

QUIET  
STRENGTH  
A MEMOIR  
TONY  
DUNGY  
WITH NATHAN  
WHITAKER



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
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“Tony Dungy’s life is a living testimony of a man’s faith in God. He has given us a new picture and definition of a ‘Coach.’ Good guys do come in first!”

**LOVIE SMITH**, *Head Coach, Chicago Bears*

“Winning the Super Bowl is an extraordinary achievement. Being the first African American coach to do so is monumental. But the Lombardi trophy does not reflect even a fraction of the greatness of this man and his message. Tony Dungy is an inspiration—a true champion both on and off the field. Now, in *Quiet Strength*, you can learn the principles that have propelled him to the top of his game.”

**PETER LOWE**, *President and CEO, Get Motivated Seminars, Inc.*

“In this fast-paced American culture with so many people driven by the lure of material success, Tony Dungy reminds us what truly matters in the game of life. At the pinnacle of NFL success, he has taken time to show us the value of making memories and not just money, focusing on family instead of fame, and building up a storehouse of eternal wealth that can never be depleted. Don’t just read this book; listen to it with the ears of your soul.”

**PRISCILLA SHIRER**, *Author and Speaker*

“In today’s world where sports figures and movie stars are idolized, Tony Dungy is a true hero because his life is a testimony to the fact that if you ‘do your best and let God do the rest,’ not only will success follow, but your life will have a positive impact on others. This is the reason I consider Tony a great friend and role model.”

**BENJAMIN S. CARSON, SR., MD**, *Professor and Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutes*

“My good friend Tony Dungy has demonstrated in his personal life and in this powerful book that it is possible to be a committed Christian on and off the field and still come out a winner. This insightful work will challenge, encourage, and inspire all who read it to uncompromisingly integrate our faith into every aspect of our

lives, so that we too, will be victorious in spite of the challenges and obstacles that life brings our way.”

**TONY EVANS**, *Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship;*  
*President, The Urban Alternative*

“‘No excuses, no explanations.’ I first heard Coach Dungy say these words in 1996, when he explained how we were going to turn the Bucs franchise around. But Coach challenged us to be more than just a winning football team. He wanted us to be winners in life—and he led by example. There are not enough pages in this book to share all the stories of the lives Coach Dungy has touched. You don’t have to win a ring to be a champion . . . but I am so glad he has won a Super Bowl ring so he can continue to use the platform God has given him.”

**DERRICK BROOKS**, *Outside Linebacker, Tampa Bay Buccaneers*

“Amid the deafening roar surrounding the machinery of earthly glory, the spiritual man leaves quiet footsteps of inspired faith. Tony Dungy’s footprints can be traced back to God and family. This foundation has provided him with the love, strength, compassion, and tolerance to fill his earthly run with man’s greatest gift and purpose . . . to be of service to God and his fellow man.”

**JIM IRSAY**, *Owner, Indianapolis Colts*

“In the twenty-one years I’ve known Tony Dungy, I have consistently found him to be a man of integrity, sincerity, and openness. As a man of faith, no matter what trials or tribulations he’s faced, he has embodied the Scripture found in Proverbs 16:32—‘Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city.’ Dungy has followed the biblical prescription for success. In football and in the game of life, Tony Dungy is a winner.”

**JAMES BROWN**, *Host, The NFL Today, CBS Sports*

“Tony Dungy is a world champion in every way. His quiet strength both on and off the field has been an inspiration to millions. His sense of priority is uncommon and uncompromised. His purposeful desire to turn the spotlight off of himself and onto Christ is admirable. Even more impressive, however, is the character and dignity he exemplifies when there are no cameras . . . when there is no spotlight. This is a man of tremendous faith, and he lives it every day of his life. He has inspired me, and I’m so thankful for his friendship.”

**MICHAEL W. SMITH**, *Singer/Songwriter*

“To say that I am a football fan is an understatement. I love it. But I love even more my friend and coach of the Indianapolis Colts, Tony Dungy. He has had a profound impact on Indianapolis that goes far beyond football. Tony Dungy is a man who uses football and its lessons to share with all of us his journey with the Lord. He walks with quiet strength each and every day.”

