

Here we are closing in on Christmas and we're all under the stress of this financial crisis. I mean, I'm sitting around waiting for congress to make a decision that might be the difference between us racing or not. That's crazy, but it's reality.

If you haven't noticed, we're in a recession. You just better hope we don't hit a depression because my mom lived through the first one coming out of Oklahoma and the Dust Bowl. I've heard the stories and it wasn't pretty. I have that trailer we used to live in right across the street from my museum. It was so small that you'd take a shower and use the bathroom at the same time because it was all together. I thought those were hard times, but it was nothing like what my mom had when she was a kid growing up in the Great Depression.

Let's get something straight -- It ain't hard times when you lose a sponsor. It ain't hard times when your car ain't fast. The people whose houses burned down last month out here in California, they're having a hard time. These mud slides cause hard times when people lose everything. Factories are closing down and people are losing their jobs. The home foreclosures you see every day on the news. All of those things are real hard on people.

What you have to do when you're down like this is figure out how to turn it around. That's what I've found out in my life. Hard times make everyone equal. When you're down in that foxhole and bullets are flying, it doesn't matter who you are or how much money you have. You just worry about the people that are important to you.

Some people just collapse under pressure. But when I'm under pressure I think that's where I'm at my best. The biggest crisis in my life was the death of Eric Medlen. I'll never face anything like that again, God willing. Nothing in my lifetime prepared me for that. And John Medlen is the real one that suffered the pain. And Eric's mother, she suffered as much as anyone.

I cried and cried and I suffered too. It was so bad I reached a point where I had to go to therapy. I wanted to quit racing. I really did. But I found a way out of it.

We can watch the news and feel like the world is collapsing and I know that feeling because that's how I felt when Eric died. I blamed myself for his death. I was all about winning and

maybe I overlooked something. Now I'm all about safety, because if you can't keep the drivers alive then what's the point of any of it. I had to turn my suffering into something good and that's why we've spent so much time and money on making the sport safer. That's turning something bad into something good.

One of the best things about American people is that they really pull together when times are bad. I think that's why wars bring people together. Maybe that's why God creates war, to let us suffer together so we see what really matters. Maybe that's what's going on now. It's time to refocus on the really important things. That's what God wants.

When my baby Courtney was born they took her straight over to Children's Hospital. We thought we were gonna lose her. I went there and cried and just stopped caring about everything else because it didn't matter. But she fought and came through. Maybe she has that fight in her from me and her mother.

Bottom line, at the end of the day we're all gonna make it. Maybe we won't have the biggest presents under the tree this year. So what? We're all in this together and we need to face the challenges and rise up to them.

Have a great Christmas and take a minute to realize what's important to you. I can tell you this, it ain't under the tree.

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