

FACING THE BLITZ

THREE STRATEGIES
FOR TURNING TRIALS
INTO TRIUMPHS

JEFF KEMP



BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Jeff Kemp, *Facing the Blitz*
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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kemp, Jeff.

Facing the blitz : three strategies for turning trials into triumphs / Jeff Kemp ;
foreword by Tony Dungy.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: "Popular speaker and former NFL quarterback Jeff Kemp shows how challenges in life are like blitzes in football—both are opportunities one can turn to an advantage"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7642-1402-8 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Conduct of life. 2. Success. I. Title.

BJ1589.K456 2015

158—dc23

2014043578

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Cover design by Dan Pitts

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15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Jeff Kemp, Facing the Blitz

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I dedicate this message to my universally loved mom, Joanne Kemp, who has always modeled the faith, hope, and love that fueled our family and allowed my dad to be the champion father he was. I also dedicate it to my greatest teammate and love, Stacy . . . and to our family, Kyle and Lindsay Ann, Kory and Dana, Kolby and Keegan. Who you are and how you lift others excites me!



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Acknowledgments

To be very clear, quarterbacks—and husbands—can’t do anything without help; we depend deeply on others. If we forget that or take it for granted, we are fooling ourselves and dishonoring our team. A lineman can make great blocks on his own. A defender can tackle on his own. But a quarterback can’t complete a pass without a whole lot of help from his teammates. He can’t even start the play until the ball is snapped to him. And as for how much a wife helps a husband (and especially how much Stacy helps me), that’s a bigger job than a quarterback’s!

In that spirit, I have a lot of people to thank for help on this book. Beating blitzes and turning life’s troubles into triumphs is essentially about teamwork, and I have been blessed with amazing teammates, advisors, and friends. My best friend and ultimate teammate, who has faced the most blitzes with me, is my wife. Stacy, thank you for your unconditional love, your dedicated faith in the Lord, your courageous truth-telling, your prayers, your wisdom, and your perspective. What I’m especially grateful for is your heroic dedication and excellence in shaping our family and our home. You are my benchmark for being a love investor. We’ve laughed about how “helpable” I am, but I celebrate that I married

the world's strongest helper. Your beauty is inside and out, and your legacy will be magnificent.

I'd like to thank my friend and mentor Don Wallis for his encouragement on my fiftieth birthday to trust my life experiences and lessons, and to feel comfortable sharing them. I would pass the same encouragement on to others who hit the halfway mark (give or take a few years). Don, your self-revealing humility and mentoring will always shape me.

A few years ago I lost my closest buddy and a man who helped me grow to know Jesus and His ways. I am so grateful for Chuck Obremski, our Rams chaplain who taught Scripture, loved well, and used his cancer blitz to bless countless people. Chuck finished strong!

So much of what I've learned and so many of my laughs come from our sons. Kyle, Kory, Kolby, and Keegan, thank you for being so honest, real, and funny. You've given me the greatest of laughs and joy; thanks for letting me share our stories. Special thanks to my sister Jennifer for her early encouragement and improvements to this book. And to my mom, Joanne; sister, Judith; and brother, Jimmy, for their joyful roles in my life. Mom, you are inspirational to all of us. The message of this book emanates from your faith and practicing the "power of the personal." This book is a thanks to you and Dad, as so many of the gifts you gave us birthed the ideas and principles that fill my heart and these pages.

I'd like to thank my friend Gary Thomas, who helped me embark on this journey. The heavy lifting was done with an awesome teammate and editor, Arlyn Lawrence. Arlyn, thank you for your prayers, talent, dedication, sympathetic spirit, and huge contribution to this mission. May your family and all your writing be blessed so that others may be encouraged. Thanks to Joel, Brian, Lisa, and Rick at Alive Communications, and to Andy, Amanda, Carra, and Shaun at Bethany House. Pat Lencioni, Jeremy Valerand, Bryan Coley, Dr. Shawn Stoeber, Dennis Trittin, Dr. Dave Mashburn—you men rolled up your sleeves to help me in many ways. I am very grateful. Dr. Scott Sticksel, you out-blessed me

