

*People say this Super Bowl catch changed my life.
But my life had already been changed*

The Catch

BY DAVID TYREE
WAYNE, NEW JERSEY

SUPER BOWL XLII. 1:15 LEFT ON THE clock. Third and long. We were trailing the New England Patriots by four points. The undefeated New England Patriots. I play wide receiver and special teams for the New York Giants. Our quarterback Eli Manning took the snap and dropped back. I started running my route. Then the Patriots defense swarmed Eli. He broke away and launched a desperation pass. All at once everything slowed. It was just me and the ball. It hung in the air for what seemed like ages, but I knew it was coming to me. I reached out.

Even if you're not a football fan, you might know what happened next because it made all the papers and TV shows. I leapt for the ball at the same time Patriots All-Pro safety Rodney Harrison did. I grabbed it. Rodney smashed into me. I felt myself falling. My left hand slipped off the ball. No! I pinned the ball to my helmet with my right hand and hauled the pass in just before I hit the turf.

Four plays later we scored what would be the game-winning touchdown. Giants 17, Patriots 14. Reporters called it one of the biggest upsets and that ball-on-the-helmet catch one of the greatest plays in Super Bowl history. Suddenly, everyone knew my name. I was on talk shows, the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Everywhere I went people asked me to reenact "the catch". It was pretty overwhelming for an under-the-radar player like me. "That catch will change your life," people said. But the truth is my life was changed long before that. And let me tell you, it—or rather, I—needed changing.

I started playing football in middle school. I started drinking not long after that. In high school my post-game ritual was getting loaded on malt liquor, whiskey and marijuana. I don't know how, but I kept my grades up enough to qualify for college scholarships. I got 45 offers, as a matter of. I still don't believe it.

When I told my mom I'd decided on Syracuse, she smiled so big I almost couldn't see the corners of her mouth. Mom was my first fan and she'd worked so hard to move my sisters and me from the inner city to the suburbs so we could have a better education. I wanted to make her proud. Before long I was a team captain for the SU Orange. I was an all-star partier too. But somehow I found myself drawn to a girl on campus who shied away from that scene. Leilah had the most adorable sleepy brown eyes. I talked her into giving me her number. We hit it off. Leilah was not only beautiful but smart too, a nursing major. She really had her act together.

From the outside it looked like I did too. I had a wonderful girl, a supportive family and in 2003, I landed the job of my dreams. Pro football player with the New York Giants. But if

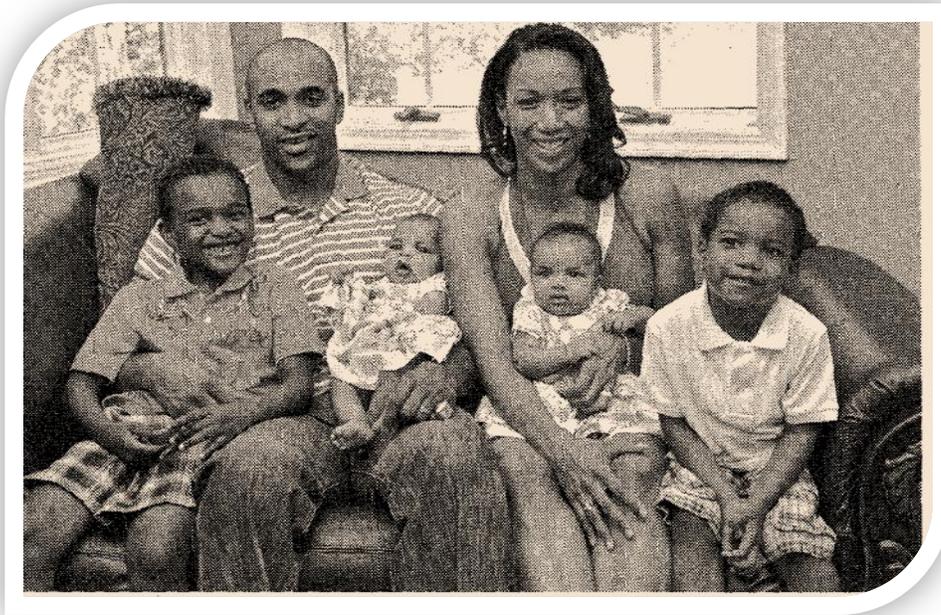
college was one big party to me, the NFL was a never-ending bender. Leilah begged me to get clean. She'd started reading the Bible, exploring her faith. But me? I didn't have time for that stuff. I was living in the fast lane.

