



Passing the Torch
Genesis 23-24; Deuteronomy
Week 13 of 14

On January 12, 2002, the [Tampa Bay Buccaneers] had suffered a crushing 31-9 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles in the playoffs. Two days later, [head coach Tony] Dungy was fired. He was now the *former* head coach of an NFL team.

"At that time in my life, it was hard to remember God's promise from Romans 8:28," Dungy says, "that all things work together for good to those who love Him. But I also tried to remember the promise in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9—that despite all of our troubles, God will never abandon us. What we often see as defeat is frequently the stage being set for a comeback."

Dungy and his three siblings were raised in a Christian home. His paternal grandfather was a minister. His mother, who taught Sunday school at their Baptist church in Detroit, made sure the family was grounded in biblical faith.

"I've been very fortunate to have a godly heritage from both sides of my family," Dungy says. "I was raised to understand that I should model the integrity of my family, and I learned the importance of making Jesus Christ the Lord of my life, but that truly wouldn't hit home with me until I was in Pittsburgh."

Dungy's most humbling professional moment came in 1989 when he was the defensive coordinator for the Steelers. After the team's fourth consecutive season out of the playoffs, management wanted head coach Chuck Noll to make changes to his staff... Assistants were fired and demoted. Dungy, who at 33 was the youngest defensive coordinator in the NFL at the time and the only African American in that position, was asked to take a demotion to secondary coach. He resigned instead.

Dungy was not without a job for long. After a two-year stint as a secondary coach with the Kansas City Chiefs, he became the defensive coordinator for the Minnesota Vikings in 1992 and, finally, Tampa Bay's head coach in 1996. There, he led the Bucs to the kind of success they had never experienced—four playoff appearances in six seasons and a 54-42 record. Before Dungy, the Bucs had endured 13 straight losing seasons.

The fiercest storm in Tampa, of course, was Dungy's fateful firing. "I will admit that when I was let go at Tampa Bay I thought it was over," he says. "I thought God was going to start leading me into something like a prison ministry or maybe inner-city programs."



northeast daily reading

April 3, 2011



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But he soon discovered football was still in God's plans for him. In 2002, Dungy took over as coach of the Indianapolis Colts. Then, in late 2005, as the Colts charged toward the postseason, Dungy and his family experienced every parent's worst nightmare when their oldest son, James, 18, took his own life in a Tampa apartment. He left no suicide note.

Although the reasons for his son's suicide remain unknown, Dungy says that the experience... only reinforces his belief that life has its peaks and valleys. But God is there—always. "I have received so many calls, letters, and e-mails after James's death that let me know that God really does have plans, even in the midst of great pain," he says.

On February 4, 2007, Dungy celebrated what had eluded him for so many years before, as his Colts defeated the Chicago Bears (led by his friend Lovie Smith) in Super Bowl XLI. Dungy became the first African American coach to win the legendary NFL championship match, and probably one of the game's most humble and gentle champions. Winning a Super Bowl and losing a child are on opposite extremes of the emotional scale. But Dungy thinks both events have had a positive effect on his life.

"Both of these events have given me the opportunity to grow in my faith," he says. "I have been touched by so many people who have reached out to me to express their own experiences, their triumphs as well as their tragedies. And because of my experiences, I have been able to help them. I can tell them in no uncertain terms that despite these ups and downs, God is with us. God is for us. He won't ever abandon us." [Michael W. Michelsen Jr., "Gentle Warrior," Today's Christian (September/October 2007

This week's Daily Bible Reading will challenge us to promote a godly heritage within our homes.

- DAY ONE – Genesis 23-24
- DAY TWO – Deuteronomy 6:1-9
- DAY THREE – Psalm 78:1-8
- DAY FOUR – Ephesians 5:22-6:4
- DAY FIVE – Hebrew 12:5-11

Memory Verse:

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children."
(Deuteronomy 6:6-7a)



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