Acknowledgments

again, and your leadership coaching shaped me and the ideas in this book greatly. Bill Bennett, your friendship to Dad and our family inspired the acronym *LIFT* to describe my dad. Thank you. Thanks to Phil Hotsenpiller of New York Executive Coaching. Rick Schirmer, Dr. Jeff Fray, Dr. Gary Oliver, and Dr. John Trent—you have inspired my passion and vision. Thanks to talented encouragers Sealy Yates, Gary Smalley, Wes Yoder, Jerry Brewer, Jeff Abramovitz, Tim Popadic, David Huckabee, Peb Jackson, Mark Merrill, and Les Parrott. Special thanks to our team leader at FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and to Bob Lepine, Leslie Barner, Jim Whitmore, and Pete McIndoe, among many who fuel my passion for lifting men and marriages.

I have special thanks for my gutsy, generous, and noble friend Dave Ederer. Your story, example, and invitation to Jan and Ken's Wild Adventure are central to beating blitzes and living lives that lift others to their best. And thank you, Jan Janura, Ken Tada, Chris Leech, and all my other "Welcome to Manhood" buddies who've adventured to share their stories and inspire my sons and each other. I'd like to thank my post-football huddle friends Tom Flick, Mike Clark, and Jim Zorn—you guys are a team for life. Jon Sharpe, Bob Nuber, Jerry Brown, Fred, Dean, Tom, and Barry of my C-3 Thursday morning group—thanks for walking with me through a great blitz, as did my awesome Friday Seattle guys led by Matt McIlwain. Thank you, Jason Pederson and Big Ray Roberts. Ray, you're a treasured friend and a masterpiece in the making.

The lives and stories of so many weave the tapestry of my life and this book. I'm grateful to Coach Bill Walsh and Coach Mike Holmgren for one intense season of my career and many lessons for life. Coaches John Robinson, Chuck Knox, and Mike Swider, along with Norm Evans, George Toles, Eugene Robinson, Reggie White, Keith Jackson, Brent Jones, Jerry Rice, Paul Skansi, Steve Dils, George Lilja, Jackie Slater, Pat Haden, George Andrews, and a couple hundred other teammates are in my mind as I pen these acknowledgments. Thank you, men. I'm grateful for the greatest sport in history—football—and the NFL. I'm glad Dad

Acknowledgments

taught me—and I loved teaching my four sons—the lessons that epitomize the best of sport.

Leslie Mayne, Jerry Brown, Steve and Tricia Woodworth, Steve and Terry Largent, Clark and Joan Donnell, Marvin and Jeanette Charles, Coach Tony Dungy—to all of you who have faced life’s intense blitzes and allowed them to mold and spur you to bless other people, including me, thank you so much. I’m grateful to offer small glimpses into the pain and beauty of your stories. Noel Meador, General Jimmy Collins, and board members and supporters of Stronger Families have been huge blessings in my life and proof of the silver linings that come from tough times.

My gratitude and acknowledgments are inadequate. Ultimately, I’m aware that I really can do nothing of lasting value or virtue apart from my total dependence on my heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ. I hope people show grace to me for any errors or self-inflicted words in this book, and that any credit accrues to God, who alone is perfect in truth and love.

Foreword

Most football fans today are familiar with the term *blitz*—a strategy where the defensive team attempts to disrupt their opponent with a quick, devastating, and hopefully unexpected attack. During my football career I had the unique experience of being on both sides of the blitz. As a defensive back for the Pittsburgh Steelers, I was part of a unit that executed blitzes well enough to win a Super Bowl championship in 1979. But before that, I had been a college quarterback and for four years had been on the receiving end of those blitzes. I learned that no matter how much you prepared for them, it was still possible to get hit by a blitz you didn't see coming. The key, then, was how you would respond after getting thrown for a loss.

