

"Whether breaking tackles, dancing with the stars, or building his businesses, Emmitt has always striven to be excellent in all he does each day. Readers of this book will learn just what it takes to be a champion in every aspect of life, including the all-important areas of faith and family."

BISHOP T. D. JAKES

Senior pastor of The Potter's House of Dallas and CEO of TDJ Enterprises

"When Emmitt came to the Cowboys, he told his teammates that when he retired, he would be the NFL's all-time leading rusher. I watched him pursue his dream with relentless determination, overcoming adversity on several occasions and never once wavering from his goal. If anybody is qualified to write a book about daring to dream, it is my teammate and my friend Emmitt Smith."

DARYL JOHNSTON

Former Cowboys fullback and commentator on NFL on Fox

"I may have helped Emmitt Smith become a great ballroom dancer, but he taught me about living like a champion in all aspects of life, respecting yourself and others, and always reaching higher to make the most of your talents while using them to benefit those around you. This book is a great gift to us all, and so is Emmitt Smith."

CHERYL BURKE

Champion of Dancing with the Stars

GARGE ON FIND YOUR PURPOSE—PURSUE YOUR DREAM EMMITT SMITH

Hall of Fame Running Back and Dancing with the Stars Champion



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Game On: Find Your Purpose—Pursue Your Dream

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Smith, Emmitt, date.

Game on : find your purpose—pursue your dream / Emmitt Smith.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4143-4981-7 (hc)

1. Success—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Self-actualization (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Dreams—Religious aspects—Christianity. 4. Smith, Emmitt, date—

Religion. I. Title. BV4598.3.S65 2011

248.4—dc23 2011024186

Printed in the United States of America

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17 16 15 14 13 12 11
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I dedicate this book to my wife, Pat, and my children, E.J., Jasmin, Rheagen, Skylar, and Elijah, for inspiring and supporting me in whatever I do. I love you, and I'm always there for you!

I also dedicate this book to my parents, Mary and Emmit Smith Jr.

They built the foundation on which I stand today, and whatever I accomplish in life is the result of their abiding love and wise guidance.

To my brothers, Erik and Emory, and my sisters, Marsha and Connie—thank you, too, for your love and support over the years. Also to my late brother, Emil—you may be gone, but you're not forgotten.

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WELCOME TO GAME ON

I've written this book to share with you the many lessons I've learned as well as the mistakes I've made in my life and my career. I hope what I have to say will help you pursue and achieve your dreams in whatever game you play.

I am often asked to speak to students, corporate leaders, and organizations because of my successful journey from a Pensacola public housing development to the Pro Football Hall of Fame—and there was a little televised dancing championship somewhere in there too. I enjoy telling my story, even as I am still writing its latest chapters in pursuit of opportunities in business, sports, and entertainment.

What I hope you'll remember as you read is that I didn't begin life as a Hall of Fame running back or a television celebrity. There were many who doubted I would ever make it in the National Football League (NFL). You will have your doubters too. When they come around, tell them what I told mine:

Game on!

I have always been determined to achieve my dreams no matter

what anyone else might say or think. I was willing to do whatever it took to become the person I needed to be so I could claim the goals I'd set for myself. You can do the same.

Like me, you won't do it alone. My faith, my family, and my friends have made a huge difference in my life. I stood on the shoulders of many wonderful and helpful people when I accepted my Hall of Fame award. They believed in me because they saw I believed in myself and was committed to being a champion.

Where you start doesn't matter. It's where you finish that counts. And how you end up in this life depends on what you do every day to accomplish your goals. Each day is a step toward building a legacy, a life of meaning and fulfillment. I didn't break the NFL rushing record by running 18,355 yards in one game. I did it by setting the goal to gain at least four yards on every carry of every NFL game.

And I didn't achieve every goal I set for myself—at least on the first try. Sometimes I fell short. You will too. But sometimes I exceeded my goal—or I kept trying until I achieved it.

You will do that too.

If you put your heart into it as well as your mind and body, I believe you will have a championship-caliber life. This book offers a practical, step-by-step plan based on my personal experience. Here's a quick summary of what it takes:

- Step 1. Envision what you want, and then dream of the best possible life.
- *Step 2.* Turn your dreams into goals, and pursue your highest possible purpose as defined by God's gifts within you.

- *Step 3.* Build a strong moral character based on your own values and principles.
- Step 4. Pursue your dreams and highest purpose with unrelenting commitment and unfailing consistency.
- *Step 5.* Be courageous even when faced with the worst of your fears and the greatest of challenges.
- *Step 6*. Seize and create opportunities that match up with your long-term goals and principles.
- Step 7. Build a championship team of supporters, role models, and mentors.
- Step 8. Maintain a winning attitude even during setbacks and defeats.
- *Step 9.* Make wise decisions, and reduce risk to keep yourself on track.
- *Step 10.* Return God's favor with your heart open to him and your hand open to your fellow human beings.

This plan does not offer a magic pill or a secret formula. I don't make any claims that these are original concepts. Most are taught in the Bible and in the writings of both ancient and modern philosophers. They have been tested over time and in the lives of many, and they have certainly made a difference in my own life.

But simply reading the steps won't result in a life-changing transformation. The rewards you reap will be directly related to the effort you make in following these steps and making them a part of your life.

But don't worry. You can do it. I know you can.

Game on!

CHAPTER 1 CLAIM YOUR DREAMS

If there were prophets among you,

I, the LORD, would reveal myself in visions.

