and through certain doors opening while others closed, I ended up working at the Bob Bondurant driving school as a driving instructor.

"Looking back the school was a great mission field. And what I eventually learned about the business of racing has been a key to some of my success still today. I sat next to Johnny O'Connell and Bill Cooper, both of which had a wealth of experience about racing on and off the track. It was also in this environment where I started learning the benefits of living my faith instead of always preaching it.

"It was a very special time in my life. I was constantly challenged on the race track by the other instructors and by some of the very impressive list of advanced students. Many who were - or were going to be - NASCAR stars. This pressure really helped me prepare for the years ahead in professional racing. Be the fastest, don't make any mistakes was the expectation. I can remember still seeing racing professionally - and getting paid for it - as an impossibility. I kept my relationship with Christ as my priority and attempted to put him first with my daily life. This enabled me to believe I could actually attain my goals with his help. I started telling all the guys at work that I was going to make it. That I was going to get a ride. I started training and acting as if I already had one.

"And as I kept that focus it was amazing to me how doors opened. Now, I know some people would disagree with this but; it was a miracle in my mind. I had no money and still, to this day, I have not spent a penny on racing aside from a plane ticket and such. Over the years I have been fortunate to make a little money from racing and save a little and not have to live paycheck to paycheck. But still I look back every day and I think this is truly a miracle.

"I was too old to make a serious run at Formula One. But I still had goals that I had set around 1997, including wanting to win Daytona, to win Sebring and to win at Le Mans

"I had started racing professionally for the first time in the early 1990s. I raced one off races here and there but never did a full season until 1997. The first big deal that really opened a multitude of doors was the phone call from Steve Saleen. Steve called me in January of 1998 and I told him I already had a ride for the season but I would love to run both the series I was in and the SPEED World Challenge. We looked at the calendars and, since there were no date conflicts, we got together. And the funny thing is, it has been that way ever since. I have had two or three rides each season in different series since that time."

Indeed. Borcheller has raced in several different series. The list includes the IMSA Exxon GT series, the American Le Mans Series, SPEED World Challenge, Barber SAAB, Motorola Cup, Grand Am Cup and the Grand Am Rolex Daytona Prototype series. He has taken the winner's flag 57 times in his professional racing career. He has clearly demonstrated that he can drive and he can handle the pressures that come with being a top competitor.

"It has been a great ride. I think racing is one of the best occupations on the planet to be able to operate in the Christian faith. There are constant mountain tops and valleys. There are constant trials. There is constant pressure. There is a constant fight of leaning on your own ability. There is a constant struggle to

perform at the best of your ability, which is the complete opposite of Christianity. Don't get me wrong. Christians should strive for excellence, however, Christianity is relying on GOD's grace not on your own work.

"It has been a very interesting journey and GOD has taught me a lot of things through my racing experiences. Probably the first and most important lesson has been to just trust him, in every single situation. From the day of my salvation to going into qualifying today, I have to trust in GOD. I need to render all of my desires and my dreams and just live for him. And when I do that, things just seem to go smoothly. That doesn't mean I don't have obstacles and problems just like everybody else, but it all just makes sense for me when he is first."

When someone has such strong convictions about a subject as vibrant as a belief in a supreme being, it is not unusual for people to sometimes feel uncomfortable around them. We asked Borcheller if he thought people are ever uncomfortable being around him, perhaps afraid he might begin preaching to them in a determined and relentless way.

"I want people to know that without Christ in my life I wouldn't be here. It is not like I stand up and preach at the races. Although in my early days I did carry a cross and I was pretty radical. But what I have learned is that, here at the track my life should be an example of Jesus Christ. I have had some opposition but I usually speak about my faith only when I am spoken to or if I have set up a speaking engagement through Motorsports Ministries. In my mind people are dying everyday and going into eternity without GOD and that is a scary thing. For I believe eternity is real and GOD is real. If that is the case, I feel I have a responsibility to share the relationship that I have with this GOD - a relationship that is very real to me - with other people. But I also feel there is a time and a place and that it needs to be invited.

"I have had some obstacles with the media. Some people have difficulty with my saying something about GOD if I have won a race. I don't do it just to plug GOD; I do it because it really means something to me to give thanks to him for what I have.