Those lessons I learned as a quarterback on how to deal with blitzes helped me become not only a better football player but a better person as well, because life can deal you unexpected setbacks that can hit you harder than any blitzing linebacker. Although I feel I've been extremely blessed by God, I've still had to deal with some things I never saw coming. Getting injured, getting traded as a player, and getting fired as a coach were not pleasant times. Losing my parents to diabetes and leukemia hit me even harder. But I had learned that how you move forward from those things is the key.

In 2005, though, my family and I faced what for us was the ultimate blitz. Our eighteen-year-old son, James, took his own life. He was a wonderful young man, very sensitive and caring. We've never experienced any greater pain. Such a loss can put a tremendous strain on a marriage. It can push you away from loved ones—or it can pull you together. You can push away from God or draw close to a compassionate heavenly Father. We drew together as a family, and we committed ourselves to drawing closer to God. Since then, we have continued to call upon His power, a power so much greater than our own, to face life's trials.

The entire momentum of an NFL game can turn as the result of a blitz. Surprise attacks, brutal blows, and intense trials are the essence of the game, and life is no different. We will have unexpected challenges, painful losses, and intense difficulties—the loss of a loved one, a surprise medical diagnosis, the loss of a job . . . And just like the quarterback, our job in life is not to merely survive the blitz, it's to beat it.

If we want to succeed in life, we need to know how to face the blitz, how to overcome our trials, and how to turn what seems bad into good . . . for ourselves and others. The truth is, although there are great dangers in the blitz, there are also great opportunities. Opportunities to respond, adapt, and succeed. Some of football's greatest touchdowns have come under the duress of the blitz.

My friend Jeff Kemp tells a compelling story of facing life's blitzes. Jeff was a long-shot to quarterback in the NFL for eleven seasons, but he comes from a family where leadership, teamwork, and perseverance are ways of life. Compassion for the oppressed and beleaguered was a mark of his father, Jack, himself a legendary NFL quarterback and widely admired American statesman. Continuing in that legacy, Jeff has devoted his post-football life to strengthening marriages and families to increase their care and love for their children.

In *Facing the Blitz*, Jeff shares time-tested strategies for overcoming blitzes at home, at the office, and in key relationships. Jeff

delivers a practical game plan, drawn from his experience on the field and in the grip of challenges off the field.

You'll learn how champions in the NFL—and those who overcome in life—have done it through mutually uplifting relationships, through sacrifice, and by allowing Jesus Christ to be their guide when the going gets tough. They have enough humility to put the team, the cause, and others before themselves. Those who persevere together find that the blitzes and challenges become a joy and a blessing to others.

The stories and truths in this book will inspire, encourage, and equip you to face real life. You will discover how your pain can result in transcendent gain. Your mess can become a message, a hope-giving testimony pointing to a *greater* hope and love.

This book will make a difference in your life. You'll want to read, digest, and re-read it. I hope you share it with friends to help them through their own difficulties and to strengthen their important teams, from family to business to sports.

—Tony Dungy, author of *Uncommon:
Finding Your Path to Significance*

Introduction

Life isn't always as we dreamed it should be and wanted it to be. It's wonderful but hard. It's tragic but poignant. It's beautiful but flawed. It goes along pretty well, and then things can fall apart and blow up really badly. But that is not always the direction things go, from good to bad. Things also go from bad to good, from painful trial to positive building block, from suffering to healing, from needing comfort to comforting others, and from feeling overwhelmed to overcoming.

I know my biggest losses and toughest times have yielded value in their own way, often more so than the easier and triumphant moments. I've learned about joys that don't fade when our circumstances tank. I've traveled pathways that carried me from lost to found. I've seen the destructive consequences of self-first, self-only living be turned around by the transformative power of humility and unconditional love. That's why I know we all have the capacity to overcome our blitzes.

The problem is, we are all so incredibly imperfect.