I would speak to them in dreams.

NUMBERS 12:6, NLT

Before I'd ever scored a touchdown for the University of Florida Gators or the Dallas Cowboys, I crossed the goal line untouched hundreds and hundreds of times. I did it as a small boy in the park across the street from my grandmother's house in Pensacola, Florida. My field of dreams was a little park called Malaga Square—though back then I never knew those raggedy two acres even had a name. It was just a sparse patch of ground, but it gave a kid from the housing projects room to run.

And run I did.

My cousins usually played football with me there, but often I'd be the first on the field. While waiting for the others to show up, I'd throw the football into the air and let my imagination run as far as it would take me: There's the kickoff. The football is in the air, and Emmitt Smith catches it at the five-yard line. He runs to the left sideline and makes it to the twenty, but here comes a tackler. He spins away, and now Emmitt Smith turns into Jim Brown bulling through another pair of tacklers. A cut to his right, and he's Tony Dorsett sprinting to the far sideline. He hurdles a defender, and now he's Walter Payton, weaving through the defense and sprinting toward the goal line. He's at the thirty, the twenty, the ten . . . Emmitt Smith scores a touchdown!

The record book says that in my NFL career, I ran for 164 touchdowns and 18,355 yards, surpassing Walter Payton's all-time leading rushing record of 16,726 yards. I'm here to tell you I ran for a lot more touchdowns and a lot more yards at old Malaga Square. As I sprinted down the field of my boyhood dreams, I'd transform into each of my football heroes one after the other, imitating each player's signature moves.

I could hear the roar of the crowd with every cut back, every spin, and every fresh burst of speed. My creative mind was racing even faster than my legs. I was a boy at play, but something far more important and lasting was taking place in that park.

A child was running after his dreams on the power of his imagination.

In a sense, I've never stopped running.

And I've never stopped dreaming.

A CHAMPIONSHIP-LEVEL DREAMER

I believe there are great things in store for my life and yours, too. Greatness is not reserved for VIPs. Happiness and fulfillment are not limited commodities. The question is, are you willing to do whatever it takes to become the person you need to be, to achieve the life you want to live?

If you are happy right where you are, that's fine. But if you feel that God has more in store for you, then I encourage you to step into your workout gear and read on. The first step in this process is to trust in your vision for that better life and dare to dream big.

The Bible says in Numbers 12:6,

If there were prophets among you,

I, the LORD, would reveal myself in visions.

I would speak to them in dreams. (NLT)

Wiser men than I have commented over the centuries about the awesome power of our visions, our dreams, and the human imagination. Poets, philosophers, writers, great military and political leaders, and probably even a rap star or two have noted that our visions and dreams are the pathways and portals to a better life. That has certainly been true for me, and it can be true for you, too.

We are all born naked into this world, but each of us is fully clothed in potential. Every one of us possesses unique gifts that we must embrace and develop to the fullest. But we can't do that if we don't have a vision. We can't do that if we're afraid to dream.

I'm not referring to idle daydreams or grandiose, self-centered imaginings. I'm talking about the way you visualize or picture the life you yearn for, the life that God is calling you to. Having vision means picturing in your mind what it will be like and how you will achieve it and build upon it. Dreaming means "rehearsing" what

you see, playing it over and over in your mind until it becomes as real to you as your life right now.

The two go together. Vision gets the dreams started. Dreaming employs your God-given imagination to reinforce the vision. Both are part of something I believe is absolutely necessary to building the life of a champion, a winner, a person of high character who is consistently at the top of whatever game he or she is in.

I was a championship-level dreamer as a boy. When we were riding in our parents' car through the nicer neighborhoods of Pensacola, my sister and brothers and I would spot our favorite big homes and claim them:

"That brick one's mine!"

"The house with the big front porch is mine!"

Other times we'd sit on the curb in our own neighborhood and claim the nicest cars passing by.

"Oh, that Mustang is mine!"

"That Cadillac is mine!"

What can I say? We were just crazy kids. But even though we came from a low-income family, we dared to dream that anything was possible for us, anything was within our reach if we were willing to work for it and keep reaching for it.

Winning isn't something that just happens to you on the field when the whistle blows or the crowd roars. Winning is something that is built physically and mentally every day that you train and every night that you dream. The victories we achieve, then, are the result of the vision that fuels our commitment to making our dreams a reality.

THE POWER OF DREAMS

As children in a middle- to low-income family, my brothers and sister and I had fewer advantages than most. So my journey offers good evidence that when you dare to claim your dreams and always strive to do your best, nothing can hold you back.

Your dream may not be anything like mine. You may have no interest at all in playing sports or developing a business. Your idea of a "better life" may involve making more money so you can help your family . . . or simplifying your lifestyle so you can live on *less* money and have more free time. You may have an inner yearning to paint or to travel the world or to establish an AIDS clinic in Africa or to retire to the mountains.

Your dreams will vary with your interests, your desires, your stage of life, and your receptiveness to God's leading in your life. But until you dare to claim these dreams—to acknowledge them to yourself and to others and to rehearse them in your mind and heart—you will never get started. Your dreams provide the energy you need to move forward and keep striving to do and be your best.

