

# DAVID TYREE

## a super catch

By Eric Tiansay

**New York Giants wide receiver David Tyree became famous for his seemingly miraculous reception that helped defeat the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLII.**

**But the unlikeliest of heroes became the unquestioned spiritual leader of his team after he wrote a letter to each of his teammates during the 2007 season encouraging them “to really believe God for greatness.”**

The Patriots, though, seemingly had the market cornered when it came to greatness last season. However, the Patriots’ dream of a perfect season fell one game short at 18-1 — due in large part to Tyree’s amazing catch with just over a minute left in Super Bowl XLII. His circus grab enabled the Giants to pull off a historic 17-14 upset victory on Feb. 3, 2008, as more than 90 million people watched the game.

After quarterback Eli Manning somehow avoided multiple defenders and heaved a high, desperate pass, Tyree came up with a 32-yard reception, twisting in the air and pinning the ball against the side of his helmet, while Patriot defender Rodney Harrison blanketed him.

NFL Films President Steve Sabol called Tyree’s catch “the greatest play in Super Bowl history,” and it won the 2008 ESPY award for Play of the Year.

Along with his teammates, Tyree had achieved greatness. But when the Giants won the game, Tyree fell to his knees, worshipping and thanking God.

“My teammates were running on the field, yelling at the top of their voices, ‘We did it! We did it!’ ” recalled Tyree in his autobiography, *More Than Just the Catch*, released last September. “I could not help but hold my head down to my chest and say, ‘God, You did it.’ ... We did not die hard, and I know what happened was only because of the intervention of God.

“If you had called my cell phone right after the Super Bowl, you might have heard this message: ‘You’ve reached the voice mail of David Tyree, and I know that you probably saw the catch, but what you did not see is that ... God did it! Let’s give Him the glory!’ ” He added, “That’s what I want to do.”

However, Tyree and his teammates weren’t doing much after the Giants started the 2007 season at 0-2. The team had a high number of players who were injured or out for the season, including Tyree, who had suffered a broken wrist. Tyree said the Lord inspired him to write a letter to every member of the team.

New York Giants wide receiver who made miracle catch ‘has been through the tough times and lived his faith’



David Tyree gives an interview in the locker room at Giants Stadium and celebrates his fourth-quarter touchdown at Super Bowl XLII.



"I felt it was incumbent upon me to share and to challenge those who call themselves Christians to stir up something and to really believe God for greatness for the year," Tyree told *TPE*. "It just so happened that the letter turned out to be somewhat prophetic."

Linebacker Reggie Torbor told Baptist Press he wasn't surprised by Tyree's letter, noting that he was glad to see his good friend take a bold stand for his faith.

"You know you're not by yourself on this team," Torbor said. "You need the Lord and you need your Christian brothers. David is somebody who has been through the tough times and lived his faith, and that's encouraging."

During the 2007 season, Tyree was boosted by his relationship with "spiritual mom" Kim Daniels, whose son Michael Jennings also played for the Giants. The co-author of *More Than Just the Catch*, Daniels and husband, Ardell, prayed with Tyree the night before Super Bowl XLII.

"She prophesied that God was going to quicken my feet," Tyree told *TPE*. "She said that God was going to give me the big play."

Tyree, who only had four receptions all season, none of which resulted in touchdowns, caught a 5-yard touchdown reception from Manning that put the Giants ahead 10-7 in the fourth quarter.

"I thought [the big play] was the touchdown, but it would be greater than that," Tyree told *TPE*.

But there was a time in Tyree's life, before "the catch" and the ensuing fame, when he was out of

control and his football career was in jeopardy.

Tyree, a sixth-round Giants draft choice in 2003, distinguished himself as one of the best special teams newcomers, winning the NFL's Special Teams Rookie of the Year.

Tyree attended Bible studies hosted by then-linebacker Michael Barrow during his rookie year, but his actions didn't match his claim to faith. Tyree told *USA Today* he would typically drink beer beforehand, then come home after reading Scriptures and smoke marijuana.

On March 2, 2004, Tyree's fast-lane lifestyle caught up with him as he was arrested with half a pound of marijuana in his car and charged with possession.

"It was a devastating blow," Tyree, 28, told *NFL.com*. "Seeing your name come up on the ESPN ticker for something off-field related that is so negative and damaging to your character is something no player wants to experience."

Concerned his career was in jeopardy after he was jailed, Tyree prayed for another chance. He told *TPE* that on March 14, 2004 — 12 days after his arrest — he received Christ as his Savior and his life "has never been the same."

Tyree told Baptist Press it was "truly God's grace" that allowed him to play in Super Bowl XLII.

"He used my trouble to allow me to find salvation in Him and to live a fulfilled life," said Tyree, who was mentored by former Giants and current Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner along with his local pastor in New Jersey and his wife, Leilah.

Tyree, who won Pro Bowl honors as a special teams player in the 2005 season, relied on his faith off the field last season after his mother, Thelma Tyree, died Dec. 15, 2007, at age 59 of a heart attack. Tyree missed two games as he mourned his mother.

Thelma became a born-again Christian shortly after her son's conversion.