I grew up around football teams during my father's career in professional football and as a player myself. In my eleven-season wild ride as an NFL quarterback, I played on many fine teams

for many dedicated coaches and several truly exceptional ones. I also grew up with an epic encourager in my dad, Jack Kemp. He was an amazing man who, after his thirteen seasons of pro football, turned to a life of public service in the intense and volatile world of political leadership. He embodied and instilled in me an energizing approach to life: LIFT—Life Is For Transformation. He was the one who first and most importantly taught me how to beat life’s blitzes and transform them into opportunities to *lift* others around me.

I’ve been on this faith-deepening journey for over thirty years. Since ending my football career, I’ve invested myself in a career to strengthen the priorities, commitments, and skills needed to build healthy families. Because of these experiences, I’ve come to see life through the lens of teams, leadership, and relationships.

Most of what I have learned in my journey has come with the help of other people and their friendship, perspective, and coaching. My passion is that these stories and lessons enrich your journey and help you successfully face your own blitzes in life.

Think back to a huge hurt or loss in your life, such as an injustice, disappointment, or humiliation. Maybe you lost a job, were betrayed by someone you loved, or publicly failed at something important to you. Did it blindside you? Did it take you down so hard that you thought you might not recover? Did it feel like a physical punch in the gut?

If your response to any of the above is yes, then you, friend, have been on the receiving end of a BLITZ.

The word *blitz* has been a part of my vocabulary throughout my life. When I was a boy, I played youth football and watched my dad play professionally in the NFL. Later, when I too played in the NFL, I learned firsthand the horror and the beauty of the blitz, both literally and figuratively, for eleven seasons.

I wouldn’t have guessed that my experience handling blitzes on and off the field would provide me with many of the most powerful lessons of my life. And I certainly didn’t expect it to

make the difference between a life of meaning and one of despair. But that's been my reality—and probably yours too. Isn't life, for all of us, about facing blitzes?

The purpose of this book is to share the lessons I learned (and keep learning) from dealing with blitzes, so that you can avoid unnecessary fear, setback, and misery when circumstances fall short of what you want them to be, and instead experience courage, growth, gratitude, and joy.

If you'll take a long-term perspective, if you're willing to change, and if you adopt an others-centered approach to everyday living, then life's problems, attacks, and trials will serve to *grow* you. They will grow your humility, your honesty, your relationships, your faith, and your joy. They will open up your eyes to the pain that others are feeling because of their blitzes and help you be a better team player and support person for them. These are all good things that can come out of your blitzes.

You'll learn that overcoming is not about bouncing back so much as bouncing UP. No matter how near or how far you are from your blitz, this is not a book about the past. It's about the present and future. This is a message about recovering, about coming back from, about transforming—and then getting better and going further than you ever dreamed possible.

But to do all that, you'll need the courage to embrace three simple principles—*strategies*, if you will—which are as easy to understand as they are difficult to follow:

1. Take a long-term view.
2. Be willing to change.
3. Reach out to others.

Before you dive into understanding and trying to employ the three strategies for facing, and beating, a blitz, you'll need to understand why some people are better at it than others, and why for other people these requirements don't make any sense. It all has to do with how we see ourselves, the world, and life in general. How

well you master these strategies will depend on how you answer these questions:

1. Do you see life as an individual sport or a team sport?
2. Do you look at the world from the standpoint of a consumer or an investor?
3. What is your power source for living, loving, and overcoming trials?

Your answers to these questions will reveal your lenses. You'll know what I mean if you've ever had your eyes examined. During the exam, you rest your chin in a vision device while the optometrist swaps out multiple lenses until you can see clearly. You need the right lenses in order to see properly. By the same token, once we can see well, we're better equipped to face life's blitzes. Keep considering these questions as you read through this book.

What are your life lenses today, and what do you want them to be?



Strategy



Take a Long-Term View

- › Find the Opportunity in the Crisis
- › Let the Old Dream Die
- › Embrace a Bigger Vision



Find the Opportunity in the Crisis

blitz: *noun* \blits\

a: *blitzkrieg*, an intensive all-out aerial attack or campaign

b: a sudden overwhelming bombardment

c: a rush of the passer by a defensive linebacker, back, or end in football¹

As a former NFL quarterback, I've seen more than my share of blitzes, including one in a crucial late-season game against the Houston Oilers when I was playing for the Philadelphia Eagles. It was *Monday Night Football*, and facing each other that night were two teams with the toughest defenses in the NFL. Despite talented players on both offenses, it would be a game remembered for big hits and all-out blitzes.

