

SUPER BOWL CATCH

MY FAMILY AND I sat in our living room watching Super Bowl XLII, the New York Giants versus the undefeated New England Patriots. As a Jets fan I normally wouldn't have paid much attention to the game. Like most Americans, I would have enjoyed the commercials, hoped for some good competition, and then moved on with life.

But this Super Bowl was different. God had told us in advance that something special would happen. And my wife, Vicki, and I felt a witness in our spirits that “the moment” was just about to arrive.

Through a series of divinely orchestrated events, months earlier I had given a word from God to one of the New York Giants players. At that point the team's season was going down the tubes, and this particular player was injured and had just undergone surgery. Nothing seemed less likely than the word coming true.

Now we were watching the scrappy Giants give the fearsome Patriots a serious challenge. “What's going to happen, Lord? What will the moment look like? When will it happen?” I kept wondering. We were sure the word would be fulfilled—but we had no idea how or when.

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

The story had started the previous summer when I gave up a lucrative job as a CFO in the fashion industry in obedience to God. Our finances were suddenly falling short, and I began working as a certified public accountant with a financial advisor in Staten Island. One day the advisor took me to visit one of his clients, a football player.

David Tyree was an All-Pro special teams player for the New York Giants. He also played wide receiver, but was low on the depth chart for that position. He was mostly known in the league as a dangerous punt blocker and gunner, the guy who tries to block the punt or tackle the kick returner when he catches the ball. I had never heard of him until the day I arrived at his house for a meeting. David answered the door, and I could see the stitches from the recent surgery to his injured wrist.

We went inside, and we all sat down at the kitchen table to talk through some financial stuff. David's two kids walked up to me and started to talk to me. "I really don't need to be here," I thought. "I'm not contributing anything to this conversation." At one point toward the end of the meeting the advisor turned to me and said to David, "By the way, this is Hubie. He's a CPA, and he will be doing your taxes from now on."

"OK," David replied, and that was that. The advisor and I said good-bye and headed back to the office. I had spent so little time with David that I didn't even remember what he looked like.

So it was a little strange when a couple of days after our meeting I felt a stirring to pray for David. Why, I didn't know. We were barely acquainted and probably wouldn't have recognized each other on the street. David wasn't even playing football, because of his injury, and it wasn't certain he would play again that season. He was virtually

unknown except to Giants fans and die-hard NFL fans. But I felt God pushing me to pray for him.

“OK, he’s injured,” I thought. “I’ll pray for that.”

I also prayed for his family, his career, and his life in general, about which I knew little.

“That should do it,” I thought, believing the prayer assignment was over.

But over the next few weeks I found myself praying for David often. He kept popping to mind during the workday and when I was relaxing at home. I dutifully prayed for him but couldn’t make sense of it given that we had met so briefly.

Then the Holy Spirit began waking me up during the night to pray for David for long periods of time. That got old pretty fast. “Lord, why is this happening?” I thought as my eyes popped open an hour after I had fallen asleep. The only answer was a drumbeat in my head: *Pray for David, pray for David, pray for David.* I prayed in tongues and with my understanding, and fell back asleep, only to wake up again. *You’re not done yet. Keep praying. Keep praying for David.*

Never had my sleep been interrupted like that. “This is a little weird,” I thought. Not a day went by that I didn’t feel an urgency to pray for this man whom I barely knew. David Tyree was very much on God’s mind, but I was to the point of wishing He would leave me alone.

“CALL HIM”

In the meantime, my relationship with the financial advisor wasn’t going well. Coming from my previous position as a CFO, I had a lot of confidence and ideas for doing our work better, but the advisor didn’t seem interested in

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

my ideas. Time after time I felt my suggestions weren't getting a hearing. "Lord, why am I even here?" I asked in frustration more than once. "Can't You release me from this job? Surely I can find other work. This whole partnership thing isn't going as well as I thought it would."

"Stay," the Lord impressed on me, and I reluctantly obeyed. I continued to work for the advisor but stopped offering suggestions. Whatever the advisor told me to do, I did. But I was asking God if every day could be my last one at this job.