"But, you know what I think is so cool about my relationship with GOD? I am living the life that every guy wants. I have been through thousands of students at Bondurant, and I have met thousands of fans, and 99% of the people I talk to say 'I want to do what you do.' They say they would be happy for just one day in my shoes, one chance to drive a race car.

"Yet, what is really cool about it all is that I can sit back and say to myself that what is really the most exciting thing is my relationship with GOD. And that is the truth. Going 200 miles per hour at Le Mans was exciting. Winning Sebring was exciting. Winning the 24 hours at Daytona overall was exciting. Going backwards and going off at 170 miles per hour and not getting hurt was thrilling. But nothing compares to the feeling of having a relationship with GOD and knowing why you were created. Nothing in racing, nothing in this world can compare with that.

"I try my best to let that truth come to the surface without preaching too much. I know that it is going to be the same whether you are a bookkeeper, an accountant, a race car driver, a janitor or whatever. It doesn't really matter because; if you have GOD as your focus you are going to have peace and happiness. You are going to have everything that people are looking for, and that is why I try to make that point whenever I see the opportunity. Again, Christianity doesn't make all of your problems go away but it does answer a lot of life's questions."

Borcheller attends church services but feels the important part of having faith is the personal relationship he has with GOD, not the rituals organized religion invoke in his name.

"It is good that I am into racing. I am very involved with my local church, and I love my local church, but I don't get bogged down in some of the religion of the church. Sometimes people do things as a practice, like they are practicing Christianity. For me, because I am away racing so much, I am in a world where

there is not a huge Christian influence. That forces me to search on my own. When I am in a hotel room I read the scriptures and when I have questions I have to seek out answers on my own. This keeps me seeking on an ongoing basis where sometimes people in a church pew every week can get complacent."

The Borcheller family resides in Gainesville, GA. His wife Tracy, and their three children, Amber, Taylor and Trenten are actively involved in their local church. They talk about the scriptures and discuss what was learned in church and they live together in a home in which GOD has a seat at their table every day. This is in contrast to how Terry was raised, but he sees his relationship with GOD to be the one single legacy he wishes to leave his children. Not that they become constant occupants of a church pew, but that they come to know GOD the way he has.

"For my children I pray that they will be different - not because they practice religion, but because they have a personal relationship with GOD and that they have a friendship with him. Not because they feel they have to because of their religion, but because they are in step with GOD. I'm hoping that that is what comes through for them, and that that is what they see in me."

Borcheller is a man with vision and understanding. While his beliefs may not be shared by all, or have a relevant place in the content of the lives of everyone, he feels for those who do seem to have a void in their lives.

"Our society is so purpose driven and success driven and finance driven and so much that goes away from GOD. And it is all so shallow. The more I look around racing, the more I see that there are a lot of hurting people here. That is why I am so grateful for Richard Anderson (of Motorsport Ministries) - our racing chaplain - being here.

"I can tell you the pressure for me has gotten a lot easier. I still want to win every time I get in the car, but the pressure is so much less because, when I start to get that pressure I just say, "GOD, I am going to do the best I can do." And the pressure comes at you from many sides but my response is always that I want to win more than you will ever know. But at the same time I know that I can only do my best. I can make my best better through my training and everything I know to do, but I can only do my best. So in that regard I am very content. This truth helps me stay at peace when it is easy to lose it."

Terry Borcheller has won championships in six series and classes. He has driven everything from a BMW to a Saleen to several different model Ferraris to a JE4 Daytona Prototype. His racing exploits have taken him to England, France, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and the Dominican Republic. He knows how to successfully get from the starting line to the finish line, no matter what kind of car he drives or the race in which he is running. He attributes his success in getting where he wants to go in varying situations to one constant, his personal relationship with GOD.

Regardless of whether or not you choose to accept the existence of a supreme being, and embrace the concept of eternity, you do have to accept that Terry Borcheller has an edge over others in the game of racing. His lengthy record of performance confirms that. And while we can debate what that edge truly is, Terry Borcheller is certain he knows. And, unlike most drivers who don't choose to reveal their performance secrets, this successful competitor is very willing to share what he knows with anyone who asks.