My life, like yours, did not come with any guarantees of success. At five feet nine inches tall, I was not exactly the prototype for the modern running back. Many scouts thought I was too small and too slow to play beyond high school. The doubters were proven wrong because they could not measure the reach of my imagination or the size of my heart. My ability to dream, to develop vision for my life and then make it happen through commitment and consistent effort, sent me soaring to heights beyond anyone's expectations—except my own.

After playing football in high school and then in three recordbreaking seasons at the University of Florida, I entered the draft after my junior year and was selected by the Dallas Cowboys. I went on to thrive for fifteen years in the NFL, won a few Super Bowls, broke a few records, and in August of 2010, I am honored to say, I was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Reporters and sports broadcasters who covered the induction ceremony again noted my lack of size and speed, but one thing they gave me credit for was having great vision on the field. Many showed game films of me running and stopping or cutting just as two defenders descended on me, causing them either to miss me altogether or to run into each other as I charged on toward the goal line. I loved it when they hit each other instead of me!

I do have exceptional peripheral vision, but my inner vision is even better—and over the long haul that's what really has made the difference in my life. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). Your inner vision, your ability to picture a better life for yourself and to pursue it, can save your life—and elevate it too.

As a boy and even later, I would first "see" myself achieving something—like playing college and professional football or having a career in the construction industry—and then my vision would drive my dreams. In my dreams, I would see myself fulfilling that vision over and over until I believed in my heart and soul that I could make my dreams happen in reality.

That ability to "see" helped me on the football field, too. I had a sort of inner big screen that allowed me to "see" changes in coverage. I could usually look at a defense and sense where the hole would be, regardless of where the play was called. Admittedly, this process became more challenging in the NFL, where defenses are far more sophisticated than in high school and college. In high school I could often point my fullback to where I felt a hole would be just prior to the snap. Every now and then, just to test this inner vision, I'd run at the hole I'd seen in my mind's eye with my real eyes shut. (Kids, don't try this at home!)

I've heard many other athletes describe similar experiences in which they envision themselves reacting to a situation before it actually happens. Quarterbacks, running backs, and receivers often talk about seeing a play unfold in their minds split seconds before it happens on the field. Some of this comes with the repetitive training that athletes go through. We run plays over and over and over again in practice, and then we watch them on film. Those plays keep running in our minds even after we go home. I know at night my mind would keep running the Cowboys' plays over and over until they became embedded in my subconscious and my responses on the field became instinctive.

Still, some of the things that have shown up on my mind's inner big screen are difficult to explain. Even scientists admit that our understanding of the human brain and its workings is still very limited. I do believe that most of us, if not all of us, have a degree of intuition, a so-called sixth sense—the ability to see in our mind's eye beyond what our own eyes tell us. I experienced that sort of vision in my athletic career, and I've also had it in my business life, when I would look at a vacant lot and "see" a commercial building on it with thriving stores and businesses.

I've worked at developing that sixth sense. It's a great asset,

a gift of God, but only if you trust and then act on it. Creating a vision for your life is an essential first step, but your dreams will live only in your imagination unless you pursue them purposefully and relentlessly.

NOT JUST ANY DREAM

Having a vision for something better and dreaming of fulfilling that vision are important keys to creating the life God wants for you. Some people wander in the darkness. My dreams gave me a lighted path. Holding a vision of a better life in mind also served to motivate me because I saw that there were greater possibilities awaiting me. When you have a vision of yourself doing great things, that vision excites you and, in the process, prepares you for greatness.

Vision also keeps you hungry. When I won one rushing title, I was happy but not fully satisfied, because I saw more for myself. I wanted to win as many rushing titles as possible because I had noticed that my rushing titles and Super Bowl victories tended to coincide. I stayed hungry because I wanted to help Dallas win more Super Bowls.

So welcome your visions of a better life, dare to dream of what your heart deeply desires, and then pursue those dreams with all your heart, mind, body, and soul.

Know that whatever you lack, God will provide—given, of course, that you've opened your heart to what God wants for your life.

That's important, because it's a mistake to assume God will automatically support *anything* you happen to want or desire or

picture for yourself. After all, not all dreams are from God. The people who brought my ancestors as slaves to America had a vision for all the money they could make with that particular "business venture." I don't believe God supported that. So if you want a truly winning life—something more than just "making it" in the world—it's always important to check your dreams and desires against God's standards of right and wrong.

At the same time, I don't believe you actually need a specific vision from the Lord—like a voice in a dream or handwriting on the wall—in order to claim your dreams and go for them. Many of our dreams, especially when we're children, are simply part of the package God made when he put us on earth. They grow out of our interests and talents and yearnings and imaginations, combined with the circumstances we find ourselves in. They don't have to involve a direct revelation to be from God.

That was true for me. I'm not a psychic. I have no superpowers. I was just a kid who had faith in my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and in the power of the dreams he gave me. But those dreams were what propelled me toward the person I needed to become, the life I believe God had in mind for me.

Whatever your circumstances are right now, no matter how hard you have it, no matter how many challenges you face, you can move to a better life if you have a vision for where you want to go. When your vision is planted inside you by God, he will help you do whatever it takes to make it a reality.

I believe in the power of dreams because I've had several incredible incidents in my life in which my wildest dreams became wonderful realities. Let me give you a couple of examples.

VISION NUMBER ONE

I was seven years old, sprawled on the floor in our Pensacola living room and watching a Sunday afternoon football game on television with some relatives and my father, Emmit Jr. (He spells his name with one *t* instead of two.) The Dallas Cowboys were one of the teams playing. I liked their uniforms. I liked the way they played the game. At one point about halfway through it, I turned to my father and said, "Pop, one day I'm going to play professional football, and I'm going to play for the Dallas Cowboys."