For those who don't know the game well, a blitz is what happens when an excessive number of defensive players approach the line of scrimmage with the intention of rushing the quarterback and sacking him for a significant loss in yards. The goals are surprise and intimidation, meant to overwhelm and damage an offense's play, as well as the quarterback!

Derived from the term *blitzkrieg* used in World War II, it's the idea of throwing sudden and extra resources at an enemy in order to bring about shock, panic, and defeat. But when the enemy adapts to a blitz and refuses to panic, it can be a great opportunity for success. Here's a look into what it was like that Monday night in the NFL.

We were in the Houston Astrodome, aka the "House of Pain," the term that was adopted as a tribute to the jackhammer defense that made it incredibly difficult for any visiting team to escape without loss or injury. Well into the third quarter, the Oilers' defense was dominating and stymieing our offense. Thanks to our phenomenal defense, who brought their own version of pain that night, we were tied 3–3.

Our first-string quarterback, Jim McMahon, had been hammered and injured. Tough as he was, he had to leave the game, and I came in. Other than three plays, followed by a concussion and a trip to the hospital a few weeks earlier, this was my first chance to quarterback the Eagles.

It was my first drive of the game, and we had worked our way to the Oilers' twenty-yard line, where it was third and eight. The coach called for a deep, slow-developing drop-back pass to our tight end, Keith Jackson. As we broke the huddle and I approached the line of scrimmage, I knew I would need good protection from my offensive line. The rabid defense of the Oilers made that unlikely. The linebackers' gleaming eyes and their tightened alignment told me they had no intention of dropping back to cover our receivers; these guys were coming after *me*, the new backup quarterback. It was a blitz.

As I called out my signals, the linebackers and linemen excitedly called out their own signals, no doubt trying to confuse me and drown out the sound of my voice. They howled, "Gap!" "Slide!" "Randy!" "Switch!" The crowd was wild, the situation crucial, and the adrenaline began pumping as I stood behind the center whose right hand gripped the football.

The instant the ball hit my hands, pandemonium broke loose. Houston threw everything they had in my direction. Two extra

linebackers were bearing down on me, with the free safety approaching at a sprint after having snuck up to the line of scrimmage. It was a full blitz, an all-out attack.

Keep in mind, I was playing for my life that night in Houston. I was nearing the end of my career, and my future with the team hung in the balance. The NFL isn't exactly a secure workplace due to the intense competition of earning your job back every week, sudden injuries, and career obsolescence by age thirty. As I dropped back, I was fully aware that in the next few seconds something very bad—or very good—was about to happen.

The Good, the Bad, and the Opportunity

We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situation.

Charles Swindoll

Since retiring from football more than two decades ago, I've become more and more aware of life's blitzes *outside* the stadium. A child is born with a disability; a loved one is injured or diagnosed with a terminal disease; the bank calls in your company loan and you can't cover it; the boss tells you you've been laid off. Or you lose your savings in the stock market, your best friend to a cross-country move, or your spouse to an affair or divorce.

Blitzes like this happen every day. And the way we face them makes all the difference in the world. It can bring something very good out of something very bad.

Many of us, when facing a life blitz, only see the negative and not the opportunity. Others fail to see the bigger picture in the blitz until they're looking back at it in hindsight. Then there are those people who come alive during blitzes. They learn, change, and adapt, realizing blitzes are trials that can force change and open up new opportunities we could never have imagined before.

Trials can humble and even hurt us, but they can also teach and motivate us. It all depends on the attitude we bring to the blitz.

The key is our *lens*: If we get bogged down by the frustration of the circumstances and think only about survival, a blitz will be

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt

primarily negative and possibly devastating. However, if our mind-set is to look for something more, for the blessing hidden amidst the challenge, a blitz gives us a chance to live our lives at an entirely different level.