"When I got saved, it sparked kind of a movement," Tyree said. "My sister got saved, and my mom started returning to her faith. But when she moved down to Florida, where she passed away, that is when she got the growth and maturity."

Last March, Leilah gave birth to twin girls, adding to the Tyree family's two boys.

The MVP of Super Bowl XLII, Manning said he values Tyree's example as a husband, father and teammate.

"He automatically stands up as a spiritual leader on the team," said Manning in the foreword of *More Than Just the Catch*. "He leads prayer in the locker room and never hesitates to reach out to a player in need. David is a hard worker and always does what he is supposed to do."

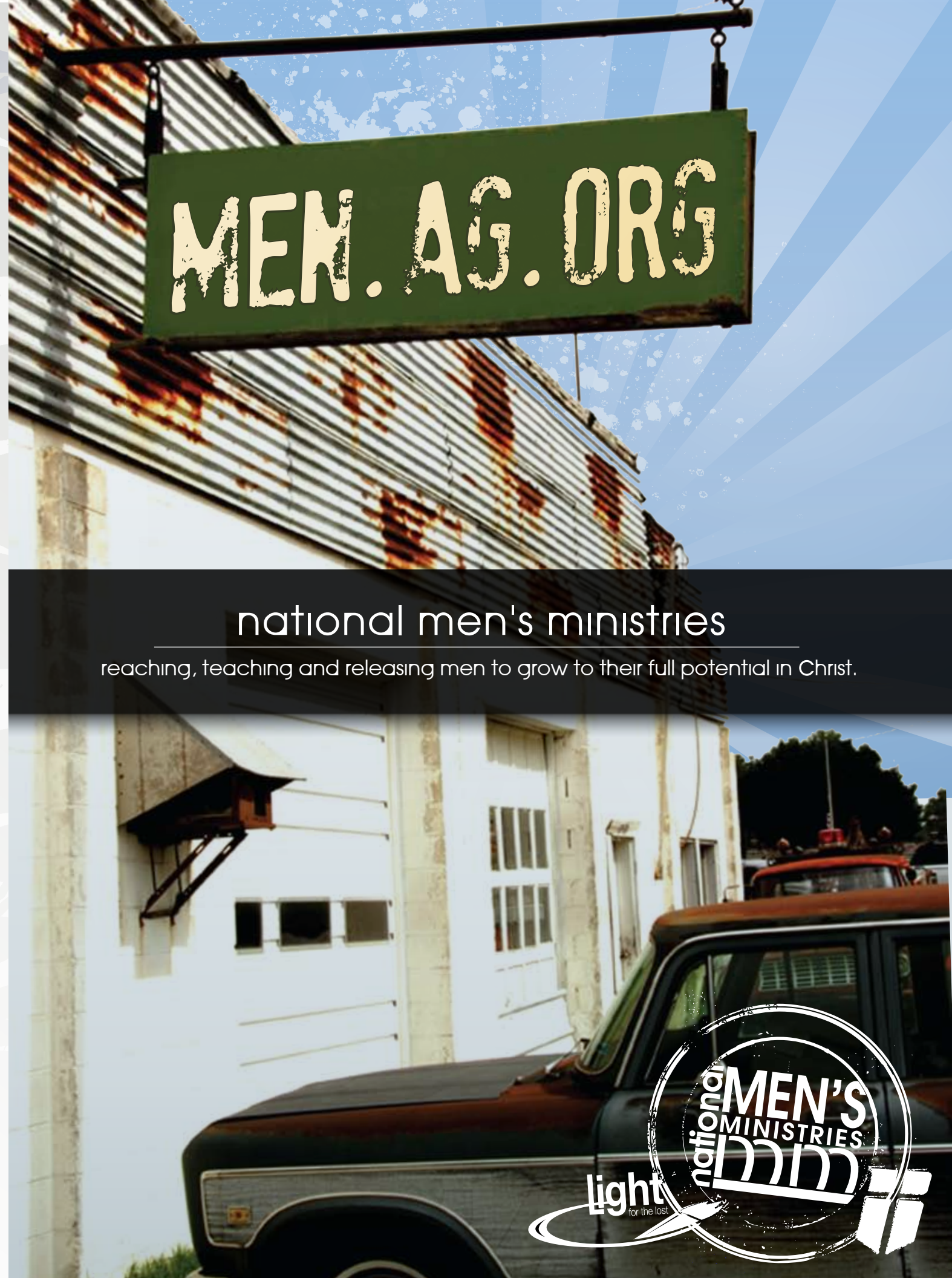
"He is one of the guys on the team who is accountable to make plays," Manning added. "When you come in contact with David, you can easily sense the presence of God in his life. He not only talks the talk, but he also walks the walk. I am so honored to have known him as a fellow Christian and a teammate."

Tyree said the biggest thing that has happened since his Super Bowl heroics was the platform God has given him to be a positive role model.

"Few can deny that something supernatural happened at Super Bowl XLII," Tyree said in his book. "It was more than a Super Bowl — it was a Supernatural Bowl. It was a double blessing — not only did I get to participate in it, but [also] now I get to tell everyone about it. I've gone from the Giants player no one recognized to a guy who can't have a quiet, anonymous dinner at a restaurant anymore. That's a good thing, if I can share what God has done through me." **tpe**

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