That bold statement resulted from a vision that fueled a dream. I couldn't hold a football in one hand at that point, but I was already getting a mental picture of what I wanted to do in my life. I wasn't aware at the time that my father had been a very good football player, so where did the vision come from? Was it merely my desire—or was it my desire coupled with God's plan for my life? I can't say for sure, but I do believe God has unique ways of revealing and fulfilling his plans for us. My professional football career serves as a prime example of that.

VISION NUMBER TWO

Let's move ahead to my senior season in high school. I was named the Gatorade Player of the Year, and part of the prize included two tickets for the Super Bowl, which would be played that year at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. As a Christmas present, I invited Johnny Nichols, the quarterback on our team and my best friend, to go with me to the biggest game of the year.

Think about all that had to happen to put my best friend and me—two kids from the wrong side of the tracks in Pensacola, Florida—side by side in the crowd at the Super Bowl. If God's hand wasn't hard at work to pull that off, well, I don't know what to tell you. Nor can I tell you what made me say this to Johnny during the game: "You know what? One day I want to play in a Super Bowl in this stadium."

At that point there were a lot of people who didn't think I had the slightest chance of becoming a starter at college or even playing at the Division I level. How could I be so bold as to say out loud to a good friend—one with a very good memory—that one day I'd be an NFL player in a Super Bowl at the Rose Bowl? That's crazy. And Johnny may have said exactly that when the words slipped out of my mouth.

DREAM MACHINE

I've come to realize that the greatest gift God has given me, besides his love and the love of my family, is this gift of vision—the ability to see beyond where I am to where I want to be. I've often talked about that in news articles and interviews—mostly as it pertains to football. Rarely have I shared with anyone the other dreams that began when I was playing in that Pensacola park across the street from my grandmother's house.

When we were still in the early years of grade school and not playing football, baseball, or basketball, my brothers and friends and I would sit on the bare, dusty ground of the park with Popsicle sticks in our hands. Using the dirt as our drawing board, we'd map out entire neighborhoods. This was way before iPads—not that our families could have afforded them anyway. So we were left to our imaginations and wooden Popsicle sticks to dig out roads for our Matchbox cars.

I wasn't just interested in the cars, though. I always drew an outline of the home I wanted to have one day. My dream homes were very different from the segregated apartment buildings we lived in. They were big *Leave It to Beaver* houses with generous yards and white picket fences—like the places we saw when we ventured across the tracks to the more affluent areas of Pensacola.

Those better, safer neighborhoods weren't really that far away, but they almost seemed like they were from another universe. Yet I dared to dream I could live in one someday, unlikely as it seemed. Maybe I could even design good places for other people to live. That was the beginning of yet another dream, one that I'm still working on as I build my construction and real-estate businesses.

I encourage you to dream that way too, to embrace even your unlikely visions—and not just for your own sake, but for the sake of others as well.

TRICKLE-DOWN DREAMS

My pastor and spiritual guide, Bishop T. D. Jakes, has said that if you and I allow our dreams to die, everyone suffers. It's not just the individual who loses out. Just think of the "trickle down" benefits we've all received thanks to great teachers who've pursued their dreams, not to mention the doctors, nurses, firefighters, police

officers, scientists, coaches, and religious and community leaders who have contributed to the betterment of our lives.

When you don't fulfill your highest potential, everyone who might have benefited from your gifts loses too. The Wright brothers struggled for years to develop their first successful flying machine. If they'd given up, the whole world might have lost out. The vision, hard work, and persistence of the Wrights and other

aviation pioneers led to the creation of entire industries that today provide millions of jobs and access to places around the world. We have all benefited from dreamers who became doers, those who didn't let failures and setbacks deter them.

If I had not followed first my dream to be a professional

Winning isn't something that just happens to you on the field when the whistle blows or the crowd roars. Winning is something that is built physically and mentally every day that you train and every night that you dream.

athlete and then to be a real-estate developer and builder, I might never have been able to create a charitable foundation with my wife, Pat, that has provided college scholarships and other assistance to scores of young people. In sports I earned the capital to invest in my own business, and in business I will continue to earn the respect of the business community while earning a living and helping our charitable efforts. But all of that started as a dream that almost seemed impossible—except to me.

My parents and my brothers and sisters operated a store selling my football memorabilia in Pensacola for several years, adding to the family income. Many sportswear vendors benefited from my football career too. Although my real-estate development and construction businesses are just being established, one day I hope to provide jobs and financial security for many who work for me and for others who work at the hotels, retail stores, and other facilities we develop.

The first big development project my real-estate company took on was a \$190 million hotel and retail site on a prominent street corner in New York City's famed Harlem neighborhood. This project appealed to me because Harlem has historically been an African American neighborhood, and the people who live there have not had access to the same kinds of stores and restaurants that other New Yorkers enjoy. We also negotiated with the labor unions so that local residents would have priority for at least half the construction jobs. The project will create many jobs both during the construction phase and long after the building is done.

As I write this, we are still in the early stages of the Harlem project, but my goal is to build the hotel atop a retail area that will serve the unmet needs of residents. I'd like to have a nice grocery store in the building, for example. It would be a privilege for me, as someone who grew up in a small southern town, to bring something of value to a legendary big-city neighborhood like Harlem.

