

DAVID POLLACK



Every Day Counts

Start Where You Are.
Use What You Have.
Do What You Can.

with Mark Schlabach
Foreword by John C. Maxwell

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Counts

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For Lindsey

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Foreword

Every once in a while, a story comes along that reminds us what real leadership looks like—not in a locker room, battlefield, or boardroom, but in the heart.

My friend David Pollack's story is one of those rare reminders. It's not about how far David climbed but how faithfully he got back up and surrendered his heart to God when life knocked him down.

I've always taught that leadership begins with influence, and influence begins with integrity. David had both long before his neck was broken in an NFL game that changed his life forever.

As a young man at the University of Georgia, he played the game of football with a relentless energy and desire that came from deep within. It wasn't only God-given talent that led him to become a three-time All-American and NFL first-round draft pick; he was driven by a much higher calling.

But when that purpose was suddenly stripped from him—when the dream he'd had since a young boy vanished in a single play—he was confronted by a reckoning that all great leaders must confront: Who am I when the spotlight is gone?

David's devastating injury was not the final chapter of his life; instead, it became the foundation for a story of redemption

and hope that can inspire us all. At the lowest point in his life, David discovered that God wasn't done with him. In fact, God was only getting started and had much bigger plans for him.

The same relentless passion and vision that once fueled his tackles and sacks on the football field began to tug at his heart to accomplish something much more impactful: a desire to bring people to Jesus.

David didn't rebuild his life by chasing what was gone. David laid the shattered pieces at God's feet, and God rebuilt him into something much greater. David surrendered his pain, and God reshaped his suffering into a profound calling that he could have never imagined. David's public stage became a sacred pulpit, and his personal story a powerful testimony in what God can do in our lives—but only if we allow Him to work. That's what makes this book so powerful.

This book is not the story of an athletic comeback; it's a textbook example of spiritual leadership. You'll find that David's leadership today isn't defined by stats, victories, or trophies. It's defined by service: by how he leads his family, coaches and mentors young men, and points strangers to Christ through authenticity, love, and how he lives his life.

If you've ever wondered what it means to transform a setback into a calling, to trade your own glory for God's glory, this book will provide you with the blueprint. David Pollack's journey is a living example of one of my favorite truths: "Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another."

My hope is that, as you read these pages, you will feel God's hand guiding your own story, revealing to you what *Every Day Counts* truly means.

John C. Maxwell

Preface

My mission is to make sure each day holds significance. Whether it's running a 5k or spending thirty minutes talking to God in prayer, I want every day to matter.

That's why you have this book in your hands now.

I want every day of your life to count too.

After I broke my neck making a routine tackle in an NFL game, I suddenly couldn't do a lot of things I'd once taken for granted every day. Recovering from two fractured vertebrae was harder than anything I'd ever endured up until that time. But there at what felt like the lowest point of my life, I started a new habit of setting daily goals.

The simple process worked like this: I began by sending myself text messages of three things I wanted to absolutely *crush* the next day.

It seems simple because it is. And yet, many people won't do it. I wasn't contemplating my whole future. I wasn't trying to solve every problem my mind could think of. I was just focusing on that day, on that *one day*. What could I be sure to accomplish today?

I'm still following this same ritual, as recently as this morning, and it has transformed my life.

Looking back now, that's really where the idea of *Every Day Counts* came from. I wanted to make sure I didn't squander a single day by not achieving something that was important to me.

So let me start by asking, "What's important to you?" Close your eyes right now and think of the first thing that's most important in your life. Then, I want you to keep your eyes closed and think about the *second* most important thing. What's the *third* thing that's most important? Finally, snap your fingers—now you're healed. I'm kidding.

If only it were that easy.

Or maybe it is. Maybe it *really is*—if we'll just do what's most important to us every day.

In this book I will share the highs and lows of my story. There's a lot about ball because God blessed me with incredible opportunities in sports that color the background of who He made me to be.

But you're also going to read about how He intended for me—and I believe also for you—to prepare for an even greater adventure in life, an approach to living that requires spiritual discipline every single day.

