

Two-Way Street (Teamwork - Chapter 8)

n/a

Ready:

"Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must [forgive]." -Colossians 3:13

"Respect your fellow human being, treat them fairly, disagree with them honestly, enjoy their friendship, explore your thoughts about one another candidly, work together for a common goal and help one another achieve it." -Bill Bradley

Set

Jo Ellen Hornish has a love-hate relationship with auto racing. She's been a huge fan of racing since her teenage years. It's the part where her son Sam Hornish Jr. drives in one of those cars at speeds of 180 to 200 miles per hour that she's not crazy about. "She would have much rather I become a pastor," Hornish Jr. says. "I'm pretty sure of that. There's never been a time where she's said, 'Man, I'm glad he's a racecar driver.' But she knows that it makes me happy."

In reality, Jo Ellen only has herself to blame. Well, herself and her husband, Sam Hornish Sr. After all, it was her son's desire to get behind the wheel that directly attributed to the life-long devotion to auto racing that both she and her husband share. In fact, one of their first dates was to go to an Indy Car race in Milwaukee, and when Jo Ellen was eight months pregnant with Sam Jr., the married couple attended the Indianapolis 500. According to the younger Hornish, the love affair goes even further back than that.

"My grandfather took my dad to the Indianapolis 500 when he was 10," he says. "That sparked my dad's interest in racing. My dad probably would have wanted to be a racecar driver if he ever would have had the opportunity, but he got married right out of high school and never had that chance. So I was into racing at an early age. All of our vacations as a kid were going to races."

Many of those trips were to Indianapolis, which was roughly three hours from his hometown in Defiance, Ohio. He also recalls longer drives—to Michigan and even West Coast swings through California and on to Phoenix. Ultimately it was the appeal of open-wheel racing that drew Hornish into the sport, but it was his family's trucking business that first taught him the concept of teamwork.

Hornish grew up on 40 acres of farmland and lived two miles from his family's church. His father owned and operated a trucking company that dispatched 175 trucks across the United States. The younger Hornish started out as a truck washer and then graduated to the fabrication shop at age 16. After finishing high school, he continued to work in the family

business until he won his first Indy Car race—a success that Hornish attributes to the concerted effort of his entire family.

“You hear so many times about how racing has created a lot of victories for people but also a lot of heartaches,” Hornish says. “I’ve been very lucky that my racing has created very little heartache. The worst I’ve ever been hurt is when I broke my foot. We’ve a lot of fond memories around racetracks—either when I’ve been racing or when we just went there as fans. It’s been a pretty good ride for us. We’ve had our family arguments and disagreements along the way, but we’ve really had a pretty blessed ride. We’ve had a lot of good things happen.”

Sam Hornish Jr., born in 1979, apparently is a master of understatement. He, in fact, has carved out quite a career for himself since first racing at the age of 11 in go-karts. By the age of 14, Hornish was one of the top drivers in the World Karting Association, where he continued to make waves through 1995. After a successful stint in the United States F2000 Series, he joined the Toyota Atlantic Series and won the 1999 Rookie of the Year honors.

In 2000, Hornish received his first big break—an opportunity to race in the Indy Racing League (IRL) with PDM Racing. A year later, he moved to Panther Racing, winning back-to-back IRL championships in 2001 and 2002. Hornish switched teams again in 2004 and drove for the legendary Roger Penske. By 2006, he had set a new IRL record by picking up his third championship. That season was especially memorable thanks to an improbable win at the Indianapolis 500, which he won on the last lap.

“When I started racing, our goal was just to go to Indianapolis and qualify,” Hornish says. “We thought that would be plenty enough. We’ve continued to have that philosophy. We’re thankful that we’ve made it this far, and if you wake up tomorrow and it never happens again, then you accomplished your lifelong dream [from] when you were a kid. So to be able to do so much more in Indy Car—to win races and to win championships—all of that has been a bonus since I made my first start in Indianapolis.”