That thought really hit home one day during the planning stages of our Harlem project. My partners and I met for lunch at Sylvia's, Harlem's landmark soul-food restaurant. When we walked in, several Sylvia's regulars looked up and said, "Welcome, neighbor!" They understood that if I made my business dream become a reality, it would have a positive impact on their community. Their

recognition of that and their warm welcome made me all the more determined to bring something of value to their community.

When you dare to dream and then pursue your dreams, you, too, can make an impact far beyond what you might imagine. If you can embrace that thought, you can use it for motivation to take your personal vision and make it a reality.

DREAM BIG FOR A BETTER LIFE

The great thing about believing in the power of your dreams and pursuing them is that even if your income is limited and your circumstances problematic, you can dream as big as the richest man on earth. I grew up in a large and supportive family, which is a major advantage in many ways, but my parents had to work very hard to keep us all fed and clothed. Our Pensacola wasn't the one you see on the tourism brochures. We had no views of the white, sandy beaches or the Gulf of Mexico from the windows of our rented apartment at 138 Attucks Court.

Ours wasn't the worst housing project in town, though we did have rats like I've never seen since. Some of them were as big as cats. And there were even larger predators prowling around if you took the wrong path or knocked on the wrong door. Shootings, stabbings, drug dealers, drunks, and prostitutes were part of our daily environment.

One day when I was about eleven, my friend Robert and I were on our way to football practice. While we walked down the street, a car pulled up alongside us. There was a white man behind the wheel. I thought he was lost and looking for directions, so

when he gestured to me to come over, I went. Robert followed a little behind me. (Kids, don't be naive like me—stay away from strangers!)

"Kid, can you shoot me up?" the man said.

I had no idea what that meant.

"What?" I said.

He held up a hypodermic needle and gave me a crazy look. "Shoot me up?"

Robert showed me some real speed that day. He was a block ahead of me before I even turned to run, but I caught up pretty fast. I ran from that man and the wasted life he represented, but I'm sad to say there were others in the neighborhood who followed his dead-end path. Some of our friends fell into the traps of drugs, alcohol, crime, and violence. We weren't better than them in any way. Most of them were good people with their own gifts and talents, and I'm deeply saddened that they were unable to break free from their circumstances.

Looking back on my childhood, I realize how fortunate my sister (Marsha), my brothers (Erik and Emory), and I were. Sure, we lived in the projects and ate government-surplus cheese and powdered milk, but so did most of the kids we knew. And we were blessed with one true luxury—two loving, hardworking, and responsible parents and two whole sets of grandparents who served as our backup mothers and fathers.

I can hardly express to you what a great blessing it was to be surrounded with all that love and support. Our parents and grandparents instilled in us a strong faith and the sense that we could do anything we wanted with our lives if we were willing to do the work required. They gave us permission to dream and supported our efforts, and that made a huge difference.

Even with that advantage, I am still living proof that where you are and what you have does not have to determine who you are or where you are going. And by the way, that's true of people without intact and supportive homes too. I know plenty of people from divorced families who have managed to find other guides and encouragers and to rise above those circumstances.

My point is that what lies around you does not have to live within you. How you begin life is not nearly as important as how you end up. You can rise above whatever tries to hold you down as long as you stay focused on your dreams.

RISING ABOVE

In my first run in my first NFL game, I was tackled after gaining just one yard. It was not the beginning I had in mind. Fifteen years later, I retired with the most career rushing yards in the history of the game, three Super Bowl rings, four NFL rushing titles, nine Pro Bowl selections, a Super Bowl Most Valuable Player (MVP) award, and an NFL MVP award. I'd say that's a pretty decent way to end a career, wouldn't you?

You have to agree that the way I began my NFL career had little impact on how I finished. What's true for me can be true for you. Maybe you grew up on the wrong side of the tracks too. Maybe you are in a tough position right now. You may not be happy with where life has taken you so far. You may have suffered in the housing crisis, lost a job, failed in a relationship, or received a

depressing diagnosis. Hard times may have piled up at your door, and you may be discouraged in your situation. Yet I'm here to tell you that if you can look up, you can get up.

The recession of 2006–2009 slowed my efforts to build a commercial real-estate and construction business, but I believe I'll eventually achieve my goals in this area as well. I walk in confidence, knowing I have the same burning in my heart to succeed in this arena that I had on the football field. If this isn't God's plan for my life, I trust he'll let me know. In the meantime, I'm whole-heartedly committed to living out this vision and rising above the setbacks I've encountered.

Given my belief in God and in the power of my dreams, you probably won't be surprised to learn that one of my favorite Bible stories is the one about Joseph, the most favored son of Jacob—the one they called "the dreamer."

Yes, this is *the* Joseph, the boy who had incredible dreams. His doting father gave Joseph a beautiful coat of many colors—a dream coat—that incited the jealousy and wrath of his half brothers. When Jacob interpreted one of these dreams to mean that the family would one day bow before Joseph, the other brothers threw Joseph into a pit. Later they sold him to traders who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt, telling their father he'd been killed by wild beasts. They even displayed his torn and bloodied dream coat as evidence.

Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the palace guard. When Joseph spurned the advances of Potiphar's wife, she claimed that Joseph had attacked her. He was thrown into prison, but even there God showed him favor, and Joseph was put in charge of the other prisoners. When two prisoners had dreams, Joseph

interpreted them and the interpretations came true. Word that Joseph had the ability to interpret dreams eventually reached the pharaoh. The pharaoh sent for Joseph, whose dream interpretations helped save Egypt from a famine. Joseph became a respected leader in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. And later, when his famine-stricken family came looking for food, Joseph not only forgave his brothers and was reunited with his loving father, but he was also able to keep his entire family and the people of Egypt from starving. By the end, it was clear that Joseph's dreams had been prophecies sent to him by God.

That's my *Cliff's Notes* version of Joseph's story, which is not only in the Bible (Genesis), but has been retold many times in plays, movies, and song. Once again, it is not where you start but where you finish that counts. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy, yet because of God's favor—and the power of his dreams—he rose to a position of wealth and power and, to his credit, he forgave his brothers and saved them from the famine.

I love this story because it confirms how God can use dreams to lift us out of our circumstances, to help us rise above whatever threatens to hold us back. I was never bold enough to think that my dreams were prophecies sent from God, but I did come to believe that even my wildest dreams might have been planted in my imagination and my heart by God's hand. He wanted me to envision a better life so I would develop the talents he had given me and put them to their highest use.

You and I have no control over where we begin our lives, but we do have the power to determine where we end up. How do you exercise that power? It takes focus, commitment, discipline, and thoughtful decision making. Our success on this earth—the happiness we achieve, the fulfillment we find, the relationships we build—all are the result of the choices we make every minute and every hour and every day in our lives.

You can choose to be a victim. You can decide that you've had enough, that life is unfair and just too hard. You can hit the bottle, do drugs, and embrace despair. Those options are all available. Or you can envision a better life and pursue it.

I encourage you to dare to dream and to act upon those dreams. We are all made in God's image. We are anointed. You would not be walking this earth if the Lord did not have a plan for you. The challenges God sends your way are in direct proportion to the blessings he has in store for you if you refuse to give up, if you strive to put your gifts to his highest purpose, and—this is important!—if you keep yourself open to his guidance along the way.

LIGHT FOR YOUR PATH

I spent most of my final months in high school talking about how great it would be to move to Gainesville, enroll at the University of Florida, and play football as a Gator. I was excited until the time came to actually walk out the door. Then my perspective changed. I swear I felt homesick before I'd stepped outside.

By that time we were living in a brick house my father had built right behind his parents' home, literally in their backyard. He'd wanted to be close to them because my grandmother, Erma Lee Smith, was partially paralyzed and in a wheelchair. I had often stayed with her and cared for her, so she and I were close. I walked

across the yard to say good-bye to her before driving to Gainesville five hours to the east.

On this day, my grandmother had prepared something special for me to take to college. Little did she know it would accompany me for the rest of my life.

I found her sitting in her chair. It was parked in its usual spot, next to a table and couch and in front of a window where she could watch us come and go from our house in the backyard.

"Get my Bible," she said.

I picked up her worn King James Bible, but before I could hand it to her she said, "Read Proverbs 3:5-6."

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." I read that passage out loud to her, and at that point I studied and memorized it. Then my grandmother said, "Always remember that verse." I thanked her, gave her a hug, and walked out to the driveway to leave.

It's a five-hour drive from Pensacola to Gainesville under normal conditions, but it seemed even longer that day. I was a typical eighteen-year-old guy going off to college. There were many things on my mind that day, and I'd have even more on my mind in the days that followed. And I have to admit that I wasn't in a spiritual frame of mind every minute of every day and night that I was away from my family. I am a much better Christian today than I was then, though I did belong to a Bible study group in college.

But no matter where I was spiritually, or physically, I always carried Proverbs 3:5-6 with me. I held on to my grandmother's

verse when I was homesick, hurt, or discouraged. Whenever I needed some comfort, it comforted me.

I didn't talk about it to anyone, but Proverbs 3:5-6 was like one of those night-lights you buy for your kids so that if they are scared or worried in the dark, they can look to that small glowing light for comfort and reassurance. I would even read it or recite it to myself before football games to calm and assure myself. It comforted me to think that I had a path, a destiny, and that even though I might not always understand why something happened or where it was taking me, God knew the where and the why.

That proverb stayed in my heart. It's in my heart right now, and it still comforts and inspires me. It tells me that not only do I have a path to walk, one that was set by God even before I entered this life, but I can trust God to show me how to follow that path.

Time and time again, I've found myself in situations where things were not proceeding as I'd hoped or planned, only to have God pull the curtain back and reveal that his way was so much better than any way I could have envisioned for myself. Even so, I encourage you to dare to dream. Dream big. Set your mind and heart and imagination free to envision your best possible future. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, understanding that when you don't know the way, when you're not even sure what to visualize or dream, he will show you which path to take. He may even reveal new dreams as you go along and grant you new vision as to what you can become.

And step-by-step, as you continue to walk, work, and trust, you'll move toward the fulfillment of your wildest dreams.

VISIONS FULFILLED

Do you remember those two visions I told you about—those moments in my early life when I could just *see* something that was going to happen in the future? Vision number one was that I would play pro football for the Dallas Cowboys. And vision number two was that I would play in a Super Bowl at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. What happened to those dreams?

