

Eddie Mason's *Training for the Tough Game of Life* is a compelling journey of overcoming personal adversity from calling bad plays. By discovering a life-transforming 'playbook,' he learned to make the right calls. Inspiring, riveting, and enlightening, this is a must-read if you want to succeed in life.

TROY VINCENT, NFL, Vice President of Football Operations and NFL Legend

We read the first chapter and were moved to tears. Our spiritual son, Eddie Mason, has written a profoundly moving book, opening his heart honestly and allowing us to look inside. What we see is ourselves. None of us can self-correct. We desperately need a playbook for our lives. We plan to read this book again, and share it with the people we love, so that together we can win the tough game of life.

CHESTER & MARION MITCHELL, Senior Pastor of Capital Community Church, Ashburn, Virginia and Author of *The Healing Road to Heaven: Walking with God from Pain to Peace*

Eddie Mason, who was a starting linebacker for us at UNC, has written a must-read book for all. It teaches us how to turn a crisis into a positive. Your life will be better with this read. As always, I'm so proud of Eddie. Thanks for sharing your thoughts and your life with us, my friend!

MACK BROWN, UNC & University of Texas Head Football Coach,
2005 BCS National Champion

In *Training for the Tough Game of Life*, Coach Eddie Mason comes alongside you with God's playbook and passionately shows you how to overcome your life obstacles. But this is much more than a training manual. Coach Eddie is living it. With honesty and vulnerability, he takes you through his own tough times, walking you through God's playbook for his own life, bringing you face-to-face with the wisdom he has gained on the field of life. If you are in the pain of life and losing your grip, pick up this training manual now, read it, apply it, and let Coach Eddie take you forward through your tough time and across the goal.

CRAIG MOORMAN, PH.D., Founder and Director, Finding Solutions Counseling Centers

Congratulations on your new book coming out. I am so proud of you. I know your goal is to help young people be better. We want to win in the game of life and you're going to help a lot of people do that. I am excited about what you're doing to help others become the kind of people we always talked about.

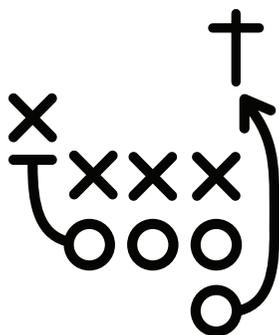
COACH TONY DUNGY, NFL Super Bowl Champion Coach (Super Bowl XLI),
New York Times Best-Selling Author, ESPN Sports Commentator

Eddie Mason has many layers to his personal story that will speak to everyone who picks this book up. Sometimes we all need a time-out. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter allow for just that very thing; giving you an opportunity to grow in your walk with God.

DAVID SOESBEE, International Speaker and Founder, What Jesus Did Ministry,
Author of *What Jesus Did: Evangelism for Everyone* and *Holy Romance*

TRAINING FOR THE TOUGH GAME OF LIFE

GUIDANCE AND HELP FROM GOD'S PLAYBOOK



EDDIE MASON



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*I dedicate this book to
those who have been broken
by the game of life
and have found courage, faith, hope,
and love again to not be afraid
to allow God to pick up the pieces
and help you get back in
the Tough Game of Life*

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To my spiritual family: Thank you for walking with Sonya and I all these years. My mentors, brothers, and friends have helped sharpen me to become the man I am today.

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To Jesus Christ for redeeming me from myself and helping me to look myself in the mirror, not at the reflection of who I saw, but at the possibility of what I could become!

“For I know the plans
I have for you declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you
and not to harm you,
plans to give you
hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11

REALIZING WE ALL NEED A PLAYBOOK



My life was changed forever in the summer of 1977. I was five years old. It should have been a time without care, filled with hours of joy in the humid country air of Siler City, North Carolina. Instead, I found myself thrust into an atmosphere I was not ready for. It was one that would lay the framework for how I would struggle to play the game of life for the next twenty-plus years.

I was playing in the dirt outside of my mom and dad's trailer. I often played alone, and this day began no differently. I plowed the rich soil with my Tonka truck, while dreaming of driving a much bigger truck. Suddenly, I heard my mother's voice cry out for help. I knew her voice well, as it was the voice I'd heard since I was a baby. But I also heard another voice. This one was angry, passionate, and its owner had reached his boiling point. I'd heard these sounds before and most times I ignored them.

I tried to ignore them this time, too, remaining engrossed in my toy truck. It was my way of escaping the sounds and screams that frequented the air in our home. I'd become accustomed and somewhat numb to them for the most part. But this wasn't like the other times. It was different. I heard an undertone in my mom's voice that exuded fear, and instinctively I knew that her life was on the line. I was only five, but I knew something was not right!