At its core, a life blitz—the unexpected problem, the deep trial, the shocking loss—contains the power to bring out the best inside each of us. It can open us up to growth and experiences and positives that wouldn't have otherwise occurred. It shakes us free from our old routines and paradigms

in a way nothing else can. We might not ever *choose* a blitz—few people do—but we can aim to *use* it when one comes our way.

The way I came to play for the Philadelphia Eagles before that memorable and adrenaline-pumping night at the Astrodome was the result of a personal blitz of my own. I had begun my eleventh and what was to be my last season of professional football in a precarious position as the fourth-string quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks. I began that year behind the previous season's starter, Dave Krieg, and two younger QBs who'd been first-round draft picks. Things didn't look good for me there. But by the second regular season game, I had not only made the team, I'd become the starter.

During the time I was quarterbacking, the Seahawks won three games and lost three, the last defeat being an overtime loss against the Los Angeles Raiders. Unfortunately, my errant pass to Raider safety Ronnie Lott cost us the game—and me my job. I was cut two days later, mid-season. To go from being the starting quarterback of a team to an unemployed one facing retirement, all in just a few days' time, is about as difficult as life gets in the NFL. It was definitely a blitz.

That night, after being cut, my then-six-year-old son, Kyle, said the prayer at our dinner table. He thanked God for the food, then prayed for me. “God, please give Daddy a new team. And I want it to be the Eagles.”

Kyle wasn’t an astute follower of professional football. He was only six. In fact, he had no clue that Philadelphia even had an NFL team named the Eagles. His first-grade youth soccer team was named the Eagles, so he was just hoping I’d play for a team with the same name as his!

It was a pivotal day in my life. I’d been booed, benched, and traded before, but this felt heavier. Yet my wife, Stacy, and I had learned to trust God through all those prior trials and the intense ups and downs of pro football. I knew that I shouldn’t focus on the negative possibilities of my circumstances. Even if it had been the end of my career, I didn’t need to let that plunge me into anger or depression—it would only create bigger problems for me and my family. It was no time to panic or despair, as tempting as that can be for any of us in the heat of the blitz.

Amazingly, the next morning I got a call from the Philadelphia Eagles, wanting to sign me up to play for the rest of the season. On the other end of the phone I heard, “Jeff, Randall Cunningham is out with a broken leg, Jim McMahon’s battling injuries, and we need an experienced QB who’s ready to play.” A few weeks later, I was on the field in the Astrodome in that critical game against the Oilers, where I was hit hard by a blitz of an entirely different dimension.

Back to the Astrodome

Thankfully, during my time in the league, I had learned not to panic at the sight of a full-on blitz. In fact, the first thought that went through my head that night was, *If I move quickly enough, we’ve got a touchdown.*

Since I’m only six feet tall and the wall of linemen coming at me each averaged about six-foot-five, I couldn’t see downfield very

well. What did become clear to me was the sprinting free safety who slipped through the line untouched and leaped at me with a sadistic scowl on his face. Actually, I have no idea about the look on his face. I was busy trying to find my tight end. I couldn't see much with so many Houston players blitzing, especially with the free safety in my face. It was an eclipse . . . and time was running out!

But my mind was racing in a good way. Because the free safety had left his regular defensive zone, it meant the deep middle was uncovered. I had to take a shot downfield. It was a risk because, if I got sacked, even a field goal was uncertain. Still, the opportunity was there, and I wasn't the only one who saw it.

Seeing the blitz attack triggered adaptations by others on our offense. Our All-Pro tight end, Keith Jackson, abandoned his late-developing corner route and ran a quick post route to the uncovered middle. The ball flew from my hand and hurtled past the ear hole of the blitzing free safety, who had his hands up in an attempt to further block my vision. I couldn't see where Keith was, so I threw the ball to where I thought he should be, being careful to give it just enough arc to get it over the defender and for Keith to get under it for the catch.