Well, fast-forward to the 1990 NFL draft, which I entered only after a last-second decision to turn pro even though I had one more year of eligibility at the University of Florida. After setting so many records at Florida, I was projected to go in the top ten of the 1990 NFL draft. I thought I'd probably go either to Tampa Bay—because I was a Florida native who had played for the Gators and would help bring fans to the Buccaneers games—or to Seattle, which had two picks in the top ten and needed a running back. Even though I was a huge fan of the Cowboys, Dallas was not even on my radar because their first pick was number twenty-one and I felt sure I'd be chosen by then.

On draft day I gathered with friends and family at a friend's condo on Pensacola Beach. Usually I find the beach very relaxing, but not on this occasion. As the first few picks were announced, my name was not called, and I became frustrated and nervous over my decision to leave college before my senior year. I couldn't sit still as the draft progressed. I'd hoped to go in the top ten, so I was more than a little worried when that didn't happen.

Everyone else in the condo seemed to be having a good time. I felt like the party pooper. I was worried that some faraway team

would draft me and my parents would not be able to attend many games or, even worse, that I'd be selected by some team in a really cold part of the country. (I am not insulated for cold weather.)

My family and friends assured me that I'd be drafted eventually. They tried to keep my spirits up, but I was worried. Finally, during a break in the draft proceedings, I took a walk on the beach and said a little prayer: "God, it's all in your hands."

If God was running that NFL draft, he sure was making some interesting moves. The first two picks had been offensive players—first, University of Illinois quarterback Jeff George, and then a running back, Penn State's Blair Thomas. I wasn't surprised that Blair went before me because he was considered faster than me. I was glad for him.

Then the next four guys had been defensive players. Another offensive player had been chosen seventh—quarterback Andre Ware—and then eight of the next nine picks had been defensive players.

Meanwhile, I'd waited for the phone ring. It did once, around the time of the sixth pick, but it was just my brother Emory. Half of the teams in the NFL had made their picks and passed me over. It's not hard to be humble in a situation like that.

If there were any traces of cockiness left in me from my college days, they had all dried up and blown away by that point. I looked out the window, and the Gulf of Mexico was churning. So was my stomach. I had the thought that I'd better think about completing work for my degree at the University of Florida.

Then the phone rang again. The NFL draft was on its seventeenth pick. I had no idea which team owned that selection, so I was shocked when I answered the phone and my agent told me, "I've been talking to the Dallas Cowboys. Stand by."

I'd hardly hung up the phone when it rang again. It wasn't my agent this time. This caller was Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson.

"Emmitt, how would you like to wear a star on your helmet?"

The air went out of my lungs, but I managed to tell my new coach that I would love to wear the Cowboys' star. I could not express to him what that moment meant to me. Coach Johnson had no idea that I'd been dreaming of playing for Dallas since I was a little boy watching the Cowboys on our living-room floor. I could not express to him that he hadn't selected a running back who'd bring just athletic ability to the team. They had drafted someone who was bringing his heart and soul, his dreams and his aspirations.

Because of the unusual way things worked out for me with the Dallas Cowboys, I'm convinced that God had me in his plan. I'm not alone in thinking that my selection by my dream team was the result of a very remarkable series of events. Cowboys writer Mickey Spagnola reflected on this in a column that appeared just before I was selected for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

First, he noted that the Cowboys needed a running back from that 1990 draft because they'd previously traded Tony Dorsett and Herschel Walker. Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson first targeted Baylor University linebacker James Francis, but Cincinnati had taken him before the Cowboys could make the move to get him. Jimmy then tried to pry James from the Bengals, but they wouldn't make a deal.

Only at that point, according to Spagnola, did the Cowboys' coaching staff decide I was their man. But then they had to swap

their first-round pick with Pittsburgh and give them a third-round pick for the right to choose me as the seventeenth player taken. The fact that I ended up in Dallas after all that wheeling and dealing still makes me shake my head in wonder. The Cowboys had to go through all that to put me exactly where I'd dreamed of playing since the age of seven.

I was definitely plan B for the Cowboys in the 1990 NFL draft, but I have to think God was the ultimate player in that game. I can't pretend to understand how it all happened. But I walk in confidence that he will take me wherever he feels I need to go.

Now, hit the fast-forward button again. Six years after sharing my Super Bowl dream with my high-school buddy, I looked up into the stands from the sidelines and waved to him. It was 1993, and I was a Dallas Cowboys running back. We were playing the Buffalo Bills in Super Bowl XXVII, and we were playing at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. It was the Cowboys' first appearance in the Super Bowl in fourteen years!

I couldn't have written a better script for those two major events in my life. I have no doubt that a higher authority orchestrated them. But both of those major accomplishments began with little more than a dream. So when I tell you to believe in the power of the human imagination, it's because so many of my visions for my life have come true.

CLAIM AND COMMIT

If you aspire to do greater things, it's up to you to claim your dreams and go after them. You can't expect greatness to come driving by so you can ask it for a ride. You have to run out in the street and grab on.

While my rookie contract was being negotiated, I had a lot of time to reflect on what I wanted to accomplish as a player in the NFL. It wasn't about the money. It was about leaving a legacy within the game. I asked myself what mark I wanted to make. That was my vision. The NFL rushing record seemed like a logical way of accomplishing that goal, although not an easy one. After all, the current record, held by the great Walter Payton, was 16,726 yards! But I decided to claim that dream—to go for it. I even did the math to figure out exactly how many yards per game I'd have to average to make the dream a reality. The answer was 125 yards per game over a thirteen-year career in the NFL. I figured if I hit that number consistently, I'd be the league's leading rusher for each season and ultimately the all-time leading rusher.