Then one day at the office the Holy Spirit spoke clearly: "You need to call David."

"Call him? I just met him, and it was only for a few minutes," I told the Lord. "We haven't even spoken since that day at his house."

Call him.

"This can't be You, Lord," I thought to myself and pushed the bizarre idea away.

An uneasy, anxious feeling badgered me all day, and I knew the only solution was to obey the perplexing word the Lord had given me. "OK, Lord," I finally said, "if this is You, then I'll do it." I copied David's home number from the office telephone directory onto a sheet of paper and put it in my pocket. The uneasy feeling stopped immediately. "Strange," I thought.

Though I had been walking with the Lord for nearly twenty years, at that time I knew next to nothing about how the spiritual gifts functioned. I had no training and no clear understanding of what prophecy was, and would not have characterized what I was experiencing as a manifestation of one of the gifts. I simply followed where the Lord led and tried to obey what He said. I often felt guided by feelings of urgency, anxiety, or peace in my mind and

body. It was that unscientific. I considered this the normal Christian life and was trying to do my best, like every other believer. But I had no track record or confidence in what was happening.

As a matter of fact, doubts besieged me after I told the Lord I would obey and call David.

“I’m still kind of new here. What if something goes wrong?” I asked while driving home from the office. “Is this crossing a line of professionalism? I don’t even know what David Tyree believes or if he’s a Christian. What if he’s offended, or just thinks it’s weird?”

Asking the financial advisor for permission to contact David was out of the question. For my boss, everything was about networking, leveraging relationships, making contacts, and expanding his business. “Make sure you get phone numbers,” he would say as I went out the door to any meeting. He was the consummate networker, and I worried that he would think I was trying to ingratiate myself into David’s life for personal gain.

“I could get fired for calling this guy,” I thought. “There is no rational explanation for it.”

Fear seized me.

“I can’t do this. I really can’t. It will upset the situation at work. It will ruin my reputation in the professional community. This could blow up so badly.”

But I felt harassed by the Spirit. “Call him... Call David Tyree... Call David.”

“And say what?” I wondered, but my question wasn’t answered.

Finally, as much to restore my own peace of mind as anything, I committed to the Lord, “You win. I will call him Friday night after work. If something bad happens on that call, I’ll have the weekend to figure out how to handle it.”

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

The nagging feeling went away, replaced by a feeling of peace and resolve. I knew the Lord was expecting me to keep my word.

Thursday flew by and Friday dawned with renewed fears. All day I recoiled inwardly from the commitment I had made. The urge to call returned like an incoming tide, stronger with every wave, pounding my soul. “Call David... Call David Tyree.”

I drove home feeling almost sick, ate dinner to steady myself, and at 8:30 p.m. pulled David’s home number from my pocket. There was no backing down. I had to keep my commitment to the Lord. I nervously dialed, hoping the answering machine would pick up so I could hang up. The phone rang once.

Two rings.

Three rings. Fear rose with each passing second.

Four rings... no answer. I was ready to hang up. Then—
“Hello?” A man’s voice. Live, not a recording.

My throat restricted as I forced out the words, “Is David there?”

“This is David.”

“Hi, David. This is Hubie,” I said.

A moment.

“Who?”

“Hubie. You know, the accountant.”

“Oh yeah, man. How are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” I said. I wasn’t fine at all. I was shaking with fear. My career was on the line. But I soldiered on.

“Sorry to call you so late, but I have something that I have to talk to you about,” I said.

“OK,” he said, waiting.

“This isn’t going to get any easier, is it?” I silently asked the Lord.

“Ever since I met you I have been praying for you,” I said to David. “The Lord told me to call you because He wants to tell you a few things.”

At this point the words began to flow beyond my control or comprehension. I could feel myself articulating them. They formed in my mouth one after another, almost like speaking in tongues. I knew the words were divinely energized, but I did not know what I was saying.

It seemed to go on for a while, and then it stopped.

Silence.