**SANDI PATTY**, *Singer/Songwriter*

“For over a decade, Tony Dungy has quietly taught me significant lessons in leadership and in life. Now he’s sharing them with you in this thought-provoking book. In *Quiet Strength*, Tony leads us on a journey that reveals profound principles for living and our ultimate purpose in life.”

**MARK W. MERRILL**, *President, Family First and All Pro Dad*

“Tony Dungy has become an icon of strength, character, perseverance, and faith. *Quiet Strength* is a road map that can help each of us draw on the God-given reserve of ‘character, fortitude, and peace’ that will allow us to stand tall during the low points of life and to be humble during the times of celebrated triumphs. I applaud Tony for his inspiring testimony that he has penned in this work.”

**S. TRUETT CATHY**, *Founder and CEO, Chick-Fil-A*

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# FOREWORD

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;  
Perplexed, but not in despair;  
Persecuted, but not destroyed.  
We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,  
so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.  
For we who are alive are always being given over to  
death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our  
mortal body.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-11

WE ARE BLESSED and privileged to write the foreword to a book that truly represents the power of God and the rewards of obedience to God's Word.

On February 4, 2007, millions of people witnessed Coach Tony Dungy confirm his faith after winning the greatest award in football, the Super Bowl Championship. Coach Dungy made history as the first African American coach to win the Super Bowl. Although that is significant, it is only a small part of his journey toward fulfilling his life's purpose.

It has been said that we get good at whatever we practice. Coach Dungy practices proactive faith. This faith is not a gimmick or magic or the will of a strong mind. It is not a short-order request to receive what we want when we want it. Proactive faith is receiving everything that has been promised to us by God's Word for His purpose and in His timing.

Because of his proactive faith, Tony Dungy has been able to climb many mountains. Great achievements require great

effort, and Coach Dungy's greatest accomplishment is that through it all, he has stayed obedient to God's will.

Coach Dungy's life displays his steadfast belief in God and his submission to God's Word. His story is a guide for basic living and a confession of his belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This account is proof that Coach Dungy's beliefs have sustained him consistently throughout his life.

To follow Coach Dungy's life from his beginnings to the present is most inspiring. For him to have been rejected, ignored, praised, and denied—yet still maintain dignity, strength, and hope—is a testament to his unwavering faith. At times his choices have not been popular, but he has stood his ground. He has remained committed to the will of God.

The payoff of such faith is far better than anything the material world can offer. In this world, one can never be satisfied. The reward of remaining patient and obedient to the will of God is that life becomes fulfilling and satisfying . . . complete.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

We see a beautiful testimony of such faith in this man of courage.

*Pauletta and Denzel Washington*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BY NATHAN WHITAKER

TONY WAS RELUCTANT to single out people specifically, noting how many people made this book possible, both by direct participation as well as in the entwining of their very lives into Tony and Lauren's, and thereby into the fabric of these pages. Although he's right—we're bound to forget people—I had far too much help with this book to not attempt to recognize those who assisted.

We are grateful for the time and memories of Jerry Angelo, Jim Caldwell, Vernon Cheek, Clyde Christensen, Jackie Cook, Mark Dominik, Herm Edwards, Leslie Frazier, Loren Harris, John Idzik, Craig Kelley, Tom Lamphere, Rich McKay, Mark Merrill, Veronica Pinto, Tim Ruskell, Donnie Shell, Alan Williams, and Ruston Webster.

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I couldn't have done this without the support of my wife, Amy, who kept faith in me long after mine had started to falter; my precious daughters, Hannah, for sharing me and for finding the comma we needed on page 72, and Ellie Kate, for stopping the banging on my office door long enough for me to finish; and my parents, Scott and Lynda Whitaker, for their belief in my vision and substantial editing assistance.

Tony, you were “Jesus with skin on” throughout this process, in good times and tough. I will forever be grateful for your faith in me and this project and for allowing your story to be told so that others might be encouraged and edified by it. You are a remarkable man with a remarkable story.