I wasn't being arrogant. I was simply taking my dream seriously—claiming it and setting up step-by-step goals that would allow me, with God's help, to achieve what I had envisioned. (We'll look at that process in more detail in a later chapter.) Now, here's an interesting thing about having the courage to claim our dreams and commit to them. Once people see that you have a vision, that you dare to dream of fulfilling it, and that you are committed to achieving your dreams, they become believers too.

So I encourage you to claim greatness. Embrace your wildest dreams and commit yourself to achieving them. Don't swagger or boast or brag, but humbly set the bar as high as you dare and commit to being the best you can possibly be. When I pursued my dreams on the football field and performed at a high level,

the fans in Texas Stadium put up a sign that said "There Is No Limit to Emmitt." My teammates teased me relentlessly about that sign. Secretly, I loved what it said—not so much *about* me, but *to* other people.

That sign reflected exactly what I've been telling you: when you dare to dream and then go after your dreams with unstoppable determination, positive-minded people will line up to cheer you on. That's a lesson every man, woman, and child can benefit from. There is something highly contagious about a person who refuses to give up on a dream. How many books, movies, and stories have been created about those irrepressible dreamers? Thousands and thousands. We love those tales because the pursuit of a better life is ingrained in the human spirit.

WHEN DREAMS DON'T COME EASY

But what if dreams don't seem to come as naturally to you as they do to me? What if you don't have any grand visions? I can think of several possible reasons why that might be the case.

One may be, as I mentioned earlier, that you're simply satisfied with your life right now. There's nothing wrong with that, if you truly believe you're where you need to be. Watch out, though—because that may change. God-given visions for a new life and a new direction don't come only to little children.

It's also possible that you're just not recognizing the dreams you do have. Not everybody dreams of playing in the NFL or becoming a real-estate tycoon. Many people, for example, aspire simply to get a good job, have a happy marriage, and be good parents. All

are worthy dreams—and not always easy to achieve. But because they feel ordinary or normal, you may not recognize these aspirations as dreams or visions. In this case, claiming your dream might involve simply affirming what is important to you and employing your God-given imagination to help you achieve your simple but important dreams.

But maybe there's a more serious difficulty. Maybe early in life you picked up the idea that dreams are futile and imagination is dangerous. Did anyone make fun of you for daydreaming when you were a child? Did an adult worry that you might get hurt and discourage you from reaching for something "above yourself"? Did a teacher or parent label your imagination as "lies" or come down hard on you for not being "realistic"? I'm always saddened at the ways that adults—even well-meaning adults—can step on a child's dreams. And grown-up dreams can be squelched by disapproval or failure too—to the point that you almost forget *how* to dream.

If that's true, you might need to counter this negative view of dreaming with a positive one. I hope this book will help you do that. You might even need to do a little "remedial dreaming"—take some time to get in touch with what you truly desire and what God might have in store for you.

The biggest problem I've seen with people who have trouble with dreams is that they are simply afraid to risk the unknown. Claiming your vision of a better life does take courage. It can feel like a big risk to step away from the familiar and go for something different than you have.

But that's exactly why I think you need to practice dreaming—because it makes the unfamiliar familiar. The more you go over a

dream in your mind, the more your mind and heart can open up to its possibilities and make it part of you. Besides, there's no real risk in *just* dreaming, imagining what *could* be. So why not give yourself permission to start there and take the next steps when you're ready?

Ask God for the courage just to make that simple start. Just dream.

You might be surprised where he takes you from there.

DREAM IT AND DO IT

I'm an optimist by nature, and I rarely get really down about anything, but I remember a time in the seventh or eighth grade when I became discouraged about some tough homework. "I just can't do this," I said glumly.

Those were words you just didn't say with our parents around. My mother's head popped up, and she gave me an earful. "Don't ever let me hear you say you can't do something," she said. "I'm here to tell you that you can do whatever you set your heart and mind to doing. And what you can't do, God can!"

I took her words to heart, and now I'm passing them on to you. I have always done my best to serve as an example to others, particularly to those who, like me, grew up without many advantages and maybe even with some extra challenges. One of the key messages I offer to them—and now to you in this book—is that we can all rise above our circumstances. Instead of worrying about your limitations, set your heart and mind on something better.

Dreaming of the life you want will get you started and keep you

motivated. Trusting in God will keep you on the right path—and I promise you he won't let you down. But you'll also have to do your part by putting yourself in position for his favor. The Bible says in James 2:26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (KJV).

I can't stress enough that you have to take responsibility for your own success. God will step in when he knows you have stepped up. A vision of greatness will take you nowhere if you fail to do the work necessary to prepare yourself. But if you do put in the sweat equity, the rewards can amaze you.

If you are willing to work hard and do whatever it takes, moving ahead one step at a time, doing as much as you can each and every day to prepare yourself for victory, you will be surprised at how the world opens up to you. I am absolutely convinced that God rewards those who are faithful, disciplined, and passionate about their visions.

I would encourage you to ask for God's help every step of the way, to ask for his guidance, and to make sure you thank him not only for any blessings that come your way, but for those you hope to receive in the future. Know that you may not have all that it takes to achieve your dreams, but God does. With his help, all things really are possible. My crazy and wonderful life is proof of that.

Yours can be too, if you start with a dream.

Believe it, and you can achieve it.

See it, and you can be it.

Dream it, and you can do it.