Because every day counts.

David Pollack, Athens, Georgia

Chapter 1

Every Play, Every Day

Back when I was only seven or eight years old, I told anyone who would listen that I was going to play in the National Football League. They would say, “That’s great, kid,” but I could tell from their tone of voice, they were trying to tell me I’d never do that.

I was determined, right then, to prove those people wrong.

So when I showed up for my first football practice at Shiloh High School in Snellville, Georgia, in the summer of 1997, I was already envisioning what jersey number I’d wear in college and then the NFL. As a freshman, I weighed 220 pounds and ran the 40-yard dash in six seconds. Six seconds flat, baby—smoking!

One of the coaches, John Almond, asked what position I wanted to play.

“Fullback and linebacker,” I told him.

“Not at *that* weight and speed,” he said, before promptly putting me on the offensive line, along with all the other guys who, if we were any slower, we’d have been running in reverse.

Okay, I guess I wasn’t fast enough to play fullback or linebacker as a freshman. When that coach looked at me, he didn’t see the star player I’d always been in youth football. I was

somebody who had a lot of work to do to become a starter in high school.

We had three different varsity head football coaches during my four seasons at Shiloh High. Charlie Jordan left in the middle of the summer in 1999, after my sophomore year, to take another job, leaving Coach Almond as the interim for my junior year, the assistant who put me on the offensive line as a freshman. I'd gotten faster and stronger enough by then for him to move me to fullback and defensive tackle, like I'd always wanted. We finished 4-6 that year, but I had a blast running the ball and tackling people. The Gwinnett County coaches named me defensive line-man of the year. NFL, here I come!

But my football fortunes didn't really take off until Shiloh hired Bob Krieger as its head coach before my senior season in 2000. Coach Krieger had been an extremely successful high school coach in Illinois, but most recently he'd been the defensive coordinator at Eastern Illinois University, an NCAA Division I-AA program in the Ohio Valley Conference. His decision to come back to high school ball was more personal than professional. It allowed him and his wife to move to Georgia, to be closer to family.

That spring, Coach Krieger called me into his office.

"If we're going to do big things, you have to be the hardest-working player on the field," he told me. "Dominate games!"

In my mind, I was like, *I'm doing that already! I'm your best player!*

Coach Krieger silently swung his office chair around and turned on a VHS player. He'd made a videotape of some of my plays from the previous season. It was a horror show of clips, catching me jogging to the football and loafing on plays. I was disgusted by what I saw.

“You have to be the best player on the field every play, not just when you choose to,” Coach Krieger said. *Every play, every day.*

Immediately, I changed the way I practiced and prepared. I might have had a high motor before then, but my engine was like a Lamborghini’s after that lecture. I played at 100 miles per hour in spring practice and preseason camp of my senior year. I often ran out of gas quickly, but I learned to push through. I never let up. Whether it was raining, cold, or sweltering hot, I was working out, pushing myself, encouraging my teammates, and tearing down the boundaries of the team we could become.

Coach Krieger ran us before and after practice like we’d never been pushed before. I can still remember throwing up at several practices in the brutal Georgia heat and humidity. He was determined that, at the very least, the Shiloh High Generals would be better conditioned than our opponents. In fact, quite a few players quit the team that spring and summer because they couldn’t keep up. But he was ready to go to battle with the guys who were strong enough to stay, which, after the kind of workouts he put us through, amounted to only about thirty. That wasn’t enough depth for the highest classification in Georgia high school football. The best programs in our region, such as Brookwood High School and Parkview High School, had three times as many players as we did. But he doubled us up, and we went to war like David against Goliath. I started on offense and defense, played wide receiver in a four-receiver set, and even served as our punter. I rarely came off the field.

Unfortunately, the 2000 season couldn’t have started much worse. We won our opening game but then dropped four of our next five, including a 21–0 loss to rival Brookwood High. The low point came on October 20, 2000, when we blew a lead and lost to Norcross High, 20–10, to fall to 2–4.