My thoughts jumped to warp speed. “I just made the worst mistake of my life. The guy probably thinks I’m crazy. How am I going to explain this to the advisor? I’m fired for sure.”

Already wondering where I would look for other employment, I held on for David’s response. There was none. Maybe he had hung up.

“David... are you there?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m here. I just don’t know what to say.”

“Oh, God, I blew it,” I thought. “What do I do now?”

He continued, “My wife and I were praying last night about some things, and we had a lot of questions. A lot of those things you just answered. You see, I play football, but what I really want is to share the gospel. I want a platform to share it with people, which is my desire. You said a lot of things, and one thing was that I would be known as a wide receiver, which is my dream. I am known as a special-teams player. I play the wide receiver position, but I am not known for that.”

He paused a moment as if taking it all in.

“There was so much that you said that there was no way you could have known,” he concluded.

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

Relief came upon me like a blanket. All the anxiety was suddenly gone.

“That’s great, David,” I said, feeling real peace for the first time in weeks. “I really don’t know what I said, but I am happy for you and I will keep praying for you.”

“I would like to get to know you better,” David said. “Thank you for calling me, and for the word. We’ll talk later.”

“OK,” I said, and we hung up.

A huge sigh of relief escaped me. I was so glad that was over. I slept soundly that night.

It occurred to me that David might mention our conversation to the advisor, but at work on Monday it was business as usual. David didn’t say anything and neither did I. Everything had turned out OK.

THE CATCH

Soon after our call David invited my family over to meet his family. We spent time getting to know him, his lovely wife, Leilah, and their children. We shared a meal and prayer, talking about the Bible and how we all met the Lord. They couldn’t get over how many kids we had. (Later the Tyrees would have seven.)

Vicki and I continued to pray for them in the following months. Soon Leilah was pregnant with twins. David’s injury healed and he was back on the field with the Giants, but they weren’t having a good season. They had lost the first two games and were 7–4 by Thanksgiving. David was playing special teams but caught just four passes all regular season as a receiver, none of them for touchdowns. To complicate things, David’s mother died and he was grieving. I watched Giants games on TV to

see David play and e-mailed or texted him now and then to offer encouragement. “I’m praying for you,” I would say. “I know you’re going to do well. God is with you.” The urge to pray for him returned and was constant some days. “Lord, give him safety. Bless his family. Fulfill the word You gave to him.”

The Giants were able to earn a wild card spot in the playoffs but were suffering from injuries to key players on offense and defense. We watched the team advance round after round, beating the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Dallas Cowboys, and Green Bay Packers in those teams’ home stadiums. My whole family became engrossed in the playoff run. We would pray for the Tyrees all week and watch David play on Sundays. To practically everyone’s amazement, the Giants advanced to the Super Bowl to play the New England Patriots, who were undefeated and going for a perfect season—a feat accomplished just once before in NFL history.

I did not remember what God had said to David through me, and it was of no concern to me. I believed it was a private message and my part was done. But David had told others about it. A mutual friend mentioned that David was holding it tightly because it confirmed what he and his wife had heard from God. The word was, in essence, “God is going to bring you out of obscurity into the spotlight and give you a platform, and your name will go before you. You will be known as a wide receiver. I am about to highlight your skills as a wide receiver. I know about your desire to share your faith, and I am going to give you a platform to do that.”

David mentioned to me later that I was the first one the Lord sent to the scene to help him through a rough season in his life. There were many others as well.

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

In the weeks before the Super Bowl Vicki and I prayed often for the Tyrees, and we began to feel a new quickening in our spirits: *something's going to happen*. Like a flickering flame in our hearts the sensation grew stronger as the game approached. We felt like kids on Christmas Eve, so excited because we knew something good was on its way. Neither of us had ever experienced such a feeling. When we prayed, the flicker in our spirits would dance even more. We felt certain that the Giants would win the Super Bowl and God would fulfill the word He had given to David by making him known as a wide receiver and giving him a platform to share the gospel. How it would happen remained a mystery.