Most of all, Tony and I are grateful to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for bringing us this far in the journey of our lives, a journey of hope, joy, and the promise of eternal life.

# INTRODUCTION

*If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.*

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

“ABSOLUTELY NOT.” I have been approached many times over the last few years about writing a book, and my answer has always been the same.

In 2004 I had lunch with my good friend Nathan Whitaker in Indianapolis, and we talked about doing a book that would be more about life than about football. Could I see how such a book could help others? Yes. But still my answer was no.

And then my team, the Indianapolis Colts, won Super Bowl XLI in February 2007.

Still no.

But then cards and letters and e-mails started to roll in.

*“Thank you for your witness before the game. . . .”*

*“My son and I watched your comments after the game together. I could take him to church twenty times, and it wouldn’t have opened up a chance for us to talk the way watching the Super Bowl did. . . .”*

*“My husband moved out three weeks ago but heard one of your comments about putting your family first. He has since called and wants to come talk. . . .”*

I like the saying, “Life is hard, but God is good.” It’s because of God’s goodness that we can have hope, both for here and the hereafter. And it’s the desire to share that hope that finally changed my no to yes.

But before we begin, I want to make sure we’re starting at the same place. The point of this book is not the Super Bowl. In fact, it’s not football.

Don’t get me wrong—football is great. It’s provided a living and a passion for me for decades. It was the first job I ever had that actually got me excited about heading to work.

But football is just a game. It’s not family. It’s not a way of life. It doesn’t provide any sort of intrinsic meaning. It’s just football. It lasts for three hours, and when the game is over, it’s over.

And frankly, as you’ll see throughout this book, that fact—that when it’s over, it’s over—is part of football’s biggest appeal to me. When a game ends, win or lose, it’s time to prepare for the next one. The coaches and players really don’t have time to celebrate or to stay down, because Sunday’s gone and Monday’s here. And no matter what happened yesterday, you have to be ready to play next Sunday.

That’s how it works—just like life.

It’s the journey that matters. Learning is more important than the test. Practice well, and the games will take care of themselves. Whether you’ve been kicked in the teeth or life just couldn’t get any sweeter, it keeps rolling on . . . and then there’s another game.

If football were the only thing that mattered to me, I would have left coaching after the 2001 season, when I had

finished with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers—or when they had finished with me. At that time, I thought God might be moving me into some other walk of life. There were a lot of things I had always wanted to do “someday,” and my family certainly wanted to stay in Tampa. I figured God was simply telling me that “someday” had arrived.

If it were all about football, I would have left after the 2005 season, when I was reminded—in the most painful context I can imagine—that football really occupies a spot far down my list of priorities.

If it were all about football, I would have moved on after the 2006 season, when the Colts won Super Bowl XLI, accomplishing the ultimate team goal in the National Football League. After all, if football were all that mattered, what else would be left to do?

It would have been easy enough to do: “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve achieved the ultimate victory. I’m stepping down.” Everyone would have understood.

But winning the Super Bowl is not the ultimate victory. And once again, just to make certain we’re on the same page, it’s not all about football. It’s about the journey—mine and yours—and the lives we can touch, the legacy we can leave, and the world we can change for the better.

I’m still not totally comfortable putting my story in a book, but here’s how I see it: although football has been a part of my life that I’ve really enjoyed, I’ve always viewed it as a means to do something more. A means to share my faith, to encourage and lift up other people. And I see this book as a way of expanding the platform that football has provided.

Despite my day job, I am by nature a very private person in a very private family. So you won’t see a whole lot about my children in this book. I love them dearly, and it’s impossible to tell my story without mentioning them. At the same

time, a tension exists because my wife, Lauren, has worked very hard to make our kids' upbringing as normal as possible with a father who is the head coach of an NFL team. So with one notable, obvious exception, you won't find much discussion of my children in this book. I hope you, as well as they, understand and appreciate why.

This book is not only about me, either. It's about the priorities, choices, approaches, and habits that lead to being a winner, to experiencing true success. It's about you and me and our journey in this world together. It's about the things I've learned, the mistakes I've made, and the heartaches that have made me lean into the Father's presence. I hope that when it's all said and done, you'll see that it's really all about Him.