Obviously, it was not how I envisioned my senior season playing out. Coach Krieger called us together before practicing that next Monday. He told us we were playing tight, like we were afraid we were going to make mistakes. We weren't playing with our hair on fire on defense, which had long been a staple at Shiloh High. He told us to play loose and have fun and that we could still turn our season around.

The next week, we defeated Dacula High 32–25 in two overtimes. We tied the game on a 38-yard field goal as time expired, then won on Mike Bailey's 20-yard touchdown in the second extra period. We were only getting started, too. An earlier scheduled game against Duluth High had been postponed because of inclement weather, so we had to play another game three days later. In a rare Monday night game, Bailey ran for 250 yards and scored four touchdowns in a 47–21 victory.

Just like that, we were back to .500 at 4–4, but we had to win our last two games to qualify for the state playoffs.

After sneaking past Berkmar High 35–31, it all came down to one game against South Gwinnett. We came out on top, 18–8, for our fifth consecutive victory and advanced to the playoffs. Then we surprised almost everybody by stunning third-ranked Southwest DeKalb High 20–7 in the first round and Pope High School 36–19 in the second. Our unlikely playoff run came to an end with a 35–24 loss to Westside High in Macon, Georgia, in the state quarterfinals. Still, it had been a memorable season.

And that conversation with Coach Krieger in the spring of 2000 turned out to be one of the most seminal moments of my life. I learned that day the value of having people who challenge us. I learned how to fight and compete for the things that really mattered to me. I learned how to leave behind a trail of sweat and determination on every inch of the playing field whenever I left it.

That lesson from Coach Krieger changed my life forever.

Best of all, it was probably the first time I learned that *every day counts*. I was determined to make sure I didn't squander a chance to become a better player and person—every day—by making the most of the time the Lord had afforded me. Even back then, I realized each day is valuable and should be attacked with intention and purpose and never be taken for granted. The lessons I learned and applied that year helped propel me to the college level and then to the NFL.

And they are still propelling me today.

Chapter 2

Lock in Your Faith

I didn't grow up believing in God. My parents, my brother, and I never went to church, not one time while I was a kid, so I had never heard much about the Bible or Jesus. But as a junior at Shiloh High, my neighbors across the street, Adam and Phillip Greenwood, invited me to join them at a lock-in.

"What's that?" I asked them.

"You know, we go to the church, and they lock us in there for the night," one of them said.

"I'm out, bro," I replied. "Why would I want to go get locked in a church?"

It sounded like the worst way to spend a Friday night, like it was punishment disguised as fun. If boredom was an Olympic sport, the Greenwood brothers were taking home the gold. It seemed almost as bad as spending the entire weekend at school. As a seventeen-year-old kid, I could think of about a million things I'd rather do than spend an entire night in church.

But then one of them said the magic words: "Come on, David. You'll get to stay up all night and play sports." Now we're cooking with Crisco. They knew my love language and how to get straight to my heart.

I ended up having a blast, playing kickball and basketball and hanging with my buddies into the early-morning hours at the church. More importantly, that night was the first time I heard about Jesus and the importance of having a relationship with God. It was the first time a gospel seed was planted in my heart.

It wouldn't be the last.

My physics teacher, Mark Watson, was a devout Christian. He had one of those Jesus fish stickers on his computer, and he played praise music in his room between classes. He was cool and different and had a peace and humility about him that made others want to gravitate to him.

Well, I wasn't that way in high school. God gave me the gift of being super annoying—plus the ability to easily get under others' skin because I talked so much and couldn't sit still. I was like a porcupine with a megaphone back then. Mr. Watson handled me with such gentleness in his class, and I realized there was something different about him. I became intrigued by the way he lived and handled himself, and I knew he had something in his life that I wanted in mine.

My English teacher assigned us outside reading for the summer that year. We had to read two hundred pages from a book. She let us choose what we were going to read, so I picked the Bible, probably for the sole purpose of annoying Mr. Watson.