The day before the Super Bowl the flickering was so intense that I couldn't sleep. I prayed for David throughout the night.

Family and friends gathered at our house to watch the game that Sunday in early February. The Giants were underdogs, and rightly so. The Patriots had gone 18–0 and were trying to become the first team since the 1972 Miami Dolphins to finish a season without a loss. In the first three quarters they showed why. The Giants were held to just a field goal in the first three quarters, stifled by the Patriots' defense. But the Patriots too had trouble scoring. When the fourth quarter arrived, the score was a skimpy 7–3 in favor of New England. The Giants looked tired and harassed, and David had caught just one pass. Still, we remained confident something would happen.

With eleven minutes left in the game, David lined up as a receiver and ran a route that put him open in the end zone. Giants quarterback Eli Manning zipped a pass to him, and David's catch gave the Giants the lead, 10–7.

We all celebrated, but I noticed something: the flickering in my heart didn't change. Catching the go-ahead touchdown was a good moment, but not *the* moment.

"I don't think that was it," I told Vicki, and she agreed. Something else was going to happen.

We found out later that on the day before the Super Bowl, David had the worst practice of his life. He dropped every single ball that was thrown to him. I could only imagine what that did to his confidence. Catching that fourth-quarter touchdown must have helped.

New England roared back, machine-like, to claim the lead with 2:42 left in the game, and things were looking dim. The Giants started their final drive on their own 17-yard line, and the Patriot defense looked primed to put the game away. Soon it was fourth down and a yard, and the Giants narrowly gained the first down with a two-yard run.

Two plays later Eli threw a pass in David's direction that was intended for another receiver who broke off his route. The ball sailed over David's head, and a Patriots defender got his hands on the ball. It looked like an interception would end the game. Instead, the ball bounced off both hands of the defender and sailed out of bounds incomplete. The defender stood there with his head in his hands, knowing that if he had made the play, the game would be over. With a minute and fifteen seconds left, the Giants were somehow still alive.

The next play was third down and five, and the Giants offensive line looked out of breath. As soon as the ball was snapped, the Patriots poured through. One lineman grabbed hold of Eli's shoulder, another the back of his jersey, and it appeared to be a sure sack. The pocket collapsed entirely, and for a moment Eli was almost invisible

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

among the tumult of jerseys. Then, with a defender still grasping his jersey, Eli managed to slip into the open field and buy one more second. Far in the backfield he squared up and tossed the ball thirty-two yards into the middle of the field.

“It’s to David! It’s to David!” I said as the ball sailed through the air.

Sure enough, David was the intended receiver. He leaped high and grabbed the ball out of the air with both hands. Rodney Harrison, New England’s star defender, hit the ball out of David’s hands while he was in the air, and it looked as if it would fall incomplete. But instead of falling to the ground, the ball fell on David’s helmet, and David’s right hand pinned it there. Rodney tackled him, furiously trying to whack the ball loose, but David managed to put both hands on the ball and hold it against his helmet.

Vicki and I jumped up and screamed, “That was it! That was it!”

The flickering inside danced like a flame in the wind. We literally laughed for joy. I had never been so excited for a moment in sports. This was David’s miracle, and it had happened before the eyes of millions.

Our friend Sinorice Moss, another receiver for the Giants, later shared his perspective of that play with us. Moss was watching from the sidelines when Eli threw the ball in the air. Moss stood up on the bench to see what would happen. When David made the catch, everyone on the sideline knew they would win the game, he said. Sure enough, a few plays later, Plaxico Burress caught the game-winning touchdown, and the Giants defeated one of the greatest teams in NFL history, the 18–1 Patriots.

We were so excited the rest of the night that we could hardly sleep. This time I wasn't interceding; I was rejoicing. "Look what God did," I kept thinking. "Thank You, Lord!"

I learned later that David's marketing guy was watching the game in a hotel room, and when David made the catch, this man fell to the floor and gave his life to Christ right there. He knew God had done it.