By 2006, Hornish was toying with the idea of making the leap to stock-car racing. He ran two races in the Busch Series (now Nationwide Series) in 2006 and seven races in 2007. Hornish also competed in two Nextel Cup (now Sprint Cup) races in 2007 before making the jump to NASCAR full-time in 2008 for the familiar Penske Racing team. And while the cars may be vastly different, he says the teamwork aspect is virtually unchanged.

“When people think about teamwork, a lot of times, people think about football or basketball,” Hornish says. “In most cases, people won’t think about racing as a teamwork sport. That’s probably because the driver gets about 99 percent of the credit. But racing is probably one of the most teamwork-oriented sports. As the driver, yeah, I have to drive the race car, and I have to make the right decisions on the track. If I do everything perfect out there, we can win. If I don’t do things right, we’re not going to win.

“As much as I get credit for those things and as much as I get paid, there’s as much pressure on the guy that’s working 80 hours a week in the shop,” he adds. “He never gets his face seen, and he doesn’t get paid nearly as much. There are thousands of bolts and fasteners and moving parts on the race car that have to be right if I’m going to have a chance to win. Everybody’s got to do their job. The driver’s got to do his job. The crew chief has to do things right. The pit crew has to make the right decisions. All the way back to when the car is being built, those things have to be put together right. There are so many things that can take you

out of a race. It's very much a team sport."

And teamwork doesn't just happen on race day. It's happening throughout the weeks leading up to the big event. For instance, every race team has several cars that are being worked on constantly—from the engine setup to the paint scheme. The pit crew has daily practices while the marketing team seeks more sponsorship money. Even when the driver isn't meeting with the crew chief and the engineers to discuss mechanical and handling issues, he or she is likely out making appearances to make the sponsors happy.

It all comes pretty natural to Sam Hornish Jr., who says his church background in Ohio taught him a lot about the importance of teamwork. His grandmother picked him, his sister and two cousins up for Sunday School and Wednesday-night services at the local Brethren Church, where he was baptized at the age of nine.

"I always enjoyed going to church," Hornish says. "I still enjoy it now—even the chapel services we have on race weekends. It's nice to be able to focus your attention on something else besides racing. We've got so much pressure on us to go out there and succeed. It's nice to be able to do one thing—whether it's 15 minutes or half an hour out of your entire weekend—and to be able to focus on something else besides racing. It's a nice release from worrying about everything else."

One thing he learned in Sunday School was how Jesus' disciples worked together as a team. As described in Matthew 4:18-22 and John 1:35-51, each of the 12 men had different roles and diverse personalities—a lot like what Hornish has experienced working with various race teams over the years.

He's also been able to temper disappointing team results by taking a look at the big picture and realizing that having a bad day on the racetrack isn't the end of the world. This philosophy was especially put to the test on April 27, 2008, when Hornish and his #77 Mobil 1 team struggled greatly in the Aaron's 499 at Talladega Superspeedway. After a solid start, a vibration in one set of tires forced him to make two pit stops. That misfortune was followed by a blown tire, which put the team down two laps, followed by engine troubles that effectively ended their chances for a good finish.

Prior to the race, Hornish had sat in on a Motor Racing Outreach chapel service and listened to chaplain Lonnie Clouse talk about the Bible story of Job. "Job was covered in boils from head to toes," Hornish says. "He lost all of his family and all of his property. Hopefully, I don't have to go through anything like that; but some days you sit there, and all of these things are going wrong in racing. You don't think you're going to turn the corner. But then you hear a message like that, and you realize it's not that bad."

Of all the variables that go into teamwork, Hornish says communication is probably the most fundamental and therefore one of the most vital. This proved especially true in his earliest transition from open-wheel racing to stock-car racing. "Everything I've known since I started racing has been about Indy cars," Hornish says. "If the car wasn't right, I knew what to tell them to make it better. Now, I don't know everything about the cars. There's got to be a lot of communication. If we have a condition where the car is pushing or it's loose, I have to be able to communicate that to the rest of the team."

His desire to learn—and do so through communication—is fortified by a number of King Solomon's nuggets of wisdom. For instance, the passage found in Proverbs 15:32 tells us that

“anyone who ignores instruction despises himself, but whoever listens to correction acquires good sense.” But that doesn’t make communication any easier. Hornish has found it difficult in times when problems continue to pop up, a scenario that often creates frustration and tension within the team setting.