When I met with my English teacher and told her I was going to read the Bible, she said, "Absolutely not."

"Why not?" I asked her.

"I can't meet with you to discuss it," she said. "I don't know anything about the Bible."

"Well, Mr. Watson does," I told her. "He said he would meet with me to go over the material."

A few days later, I met with Mr. Watson. He didn't give me a rigid set of rules on how to tackle the material, which would have made it more like an assignment for class. He suggested that I start with the four Gospels of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He explained how Matthew had been a tax collector and was one of Jesus's original twelve apostles, how Mark's mother had been a follower of Jesus in Jerusalem and he was only a teenager, how Luke had been a doctor and a follower of Peter, and how John was one of Jesus's closest disciples and was with Him for much of His life on earth.

Those Bible accounts lit a fire inside me. I wanted to know everything I could about Jesus. That summer, I started reading. God's Word jumped off the pages for me. The Scripture resonated deep in my soul and inspired me to become the best person I could be. The accounts of redemption, love, and grace inspired me to delve deeper into my passions, dreams, and purpose. Reading the Bible changed my life. I was saved and now knew that Jesus paid for my sins on the cross and my faith in Him would save me from the penalty of sin through God's grace. I began my Christian journey.

Each time I read a new book in the Bible, I would ask Mr. Watson questions about it, and he took the time to meet with me and patiently explained everything he knew. Through his own life and example, he demonstrated to me what love is, and he softened my heart by showing me there are different ways to treat people. He taught me how to be respectful. He made me realize you can follow the rules, live a good and righteous life, and still be awesome.

Over the next few years, I began memorizing the sacred text and applied it to my life. I thought of it like my playbook. (I knew about playbooks from football.) I learned that the Bible was an even better playbook. It provides us the answer for every

conceivable situation in life. I didn't drink alcohol like some of my friends. I rarely cursed. I abstained from sex until I was married. The Bible talks about *all* that stuff.

I started going to church and found friends who wanted to conduct their lives like me. I prayed and built a relationship with God. I started to understand, with the help of great coaches and mentors, that there are more important things in life than football.

Oh, and I also met this girl.

Along with meeting Jesus that summer, I was introduced to someone who would become the second-most important person in my life—the young woman who would become my wife, Lindsey. She was a sophomore at Parkview High School in Lilburn, Georgia, which was one of Shiloh's biggest rivals. We met when one of my friends started dating one of Lindsey's friends. I had played sports with her brother William, who was about four years older than her, and their parents knew me.

Lindsey was only fourteen years old when we started dating, but she acted as if she was much older. She was the person who taught me what love is, and she taught me what love felt like. She softened my heart even more and made me have so much love for something. I admired the way she treated people in her faith and how she loved others. She had a calm and cool demeanor about her and a natural disposition that everything was going to be fine. It was so refreshing.

Through friends like the Greenwoods, through a teacher like Mr. Watson, and through this beautiful girl named Lindsey, God came and found me when I was a senior in high school. Faith became the most important thing in my life.

Except maybe for this thing called football.

*Are you living like
every day counts in your life*

**OR ARE YOU PASSIVELY SURVIVING
THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE?**

Former NFL player and ESPN college football analyst David Pollack takes readers on a journey through the principles of resilience and personal growth so you might not simply survive, but thrive every day, no matter what you face. Pollack played four seasons at Georgia, earning All-American three of the four seasons. In the 2005 NFL draft, he was a first-round selection for the Cincinnati Bengals where he had a promising future in the sport. However, in his second season, he suffered a neck injury that ended his career.

Pollack is no stranger to navigating difficult days, but offers his readers hope that no matter what situations you find yourself in, you can make the day count by starting right where you are, using what you have, and doing what you can just for today. With compelling personal stories and practical advice, this motivational guide is more than simply a football memoir or self-help book. It inspires readers to begin anew at any stage in life. *Every Day Counts* is not just a book—it's a blueprint for readers to become the best version of themselves and learning that actions determine their destiny.

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