As the ball left my hand, I felt the full impact of the charging free safety's weight. He collided with my chest and landed directly on top of me. Some defensive players like to take their time getting off the quarterback, maybe even letting a few choice words and spit escape from their mouths while they're piled on top of you. I don't remember worrying about any of that. While the free safety had me knocked down, he hadn't ended the play. We'd gotten the pass off.

Unable to see what was happening, I listened to the crowd. I knew if there was an immediate roar in our opponent's domed stadium, it would signal that I'd just thrown an interception. If there was a quick cheer followed by applause, I'd know the ball had fallen incomplete.

But there was none of that. Instead, it was deathly silent . . . a sweet sound. In a visiting stadium, silence is great news.

Keith had played it perfectly. Changing his route to a quick post, the ball met him just over the shoulder. Not only did he catch it, he crossed the goal line for what would be the game's only—and winning—touchdown. The Philadelphia Eagles won the game 13–6 in the House of Pain. We hadn't merely survived the blitz; we'd turned it into an opportunity greater than anything we could have created on our own.

Finding the Opportunity in Your Crisis

That blitz by the Oilers could have taken the Eagles right out of the game. As it turned out, though, our best play of the game came on what could have been the worst. It all depended on whether we would let the blitz beat us or choose to respond to the opportunity hidden within it.

What does it take to break a blitz and turn it to your advantage?



The Chinese character for *crisis* combines two smaller characters: one representing danger, and one representing opportunity. That's the intrinsic nature of a crisis. You may be asking, "Can my something bad really turn into good?" I believe so, and nearly every day I meet other people who think so too—and who prove it.

I think of the server I met in a restaurant in Gig Harbor, Washington. Leslie was a middle-aged mom who told me the story of her adult son's tragic death. He was a soldier who had served in Iraq. When he returned home, he suffered from PTSD. He died away from her, but here in the states, not in the war. The pain of losing a child, Leslie told me, is like no other. She'll never forget

the day she picked up the phone and heard the voice of Kyle's father telling her the news, "We've lost our boy."

Her friends helped her up when she fell to the floor, that day and many more after it. They flew her to Virginia, where she went through the motions of burial and the recovery of Kyle's meager belongings. Her friends encouraged her, prayed for her, and refused to let her drown alone in her tears. But there was one thing they could not do for her. They could not beat her blitz for her. She had to do that herself. Or, as Leslie would put it, she had to beat it with God's help.

At first she had tried to numb the pain with medication and alcohol, but that gave little relief. That's when she turned to God. She'd had experience with what she called "lip-service Christianity," but now God became a reality in her life. Praying He would bring her some sort of purpose and peace in the midst of her turmoil, she began to look for Him in everything she could—in the people, the places, and even the little things she encountered every day, both the good and the bad.

Then, providentially, a friend who didn't know about Kyle's death called her and invited her to New Orleans to help chaperone a youth group traveling there to serve people devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The trip changed her perspective—and her life. She'd been the sufferer, and now she was serving others who were suffering. A spark of life, and healing, ignited in her.

"I know God didn't cause Kyle's death," Leslie regularly tells people. "I still have lots to praise Him for, no matter how bad things get. You can't blame God for the bad if you want to praise Him for the good at the same time.

"I can show my three other kids, who are still here, that you can get through something like this. You can miss Kyle, but you can still go forward and turn this into an opportunity to serve other soldiers. You've got to be patient in the process and learn the lessons in the losses."

Serving other soldiers is precisely the way that Leslie has used her blitz for opportunity and found healing and hope. The restaurant

where she works teamed up with her to host a free luncheon for over ninety Green Berets headed to Afghanistan. She organizes the Race for a Soldier, a community-wide half marathon to raise awareness and support for suffering soldiers returning to civilian life. She's out to save lives and families. Her mission has given her the healing, purpose, and joy that had nearly been extinguished by a blitz. Leslie's lesson in the loss? "Take your bad, serve somebody else, and turn it to good."²

Sometimes, as Leslie experienced, a blitz turns into something amazing you can give away to others. Other times the blitz brings new direction and empowerment to you personally. Just ask epic Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps.