# TAMPA RAIN

CHAPTER ONE

*We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9

IT WAS TIME. I figured I had waited long enough. Darkness had fallen on that winter evening, two days after our team's business had concluded for the season. The building was otherwise deserted as I pulled up and parked at the small wooden shack guarding the entrance to One Buccaneer Place.

One Buc, as we all called it, stood quiet. The one-story, stucco and concrete block building was located on the edge of the Tampa International Airport. The color of butter pecan ice cream, this was the original building that housed the newly formed Buccaneers in 1976. Rather than expand the building as the organization exploded in size over the years—as personnel were added for coaching, scouting, marketing, public relations, ticketing, and other functions—the Bucs had simply added a series of trailers on the other side of a small parking lot in the late 1990s. The trailers were collectively known as Two Buc.

Oscar, the guard on duty, escorted me through the locked

gate on the side of the building; my security code no longer worked. Silently I gathered six years' worth of my professional life from my office—three-ring binders with notes, play diagrams, and play-calling sheets; various books and photographs; my sons' video games; and a couple of Buccaneers hats, although I'd never wear them again. I was lost in my memories as I placed these things rather haphazardly in cardboard boxes thoughtfully left out for me by my administrative assistant. *No*, I realized, *Lora is somebody else's administrative assistant now*.

I stopped to contemplate a wood-framed picture in the stack. It had been taken our first year in Tampa, and we were all beaming; my daughter, Tiara; my sons, Jamie and Eric; my wife, Lauren; and me. The stadium grass behind us was a vibrant green, the shade of an Irish meadow, sliced into five-yard increments by crisp, white stripes. A teeming throng of humanity, dressed in orange and red and squinting in the unforgiving Florida sun, filled the stands in the picture's background.

The summer of 1996 had been a long time ago.

Now, in the winter of 2002, that same Florida sky was dark. Dark, cold, and damp. The mist that had begun in the afternoon had turned to light drops. The weather mirrored my dark inner world on that night of January 14.



I finished packing the last of the items. Not that much, really. A few boxes stood by the door, ready to be carried home. Nothing else of note remained. That office of mine had been lived in pretty hard, I had to admit. Most of the homework completed by my sons Jamie and Eric over the previous six years had been done in there, and the office had seen countless games of catch, video-game competitions, and other pursuits geared around young boys.

I later learned that Rich McKay, general manager of the

Bucs during my tenure as head coach, had asked the facility manager to clean and paint the office that week, noting that my replacement was “about to move into an office that two boys have been living in every day for the last six years.”

As I wrapped things up, I noticed that the light drops falling outside had turned into a heavy rain.

I should have just walked out, since by then it was getting late. Instead, I wandered out of my office and through the building, stopping in the coaches’ locker room. Standing in the middle of the room, I let my gaze sweep over the cramped, worn twelve-by-fifteen room. I looked from locker to locker, reading some names, imagining others.

Monte Kiffin. Chris Foerster. Clyde Christensen. Rod Marinelli.

We had shared this locker room and many memories, these men and I. We had spent hours, weeks, and years together. These men had walked off the frozen, concrete-hard synthetic turf in Philadelphia with me just two days earlier, their careers critically stung by the Bucs’ 31–9 loss. So much had been at stake for all of us—and the players too—yet the outcome had never really been in doubt.

It was a difficult season punctuated by a painful ending.

And now God had something different in mind for all of us.

I tried to take solace in the things we had accomplished together—three straight playoff appearances, more wins than any other staff in team history—but they seemed hollow, even within me. I stared at the lockers, the enormity of the moment suddenly overwhelming as I remembered names of guys long gone from my staff.

Lovie Smith. Herm Edwards. Mike Shula.

The prognosticators had been circling for weeks. And amid season-long rumors that a new head coach was being courted, their speculations had finally become reality. I had been fired.

Many of the assistant coaches—maybe all of them—would be let go as well. They would all come out fine. I knew that. But I also ached for the inevitable pain I knew they would face as they dealt with the uncertainty of their futures, that their children would face when they were uprooted from their schools, that their wives would face when ripped from their support systems.