Then at the end of my rookie year I got pulled over for speeding. My car reeked of marijuana.

"Do you have anything in here that I ought to know about?" the officer asked in a voice that said he knew I did. He searched the car and found a bag of pot under the seat. I was arrested. You know that expression "rock bottom"? Well, I hit it. Literally. There I was, sitting in a holding cell, staring at the cement block walls. What had I been doing with my life? I needed to change. Was it too late to ask God for help? I didn't know where to start, so I looked up, clasped my hands like I'd seen people do, and said, "Lord, I need you right now. If you could spare my job, I'd really appreciate it." I wanted a chance to make it up to Leilah and my family.

I was released the next day, and eventually the charges were dropped. God had heard me.

That weekend I drove up to see Leilah in Syracuse. I wanted to clear my head, and tell her how sorry I was for being such a lousy boyfriend and that I wanted to change. I walked into her room. That's when I noticed it. A Bible lying in the middle of her perfectly made bed.



FAMILY MAN David and Leilah, with Teyon, Hannah, Sophia and Josiah

I don't know how to say this or if I expect anyone to believe it. There was something about that Bible. Something... *physical*. No joke—it looked like it was glowing. I felt myself reach out for it, almost the way I would reach for a pass. In that way that time seems to slow down when you're doing something incredible, I picked it up and turned to the first page. Genesis 1: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." I read more." And God said, "Let there be light!" It's not like I'd never opened a Bible before, but for the first time the words on the page

made sense. As if their *meaning* was brought to life. God was real. And he was in control. Not me. That *was* the answer.

Leilah and I had a long talk. "I feel like I can finally get my life together," I said.

"David, are you really ready to make that commitment?" she asked.

I couldn't blame her for doubting me. But less than a week later I completely lost my desire for drugs and alcohol. God was already working on me. I really wanted Leilah to know I was serious, so a few weeks later, I proposed. We were married in a small ceremony. My family was ecstatic, especially Mom. She was so proud to see her only son finally settle down.

The Giants let me keep my job. It took a while for Coach Tom Coughlin and the rest of the team to realize I'd changed. I let my actions speak for me. I practiced harder, started playing better than ever, even led the team in prayer. By the time the 2007 season rolled around, Leilah and I had two sons and were expecting twin girls. My teammates looked to me as a responsible family man, a man of faith. That felt good.

I thought this would be a breakout season for me and the team. Then we lost our first two games and 21 guys landed on the injured reserve list. Morale was at an all-time low. Something had to be done. One day after practice I stuck a note in every player's locker. "I believe God wants to do great things with this football team," I'd written. "This is a wake-up call for us to come together. To trust God and put our gifts to the test. Let's do it!"

I'm not sure if the note helped, but I *can* tell you that by December we were headed for the playoffs. I was gearing up for practice the Saturday before a big matchup against the Washington Redskins when Coach Coughlin pulled me aside. "Your wife needs to see you, David. It's urgent."

Were the babies coming early? As soon as I saw my wife's face, I knew something was *seriously* wrong.

"Your mother had a heart attack, David," Leilah said. "She's... gone."

Mom was just 59 years old. She wasn't even sick. *God, I don't understand this, but you've been with me through my darkest days. I'm trusting you now.*

It was hard to get back out on the field, but I knew it was what Mom would have wanted. For me to make her proud, even in heaven. We made it to the Super Bowl, up against the strongest team in the NFL—the 18-0 New England Patriots. Game day was electric.