“You’re always trying to make the car better throughout the race,” Hornish says. “You’re communicating what you think needs to happen but sometimes it just doesn’t get better. You feel like you’re constantly falling behind and that you can’t keep up with the changes. Sometimes it’s hard to keep your head about you and say, ‘That didn’t work—how about this?’ There are a lot of people who lose their head and make more mistakes because that communication is lost. Everyone’s speaking English, but something’s getting lost in the translation.”

In times like that, Hornish extols the virtue of patience, even though raising one’s voice or simply shutting off the lines of communication may seem to be the easy way out. “It’s tough sometimes, because you know that everyone is trying their hardest,” he says. “Sometimes it’s very difficult to tell someone they’re totally off base. For me being a young driver in my stock-car racing career, it’s hard for me to take that stance. But sometimes you just have to get to that point.”

And that means admitting mistakes, even if it’s Hornish himself who is the person on the wrong end of the stick. “I make hundreds of mistakes every time I go out there and race,” he says. “It’s the guy who makes the least mistakes who’s going to win the race. It’s not the guy who’s perfect, because nobody’s perfect.”

For teamwork to flourish, Hornish says there must be an environment of open, honest two-way communication that is grounded by a strong commitment to forgiveness. The perfect model for this concept can be found in Colossians 3:12-15:

“Therefore, God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must [forgive]. Above all, [put on] love—the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of the Messiah, to which you were also called in one body, control your hearts.”

“Being a good teammate is being able to forgive your fellow teammates for making mistakes,” Hornish says. “It’s also wanting to work hard so you don’t let them down; and knowing that if you do make a mistake and you’re working as hard as you can, you’re going to be forgiven of that.”

And while communication with all team members is important, there is a special bond between the crew chief and the driver. Throughout the week, these two must talk about everything from race strategy to car-related issues. During the race, the crew chief alerts the driver to his surroundings with the help of a spotter and verbalizes the game plan at every stage.

“The communication between the driver and the crew chief is extremely important,” Hornish concurs. “There’ve been days in the past when I could walk in and say three words about what the car’s doing to the crew chief, and then he’s going to make three changes to the car and make it twice as good as it was. That relationship—and that understanding—that a crew chief and driver have is the most necessary component for a successful race team.”

In a lot of ways, the relationship between the driver and the crew chief is a lot like our relationship with God. Daily communication helps prepare us for any challenges headed our way, and while living out our seemingly ordinary lives, we can rely on His gentle direction and correction to make good choices and rebound from poor decisions. And while Hornish says he’s never woken up in the morning and felt like God was telling him exactly what to do, he does believe that God speaks to him through both wide-open opportunities and closed doors. Psalm 37:23 backs up this concept: *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way”* (NKJV).

“Sometimes you don’t understand why the crew chief is doing what he’s doing, but at some point in time, you’ve got to trust him enough to make that decision,” Hornish says. “In the same way, God makes the right decisions for us, and sometimes He challenges us. The biggest thing is being open enough and smart enough to trust what He’s telling you to do, no matter the situation at hand.”

Go

1. Think of a bad day that you had recently. What were the circumstances that made that day so challenging? How did the bad day you were having impact your ability to communicate with others?
2. Sam Hornish Jr. says the story of Job helps him to keep his racing trials in perspective. How did Job’s troubles impact his communication with his friends, his family and with God? How would you handle the same kind of troubles that Job experienced?
3. Read Proverbs 15:32. Can you describe a time when you ignored some good advice? Who are some people that have given you good advice? How did listening to that wise counsel impact your life?
4. Read Colossians 3:12-15. What are some of the ways this passage tells us we should treat our teammates or friends? How would exercising these values improve communication within a team dynamic?
5. Sam Hornish Jr. shares a story about his former car owner Roger Penske (see “In His Own Words”). What role did trust play in his success at the Indy 500 in 2006? In what ways can the relationship between a driver and his crew chief be compared to the relationship between you and God? What are some ways that you can improve your communication with Him?

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Bible Reference:

Colossians 3



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