Joe Barry. Mike Tomlin. Alan Williams. Jim Caldwell.

These men had just come that year. Why did they have to go? It was hard to figure. My family had come to Tampa for a reason. God had led us here, opened doors that we didn't expect would be open, and allowed us to connect deeply with this community. But for what purpose?

Not football, apparently. I felt certain that the Buccaneers were my best, and possibly last, chance to lead an NFL team. For whatever reason, God had closed the door. For what?

Possibly some sort of ministry. I was heavily involved in the All Pro Dad organization and Abe Brown's prison ministry, both based in Tampa, as well as our church, Idlewild Baptist Central. Maybe God was trying to turn my focus toward those.

But did He have to close this door already?

And close it so firmly?

It really was hard to fathom. I had been faithful, hadn't I? So faithful in the mission that surely—*surely*—it was going to be blessed by Him. I had come here in 1996 with dreams of creating an organization based on values and character, and my staff and I had succeeded in doing just that. But God obviously wanted something else from me now.

It wasn't really the firing itself that was a shock but rather the thought that God was allowing this great experiment to end. Hadn't we tried to do things right?

Oscar reappeared. It was late, approaching midnight.

I walked out, traversing a path between the squat racks,

benches, and other weight-lifting machines in the weight area attached to the building. A cool mist blew in under the awning, dampening my forty-six-year-old face. This half of the weight room was outside and open on its ends and side, but at least the Glazers, the Bucs' owners, had partially covered it with a vinyl awning. Although the weights were cooled and heated—mostly heated—according to the daily whims of the southwest Florida climate, they were usually out of direct reach of the elements.

I looked to my left, past the row of squat racks and away from the building. Through the dark and rain, I could barely make out the two shadowy practice fields. The runway lights of the airport were clearly visible just yards beyond.

Where was the burning bush? Where was that still, small voice? Or, even better, the loud, booming one.

The only voice I could hear clearly was my own, crying out in the wilderness. *When will I hear Your voice, Lord?*

I returned from my thoughts as Oscar quickly maneuvered between and around the weight machines to beat me to the next door. He pressed the electronic pad, releasing the magnetic lock on the chain-link gate that separated the weight area and practice fields from the waiting parking lot.



The Bay News 9 reporter had been waiting all night for this shot. For two days, news trucks had been parked along the street, on the front lawn, in the surrounding ditches—wherever they could fit close to One Buc.

I thought everyone had abandoned the vigil hours earlier, when the Buccaneers had issued a statement that there would be a press conference the following morning. But on a hunch, this reporter had doubled back in the dark and rain, and he was about to hit the jackpot.

He must have seen my head over the dark green screen of the fence; he began filming just as I carried the boxes through the gate and into the open area. He was across the street, sitting in the back of a news van on airport property, but given the narrow street and small parking area, he was no more than fifty feet away. The lens on his video camera more than compensated for that short distance as I walked directly toward him.

His nighttime footage of me would air repeatedly over the next several days. Everyone in the Tampa viewing area would have multiple opportunities to see Tony Dungy, former head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, placing boxes into his SUV in the pouring rain.

As I drove away from One Buc, I knew that my real and painful experience of being fired was an all-too-common part of the human condition in the young 21st century. I reminded myself that it was temporary. I took comfort in the knowledge that this, too, would pass. But my emotions were a mixture of peace and bewilderment with a swirl of unanswered questions.

*What's next? What could we have done differently?*

I kept driving, across Columbus Drive and up Dale Mabry Highway. I went past Raymond James Stadium, where I'd experienced so many highs. Fittingly, it was now empty. As I reached Bearss Avenue, I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I kept reminding myself that I would move on, that things would turn out all right professionally, that Lauren and the children were resilient enough to handle all of this. And it was obvious to me that God had something else for us, or He wouldn't have closed off what we were doing with the Bucs.

*When will I hear Your voice, Lord? Soon, I hope.*

I knew everything would ultimately be fine, but at that moment—on that rain-swept night of January 14, 2002—my Explorer and my spirits traveled under the same dark clouds.