Everyone knows that training is the key to success in Olympic swimming. But just ten months before the 2008 Olympics, Michael Phelps tripped in a parking lot and fractured his wrist. Skeptics forecasted the worst, and hopes for Olympic glory dimmed. Phelps, however, figured out a new path. Unable to continue his normal training, he decided to train with his legs, develop his kick, and stay in the pool with his teammates, using a kickboard to support his wrist.

Ultimately, the injury to Phelps's wrist proved to be more of a catalyst than a crisis. He used it to develop the astounding and exceptional kick that helped him blow away the competition, come from behind, and win eight Olympic gold medals.

Crisis or catalyst? Hang in there, friend; be creative and persevere. Bad things can still turn out for good. You wouldn't be the first person who, after a blitz, woke up to the realization that you'd lost focus on the simpler things of life. Blitzes can direct us back to the fundamentals, the essentials of life.

It's not always easy or appropriate to tell someone there are riches to be mined when they're in the midst of pain, in the trial of a lifetime, or engulfed in the heartache of losing a loved one. But it is appropriate, truthful, and compassionate to encourage people with the reality that new life can spring from death, a bright future can follow a terrible present, and that a better you can emerge from the greatest difficulty you've ever faced.

I know this, because the toughest things I've gone through personally have given me the best lessons and platform to be able to encourage others. I've been disappointed, overlooked, rejected, traded, cut, booed by sixty thousand fans, and injured. I left football much earlier than I wanted to. I've lost big games and blown great opportunities to become a long-term starting NFL QB. I've watched money disappear in investments, the stock market, and in big contracts that never cashed because I was released from the team.

When I was leading a nonprofit organization, budget crunches forced me to release highly valued people at crucial junctures. When the economic slump created an intense funding crisis, the only option for salvaging our organization was for me to resign, extract my salary, and let go numerous devoted people, triggering blitzes in their personal lives and family finances.

And the most personally devastating: My family lost my father to terminal cancer—a swift five-month departure of my greatest encourager, and a legacy-shaping man in our family and our nation.

Some of your blitzes may make mine sound tame in comparison, but the principle applies in every case: The same blitz that threatens to destroy you can also build you. The lens through which you view the blitz—and the way you use it—will make the difference between whether you travel the path of relational support and personal growth or fall helplessly into the chasm of despair and bitterness. Certainly, when viewed from our limited vantage point, life seems unfair. Yet allowing oneself to be a victim takes away our hope and the power to overcome.

If you're in the midst of a blitz right now, or recovering from one, the decisions you make in the coming months will shape you for years to come. We can't always choose what happens to us, but we can always choose our response. That, in turn, will shape what kind of person we become. It will also shape the degree to which we become an encourager and helper in the lives of others. The blitz is not the *end* of the story; it's only the catalyst to a greater one.

Time Out for Self-Reflection

1. What “life blitz” are you experiencing right now or have you experienced recently?
2. What are the potential (or actual) losses you’re facing?
3. What are the potential *opportunities*? Think long term, positively, and try to come up with at least one, if not more, such as an area of personal growth, an important lesson, or openness to a new opportunity.

Run the Play: Practical Application

1. Start looking for and writing down examples of blitzes that have been turned around for good—in your life, in others’ lives, in history, sports, politics, medicine, the arts and sciences.
2. Find a person you respect for his or her resilience and character, and ask how they’ve faced their blitzes. Look for principles and record what you learn.

My prayer for you:

Perfect Creator, Loving Father, Lord Jesus,

Please be present and real to the unique person reading this. Open the eyes of their heart and bring wisdom to their mind. Comfort them and strengthen them through their blitz and the response to past blitzes. Give them faith to be grateful and positive in turning to you when facing troubles, trials, and losses. Help them convert what seems bad into something good that can grow faith and character, improve relationships, and lift others. Bring your hope, your love, your power, and your Spirit to them as they read this book and live its message.