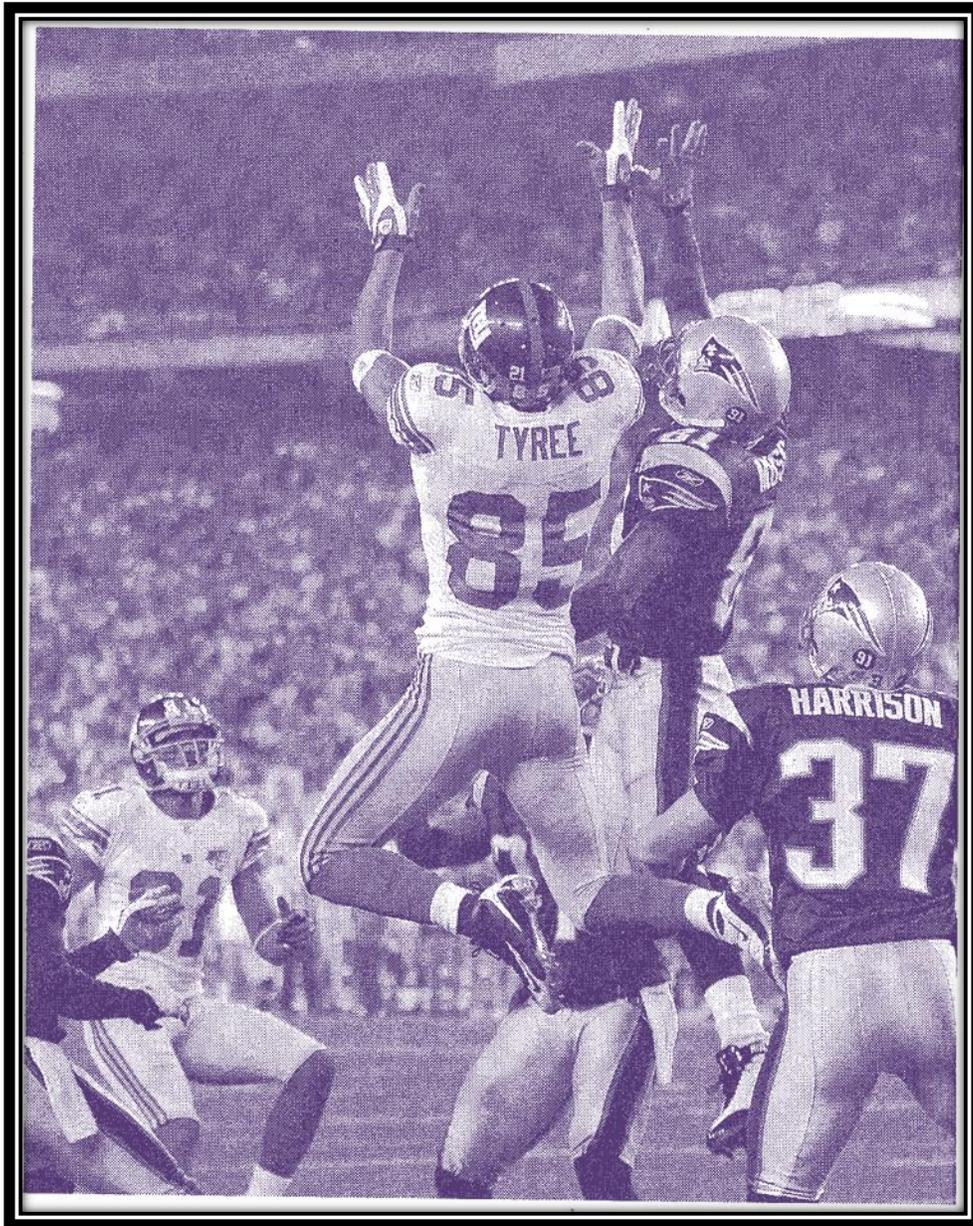
We played with everything we had, but it just wasn't enough. We went into the fourth quarter behind by four points, and still hadn't managed to score a single touchdown.

With 11 minutes left, I stood in the end zone. Eli hurled a pass. It came toward me like metal to a magnet. Bam! "Touchdown, David Tyree, number 85!" Our first touchdown of the game! A touchdown at the Super Bowl. It doesn't get any better than that, right?

Well, as God proves time and again, just when you think things can't get any better, they do. The next big play I made was "the catch." A minute later we were the Super Bowl champs, the team everyone counted out in October.

I like to call that game the Supernatural Bowl because I've got to give credit where it's due. Did "the catch" change my life? Not exactly. God did.

Watch David describe "the catch," the mentors who helped him, the joys of fatherhood and what's next for him, at guidepostsmag.com/tyree.



SUPERNATURAL David's grab of Eli Manning's pass will go down as one of the greatest plays in Super Bowl history.