

PGA Golfer Bubba Watson Lets His Light Shine

There's something different about **Bubba Watson**.

And he doesn't care if you know it.

The PGA golfer, who ranked 18th in the latest World Golf Rankings, realizes he's not like most famous athletes.

In fact, he welcomes it.

"People always ask 'Why is Bubba different?'" said Watson during a phone interview from Scottsdale, Ariz. "They're just trying to figure it out."

Watson's identity is not wrapped up in his freakishly long drives from his lanky 6-foot-3, 180-pound left-handed swing—he leads the Tour with a 315-yard average.

Rather, take one look at his Twitter profile and you may figure out what's different about Watson.

@bubbawatson: Christian. Husband. Daddy. Pro Golfer. Owner of General Lee 1.

And pay close attention to the order.

Watson is an outspoken Christian golfer and he uses his Twitter account—along with his platform as one of the PGA Tour's magnetic personalities—to share about his faith in Christ.

"For me, it's just showing the Light," the 33-year-old said. "There's people who want to put down Christians. I try to tell them Jesus loves you. It's just a way to be strong in my faith."

Last April, just before teeing off on the final round of the

Masters, Watson took advantage of his social media platform to Tweet out two **Bible verses** on Sunday morning.

He followed that up, talking about his faith, his relationship with God, Tweeting out more verses and the impact of Christian artists on his iPod.

Some started complaining about his 140-character witnessing tactics, but Watson's response was simple: Feel free to unfollow, but the talk about God wasn't going away.

Some 100 people quit following him and in true Bubba style, he reached out and wished them well with goodbye notes.

This past month more Christian haters have tried to derail Watson's testimony—or as he mildly puts it, “write bad stuff.”

But Watson doesn't take offense, even when it's the sole intent.

When someone tells him “Your God Tweets are lame,” Watson responded with “I will pray for u and ur family.”

Among the 39,000-plus messages he's sent into the Twittersphere, he's sure to spread the gospel message: “God made everything & saved us from our sins & gives us hope and gives us eternal life! #Godisgood”

Sometimes he'll Tweet out some of his favorite verses: “Hebrews 13:6 So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?’”

Or he'll use his PGA platform—like the day after taking the lead with a headline-grabbing 10-under-par 62 at last month's Cadillac Championship—to bring God into the mainstream conversation.

Watson's Tweet before his third round: “The most important thing in my life? Answer after I golf 18 holes with @JustinRose99. #Godisgood”

Later that day: "Most important things in my life- 1. God 2. Wife 3. Family 4. Helping others 5. Golf"

"Lecrae said it the best," Watson said of the Christian rapper he listens to on his iPod. "He doesn't want to be a celebrity. He doesn't want to be a superstar. He just wants to be the middle man for you to see God through him."

With golf's official major season blooming this week, Watson will again try to tame azalea-laden Augusta National, where his best finish has been a tie for 20th in 2008.

But winning is no longer everything for Watson. There was a time in his life where drives slicing into the thick, 5-inch stuff or birdie putts rimming out would get the best of him and his blood pressure.

Watson will tell you, Angry Bubba was not a good look. Unbecoming, for sure.

"I was so wrapped up in 'Why am I not winning?' " Watson said. "It created frustrations in my head and in my life."

Things got so heated on the golf course, Ted Scott, his caddie since 2006, finally gave him an ultimatum.

"My caddie finally stepped up and said you're going to have to change, or I'm going to quit," Watson said.

Watson's temper-laced decorum was replaced with what some call "Bubba Golf," which stresses golf mechanics less and puts a heavy focus on just playing golf and having fun on the course.

And it's working.

Watson won the Travelers Championship in June of 2010, the Farmer's Insurance Open in January of 2011 and the Zurich Classic a few months later.

Last month, Watson led the Cadillac Championship after 54

holes before fading in the final round, missing a 9-foot putt by inches on the final hole that would have forced a playoff.

Old Bubba may have let that one fester for weeks. New Bubba brushed it off with a satisfied smile and slight head-tilt.

Watson credits three strong believers—Scott, along with his trainer Adam Fisher (“Fish”) and Watson’s wife Angie – as the difference in his attitude.

“I’ve really got a good team around me trying to help me succeed,” said Watson, who has long supported many charities, including the upcoming Bubba’s Bash and the infamous “Golf Boys” video project. “Not just in golf, but off the golf course, to be a light for Jesus.”

Perhaps the most powerful **Christian** impact Watson has experienced has been the PGA Tour’s weekly Bible Study, held every Wednesday night during tournament weeks.

Rickie Fowler, Matt Kuchar, Zach Johnson, Jonathan Byrd, Webb Simpson along with Watson are some of the regulars, with attendance ranging from 16 to 50 on a given week.

“For me it’s a way to get back connected with the Bible and with God and Jesus,” Watson said. “Now you know other people you can talk to, ask questions to, tell them what you’re thinking, tell them what’s going on in your life.”

The one-hour study is something Watson looks forward to regularly: “Getting more in the Word and realizing that golf is just an avenue for Jesus to use me to reach as many people as I can.”

Watson’s journey to Christ isn’t uncommon.

He grew up in Bagdad, Fla., as one of the good guys: “Didn’t cuss, didn’t cheat, didn’t steal, didn’t lie, didn’t drink, didn’t do drugs,” he said. “I was doing the right things but I didn’t know what that meant.”

It wasn't until his senior year in high school when two twin neighbor girls, from the house directly behind his, invited Watson to their youth group. He went and found a place where he belonged.

"The girls asked me to go to church," he said. "And after a few times going I realized this is what I wanted to do. This is truth here. And I gave myself to the Lord."

But with all the pressures of college golf, especially on the weekends, it wasn't until 2004 that Watson became serious about his commitment to Christ at the University of Georgia. He began dating Angie Ball (former WNBA player) and the two began living for God as a couple.

"We wanted to be Christ followers," Watson said. "We wanted to do the right thing. We started turning to the Lord for our decisions."

The couple married in September 2004 and were both baptized later that year, the day after Christmas: "I would say 2004 was my true time of becoming a Christian," Watson said, "and shaping me into the man I am today."

And just this week, Bubba the Man has become Bubba the Father. The Watsons began another chapter of their life, adopting a 1-month-old boy (Caleb), a journey that began several years ago.

Fittingly, Watson broke the news on Twitter: "Everyone @angieb1433 & I are proud new parents of a 1 month old baby boy name Caleb. Been a parent for 2 days. #amazing."

Used with permission from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.