I ran to her voice and came up on an escalated argument between her and my dad. My father had my mother by her hair, intending to hit her. I grabbed his leg and began to bite him. I don't

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know how much my little bite hurt, but it was enough to get him to release my mom as he turned his focus to me, his youngest son, who was happy with nothing more than playing in the dirt in our yard.

My dad grabbed me and flung me away with a swipe of his large hand. For a moment there was silence as the realization that he hit his five year old son fell upon us all. In this pause, my eyes met his and I saw anger, hurt, pain, and frustration. I saw that he did not know how to communicate except through the abuse of his hands, voice, and a bottle. I saw that his addiction was also his pain. It was not over; it was only beginning.

His attack on my mom would have resumed save for the new presence of my Grandma Emma. She now stood at the door unwavering; daring my dad to come near.

His spirit subdued and he remained silent as he walked away—dejected—processing what he had just done. It was in this moment that I realized everyone has a playbook for how they play the game of life. Some play life out through abuse, addiction, pain, unforgiveness, or loss of hope, trying their best to gain ground toward a greater sense of worth that leads to a brighter future.

These people use the pain they have battled through in the game of life as fuel to get them from one quarter to the next, never stopping for a moment to consider the rules they are breaking, the penalties they are causing, and the fouls that hurt others along the way. They never stop for a moment to consider that there is a greater playbook that lies within God's Word. God's playbook gives *better* options that will point the way toward success.

SCRIPTURAL TRUTH:

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26

Each of us must ask ourselves: What playbook am I using? Am I running plays based on my will or on God's will? Am I playing the game of life based on the pain in my past or a bad life decision that has left me dejected? What is hindering me from moving forward to

a life filled with God's promise?

The intent of this book is to help you understand that everyone has a playbook and we all have to make hard calls. The outcome of the game is based on your ability to make the right calls, God's way.

TIME OUT

As we begin this journey of training you for the tough game of life, take some time to consider the questions I asked in this chapter. What playbook are you operating from? How much credibility do you give God's Word as the playbook you need for life?

2 NEW BEGINNINGS



Immediately after that huge fight, we moved out from the chaos of my father's house and went from one extreme to the other—from fighting to faith. Even though it was a big adjustment, it was exactly what we needed as a family. As long as I could remember, I had never experienced the peace we now had, but it was obvious we all longed for it. That day we left, my mother gave birth to a faith that would launch us into the first quarter of a life journey of trust in God. The moment she saw my dad lay his hands on me, she gained the strength to determine that we could not go another day in that environment.

Everything happened so fast. Mom had broken the moment of silence with a frantic cry, “Get your things!”

“Things?” I wondered. What things does a five year old grab? His Tonka truck, toys, clothes. . .what?

Mom instructed us to grab necessary items. My Tonka truck was one of them. Her wounded voice would carry the burden of labor and pain as she sacrificed for the benefit of her children. She carried that burden for many years, never revisiting or discussing the “day” that changed our destinies and family dynamic forever!

My mom decided that her playbook would be played from a place of silence amidst pain in order to regain a voice that had been lost through the abuse she took from my father. We left chaos and moved to an environment of faith and peace. Although my grandmother was an outspoken woman who shared her opinion unabashedly, living with her was the best thing that could have

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happened to us. The painful, sometimes unbearable, atmosphere that we had grown accustomed to and considered “normal” was left behind in favor of faith, hope, love, compassion, and kindness. Mom had decided she was not going to live by Dad’s playbook anymore. Instead, she would live by her own. . .which would take some time for her to figure out.

SCRIPTURAL TRUTH:

For the Lord has not given me the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7

Sometimes life presents a fourth-and-one situation, where your back is against the wall and there seems to be no way out. It is then you have to rely on the power of God in order to choose the right path. You must not live in fear, but rest in and rely on faith that conquers all fear. That is what my mom and our family did.

That day, as we were loading the car, I recall hearing my mother repeating, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,” under her breath. She said it over and over. Each time she called out to Him it brought more and more peace to us kids, who were sitting in the car with tears in our eyes. It was as if she were crying out, “Lord! Help us!” It was both a statement and a prayer that was drawing a line of separation between the pain of her past and the hope of a new future. Although the game of life presented a set of plays we hadn’t seen before, it was evident that Mom was confident that we were in need of a halftime adjustment. It was time for our family to have a fresh breath of air for the next drive ahead. God had given us a new set of downs that day, and we were to take them and run with it.

SCRIPTURAL TRUTH:

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I was doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43:18-19

TIME OUT

Has God ever made it evident to you that you were living by someone else's playbook? Have you had to make a hard choice to break away from a situation that was not good for you and get a fresh start? Was it a time of peace or chaos? What made it either peaceful or chaotic?

