

Next Years Champions



By the year 1971, the Dallas Cowboys had acquired a reputation for being “almost champions,” acquiring such labels as “Next Years’ Champions” and “Can’t Win the Big Game” Cowboys. While their seasons were showing great promise, they continued to fail in the finals. With a chance to go to the first and second Super Bowls, they lost the championship to the Green Bay Packers. The next two years, they again came close, but were defeated by the Browns. Finally, in 1970 they made it to the Super Bowl, but a number of freak plays set them up for defeat, and with only five seconds left, the Baltimore Colts kicked a field goal to win the game, 16-13.

After their Super Bowl defeat, they acquired a new quarterback. Roger Staubach had been drafted years earlier, but had to finish out his four years of service with the Navy before joining the team. Now, he was ready, but Coach Landry was not prepared to put him in full-time. Instead, as the year began, he alternated the quarterbacks between Roger Staubach and Craig Morton. The team never knew who would start or how long they would play, causing division and confusion, leading the Cowboys to a bumpy start. After half the season, the Cowboys had a record of four wins and three losses. Realizing they were in danger of missing out on the playoffs, the players agreed that someone would have to talk to the coach.

Confronting him, they made their appeal, and Coach Landry listened, placing Roger Staubach as the starting quarterback of the Cowboys. Things at once changed for Roger. A new feeling came over him. He no longer had to prove himself. He later said the decision “changed my life. And that was a kind of a whole new season starting.” The next game started rough, and by halftime, the Cowboys were behind 10-3 in a game that they needed to win, but Roger was not worried. He later said, “I knew that I wouldn’t be pulled. I mean, it was a whole different feeling. When he announced that I was starting quarterback, he was going to stick with me.”

The faith of his coach gave him the confidence to go on, and Roger turned the game around, leading the Cowboys to pull off a 16-13 win. After that, the Cowboys never lost another game that season. They made their way to the Super Bowl, and in a 24-3 blowout, the Cowboys defeated the Miami Dolphins to win Super Bowl V and finally crushing the label, “Next Years’ Champions.” Roger Staubach went on to play in three more Super Bowls in his 11 year career, with 2 Super Bowl victories, with 6 Pro Bowl games, and an induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The change came when Roger was moved from a trial quarterback to the official team quarterback. This same change can take place with you too.

So many people live their religious lives as trial quarterbacks, constantly in fear of being pulled or being benched. They live their Christian lives fearful of what God will do the moment they drop the ball, get tackled, or throw an interception. They constantly fear God, as if He is waiting over them with His great club of justice just looking for an opportunity to crush them the moment they do something wrong. Those who live this way are living under the Old Covenant. They live in fear of the law because they don't love the law, and they don't love the law because they are not officially part of God's team. As a result, they are constantly living fearful of God.

Before Roger Staubach was officially deemed head quarterback, he was playing in fear. The fear of losing his position motivated him. It led him to try hard to play good, but no matter how good he did, he could never really be good enough. He would never be a perfect player. Even the best quarterbacks drop the ball, throw interceptions, and get sacked at times, but while Roger was still on trial, every failure and every fall only led him to fear Coach Landry more. After he was placed as quarterback, he still had failures and falls, even losing two of his four Super Bowls, but now his failures only showed the grace of his coach. He failed, but his coach did not give up on him, leading him to love the coach even more.

Like Roger, before his position was official, we often live in fear. Don't get me wrong. We should have a certain sense of fear. To live without healthy fear is foolish, but Christians are not to live in constant fear that the next time they slip into sin, God will plunge them into hell. Rather, we should fear if we continue in sin with no effort to stop, because no desire to resist sin shows that we are not saved. We resist sin because we love God, not out of fear. The Christian life is not a life of fear. The Bible says that "the love of Christ compels us" and "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment" (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 John 4:18).

While we should be afraid if we have not given our heart to Christ and washed away our sins in the waters of baptism, once we accept Jesus into our heart and become baptized, we no longer have to worry about being cut from the team. That does not mean we cannot be cut, nor does it mean Christians cannot fall away and become lost, but those who fall back into a lost condition do by their own choice, choosing to turn back to a life of sin. And if we do get cut off, we can still be brought back. So many people live in fear that God will leave them, but Jesus did not come from heaven, suffer all his life, and die on a cross to save you, just so He could let you go that easily. God has no plans of cutting you, so relax.

There's a song by Christian artist Andrew Peterson called 'Rest Easy,' which sings, "You don't have to work so hard. You can rest easy. You don't have to prove yourself. You're already Mine. You don't have to hide your heart. I already love you." The song tells us an amazing aspect of God's character and His relation to His children. When we accept God and invite Christ into the heart, God then changes us on the inside. We see the love of God, and in turn, we begin to love Him (1 John 4:19). Once this change takes place, we want to serve Him. While we will still fall at times, repent, and get up again, we may rest easy, knowing that God will not leave us (Heb. 13:5).

Once Roger Staubach was given the position, he found an assurance. He no longer had to fear his failures. Similarly, when we accept Christ and are baptized, we no longer have to fear our failures. That does not mean we can stop trying to overcome sin. On the contrary, if we really love Christ, we will hate sin and constantly fight against it, but we don't have to live in constant fear of God because we are now on God's side, and He is on our side. When we accept Christ, we are on the same team, and even if we fall and fail, which we will at times, we can rest in God's assurance that He will forgive us and help us get the victory (1 John 3:2). So even when we fall, just get up and keep moving forward (Prov. 24:16).

In the classic, *Steps to Christ*, we are told, “We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, ‘These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ 1 John 2:1” (SC pg. 64). We don’t have to worry that we will be cut from the team because we fall, but we do need to be worried that we will become so discouraged that we will quit the team.

God has not let you go, but you can choose to leave the team. Still, even if you have done this, He will take you back, so stop living in fear. Football players know they will have fails, falls, and fumbles, but the coach does not give up on them, and neither will God give up on you. Stop looking at your falls and failures, fearing that God is going to cut you from the team. Instead, look at the cross and all that God has invested in you, and start moving forward until you gain the victory. Stop being “next years’ champions” and be a champion in Christ today!

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