Early the next morning David called and left a message. He was weeping. "Hubie! Can you believe what happened? I can't believe it! Look what God did! I'm so speechless. I'm not going to take any credit for this. It's a platform, and I'm going to use it to share the gospel. I'll call you when I get back, and thank you for praying for me."

I couldn't have been happier. David had a platform to tell people about God, just as God promised. I knew he would use it well.

Nobody knew then that "the helmet catch" would go down in NFL history as the greatest catch in Super Bowl history and one of the greatest catches of all time. Sometimes spectacular plays like that are forgotten, but God elevated that moment. Today if you ask a football fan which teams played in the 2008 Super Bowl, few could give the right answer without looking it up. Who performed the halftime show? Who cares? Even the funny commercials are forgotten, as is the final score, the game MVP, and where it was all played.

But say "helmet catch," and most football fans break into a big smile. God made it one of the greatest and most unusual plays in Super Bowl history, a symbol of the ultimate clutch play by an underdog team. Nowadays when a receiver makes a great catch, you can hear the announcer say it is a "David Tyree-type catch."

David told us later that he didn't even know how

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

spectacular the catch was. He went up to catch the ball, and when Rodney hit it, David just reacted by holding it against his head. He didn't know how incredible it looked at the time.

Our friendship with the Tyrees would produce much more fruit than we expected. On a personal level, David gave me great counsel about how to raise a family and treat my wife, and how to handle challenging life situations. He even rebuked me on occasion. A lot of people have come and gone in David's life since that February day, but our friendship will always be special because of how God brought us together.

The experience also taught me several important things about how God works.

First, God will put us in places we don't want to be, to do what He wants us to do. What if I had quit working for the financial advisor before God did what He did with David? My own stubbornness might have caused me to miss the blessing of sharing the word with him.

Second, we can't let fear stop us from obeying God. What if I had been too afraid to call David and speak God's words to him? It would have been easy to think "practically" and say no to God's urging.

Third, as we follow God, we shouldn't expect Him to reveal the whole picture up front. Even after giving the word to David, none of us knew how or when it would be fulfilled. God has a way of stretching us by keeping us in the dark so we look to Him and not to our own abilities or knowledge. He will always be faithful to show us the way, one step at a time. Consider the examples set by Noah and Abraham:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . . By faith Noah, being divinely warned about things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to save his family, by which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out into a place which he would later receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was going.

—HEBREWS 11:1, 7–8

Faith means saying yes when we have no idea what it ultimately means. That's the kind of response that pleases God.

Fourth, when we step out to do the uncomfortable, God empowers us and gets all the glory. Our job is to show up, obey in spite of discomfort, and see how His Spirit moves through us. I love what Paul the Apostle wrote:

For observe your calling, brothers. Among you, not many wise men according to the flesh, not many mighty men, and not many noble men were called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And God has chosen the base things of the world and things which are despised. Yes, and He chose things which did not exist to bring to nothing things that do, so that no flesh should boast in His presence. But because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, whom God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

THE TALES OF A *Wandering* PROPHET

Therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31

I can do all things because of Christ who strengthens me.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:13

We have such trust through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient in ourselves to take credit for anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.

—2 CORINTHIANS 3:4–5

But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

—2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Seeing how God moved in David Tyree’s situation illuminated so many biblical principles and gave Vicki and me a foretaste of the life God had for us. We were two regular Christians with no real ambitions beyond local church ministry and occasional mission trips. I had no idea that God was preparing me to share divine messages with people from all walks of life—the famous, the unknown, and all those in between. I never would have chosen it for myself, and frankly it caused us a lot of discomfort and questions. But the results were obvious, as the words encouraged people far beyond what I could do in my natural abilities.

I’m still surprised because I’m just an accountant, a family man, a face in the crowd. For reasons I don’t understand, God has given me work to do that goes beyond my

Super Bowl Catch

wildest dreams. The good news is that I believe He has chosen you for a special work too. When you see the kind of dismal background I came from, you will know it's possible for you and that God has destined each one of us for extraordinary things, no matter where we came from.

