

With NASCAR in His Blood, Austin Dillon Turned to the Shed Blood of Christ

He's won NASCAR's two biggest races and grown up in one of the sport's royal families. He's also survived a frightening accident and experienced times when driving race cars felt completely monotonous and unsatisfying.

But through the ups and downs that come with being a professional racecar driver in NASCAR's premier series, Austin Dillon has discovered that operating in close fellowship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing in his life. And that includes his job—the one he's been in training for his entire life, growing up as the grandson of NASCAR Hall of Famer and six-time NASCAR Cup Series champion team owner Richard Childress.

"No matter how much you've won or done, you still go through the peaks and valleys of life," Dillon says, who's in his ninth year as a full-time driver in the Cup Series, in an exclusive interview with *Charisma*. "I think the greatest thing I've learned is that staying grounded with God and having a relationship with him definitely makes the high times and low times just kind of level out."

Dillon, whose brother Ty is also a Cup driver, is most well-known as the oldest grandson of Childress—who owns the team he races for—but others, including Dillon's parents Mike and Tina (Childress' daughter) and his wife, Whitney, have also been instrumental in shaping him into the man he's become. Whitney, whom Austin married in December 2017, has been an especially stabilizing source of strength over the last several years.

Before meeting her, Dillon admittedly wasn't in particularly close fellowship with the Lord. That began to change, however,

the more he came to know his bride-to-be.

"I definitely grew up having a relationship with God ... but He wasn't at the forefront," Dillon said on a podcast last June. "I was more focused on racing than God. When God really came back into my life was when I met my future wife. She inspired me more than anyone had in the past. I had gotten to the pinnacle of our sport—which is the Cup Series—and things weren't going as easy as I would have liked them to.

"A couple of years in it, I wasn't having fun," he said. "I was just kind of showing up to the track doing a job. I was single and just a mess. I met her, and things started turning around."

Whitney, whom Dillon described as "on fire for God," shared a book with him by a famous Christian author that led him to becoming considerably more proactive about pursuing an intimate relationship with Christ. It was also around that same time that Dillon miraculously walked away uninjured from one of the most harrowing wrecks in NASCAR history when his car went violently airborne into the Daytona International Speedway catchfence at nearly 200 miles per hour before landing upside down.

"The good Lord was looking at me and keeping me safe," Dillon said just a couple of days after the July 2017 accident. "It happened so quick, man. You're just holding on and praying that you get through it and get to race again."

A year and a half later, in February 2018, Dillon won NASCAR's most prestigious race—the Daytona 500—at that same track. In May the previous year, Dillon prevailed in NASCAR's longest and second-most prestigious race—the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Overall, though, the victories have been few and far between for Dillon. Unlike earlier in his racing career, when he often grew weary and discouraged from not performing at the level to

which he aspired, he now has somewhere powerful to turn. He remembers one occasion in particular earlier this year when he gained tremendous inspiration from a sermon that his wife sent to him on race morning.

“I watched it, and it changed my outlook going into that day,” Dillon said. “I had a confident aura about me when I walked into the track, like, ‘Hey, this is what we’re here to do, and we’re going to accomplish it.’ It was great. It was about having crazy faith.”

While there are plenty of other things that he still hopes to accomplish in NASCAR, the 31-year-old driver from Lewisville, North Carolina, has a more purposeful mission these days: living for the Lord and giving God his very best. Along with joining a Bible study and delving deeply into God’s Word—Dillon’s favorite Bible verse is Psalm 37:3, and he’s come to particularly love the story of how John the Baptist baptized Jesus—Dillon has cultivated a consistent prayer life focused on using his platform as a celebrity racecar driver to share the gospel.

“I pray every night, ‘Hey, God, let Your will be done. Use me in every way You can,’” Dillon said on the podcast. “I hope my story can help someone. God gave His only Son for all of us. I’m just thankful for the opportunities that have been put in front of me, but the glory always has to go to God. Stay faithful; that’s the biggest thing.” {eoa}

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